



## **VFW PRESS RELEASE**

### **VFW Fall Legislative Conference Presses Priorities**

This past week, members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Legislative Committee from VFW Departments throughout the United States came together for the first-ever virtual legislative conference. Bob Jones (VFW National Legislative Committee Member) and Carmelita Jones (VFW Auxiliary National Legislative Ambassador) joined the VFW National Officers and National Legislative Committee Members in Zoom meetings to discuss and advocate for the VFW's legislative priorities. Virtual and teleconference meetings were held with Idaho's U.S. Senators Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, and U.S. Representatives Mike Simpson and Russ Fulcher. They also took to social media to spotlight what was accomplished. The COVID-19 pandemic may be changing the way business is done, but it will not stop the VFW and its Auxiliary from being the voice of our members and fighting for veterans' benefits on Capitol Hill.

An average of 20 veterans die by suicide every day. Studies have found that our veterans account for 18 percent of all adult suicides in the United States. Suicide is preventable, and change starts when we reach out to share hope and help someone who is hurting, someone who may be at risk. Together, we can all do our part to reach out to those in need and change the culture around mental health and suicide prevention.

This week, the House passed, the Senate-passed and VFW-supported version of S. 785, the *Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act of 2019*. This legislation will provide VA the authority it needs to expand suicide prevention efforts, and provide the opportunity to expand telehealth capabilities to veterans in rural and highly rural areas. The John Scott Hannon Bill now heads to the President's desk to sign as law. Senators Crapo and Risch are both co-sponsors of this important veterans legislation.

On Tuesday, 45 senators sent a letter urging members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees to keep a provision to add bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and parkinsonism in the final version of the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021* (NDAA). The bipartisan letter was spearheaded by Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT), who introduced an amendment to the NDAA that would add these conditions to the list of presumptive conditions associated with exposure to Agent Orange. The amendment was approved by a vote of 94-6 in July in the Senate. However, the measure was not included in the House bill. If it is approved by a

conference committee, which will be comprised of members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, it will be included in the final version of the NDAA.

The VFW offers camaraderie, as well as its many services to help ease the transition of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans to civilian life. Further, the VFW fights to ensure Congress and the Administration keep America's promise to care for veterans, long after their transition to civilian life. Veterans in need of assistance in understanding and applying for VA benefits are encouraged to contact Ron Naegelin, the Madison County Veterans Service Officer. He has an office in the Madison County Court House and can be reached by phone at 208-359-6249.

Those veterans who have received a Campaign Medal for overseas service, have served 30 consecutive or 60 non-consecutive days in Korea, or have received hostile or imminent danger pay, are eligible and invited to join the VFW. Madison County VFW Post 3012 and its Auxiliary meet in the Veterans Memorial Hall in Rexburg, the first Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

Thanks,

Bob Jones  
Legislative Committee Chairman  
Public Relations  
Department of Idaho  
Veterans of Foreign Wars  
208-356-0255