

VFW to Deliver Veterans' Voice to Congress

Fixing the VA, ending sequestration tops VFW legislative agenda

Feb 24, 2017

WASHINGTON — More than 500 members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. are arriving in the nation's capital this weekend to urge their members of Congress to continue transforming the Department of Veterans Affairs so that it can more efficiently and effectively serve America's veterans.

“The VFW is fully committed to working with Congress and the VA to change the way the department delivers health care, to include finding the best way to leverage what the VA provides with what public or private practitioners out in the community can offer, with the end goal being the delivery of the highest quality integrated care so that no veterans are ever stranded in line again,” said VFW National Commander Brian Duffy.

The VFW national commander is scheduled to present his organization's legislative positions at 2 p.m., Wednesday, in testimony before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees in room G-50 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

Along with fixing the VA, Duffy will also demand that this Congress—the 115th Congress—finally eliminate sequestration.

“When the 112th Congress created sequestration in 2011, Russia was not in the Ukraine, China was not building islands out of rocks, Iran and North Korea were not as emboldened as they are today, and the Islamic State did not exist,” he explained. “Yet here we are six years later, American forces are still in Afghanistan, in Iraq, and now in Syria, and our brave men and women in uniform must still operate under a budget ax called sequestration that is the law of the land. Once again, the VFW demands that this Congress eliminate sequestration!”

Before testifying Wednesday, Duffy will have discussed VFW issues and priorities with new VA Secretary (Dr.) David Shulkin, and presented the VFW's 2017 Congressional Award to Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine), who was selected for her unwavering support of veterans, service members and their families, as well as to strengthening America through strong national security programs.

Other legislative conference highlights include:

- Hosting a Wounded Warrior Dinner tonight for wounded troops and their families from the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center at nearby Bethesda, Md.
- Awarding a \$30,000 scholarship Monday evening to the winner of the annual VFW Voice of Democracy program, a patriotic-themed contest that this year judged more than 38,000 high school student entries. The winner will be joined onstage by Lindi Compton, a Greensburg, Ky., eighth grader who bested more than 130,000 other middle school students to win a \$5,000 scholarship in the VFW's annual Patriot's Pen contest. The award location will be inside the Regency Ballroom, Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Va. Learn more about VFW youth scholarship competitions [here](#).
- The third annual VFW-Student Veterans of America Legislative Fellowship Program. The 10 selected Fellows will be paired with a VFW mentor and accompany their respective VFW state delegations around Capitol Hill for in-person meetings with their members of Congress and their staffs. The student veterans will also receive briefings from the VA Department of Labor on ongoing policy initiatives, as well as briefings on ways to work constructively with the media when advocating for veterans' policy initiatives. The 10 selected Fellows for the Class of 2017 are: Matthew Carbonelli, Army veteran, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Samuel Casey, Army veteran, Coastal Carolina University; Jayson Hoffman, Army veteran, University of Illinois-Springfield; Juwelle McClendon, Navy veteran, Radford University; Ryan McKibben, Army veteran, Florida State University; Lisa Payan, Army veteran, Marylhurst University; Krista Schultz, Army veteran, Eastern Washington University; Wesley Stiner, Marine Corps veteran, University of Arizona; Ryan Taylor, Marine Corps veteran, Florida State University; and Karthik Venkatraj, Army veteran, University of Colorado. Learn more about the VFW's support of student veterans [here](#).

The VFW will again livestream from this year's conference. Visit www.vfw.org/VFWDC2017 on Monday at 6 p.m. EST to watch as the legislative conference kicks off with the Voice of Democracy Parade of Winners, followed by the delayed streaming of the VFW national commander's testimony available at 5 p.m., Wednesday. Look for #VFWDC2017 on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), and be sure to visit www.vfw.org for all the latest legislative conference updates beginning Sunday.