

VFW, SVA Announce 2020 Student Veteran Fellowship Class

Legislative fellowship to bring 10 student veteran leaders to Washington

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WASHINGTON – Ten Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) members and Student Veterans of America (SVA) leaders were selected for the 2020 VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship Program Sunday at the SVA National Conference in Los Angeles, California.

The 10 fellows will now join more than 500 VFW members on Capitol Hill in early March to advocate on behalf of all veterans, service members and their families.

“The VFW prides itself on working with our student veterans nationwide to help build tomorrow’s leaders,” said VFW National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz.

The VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship is a semester-long academic experience that involves researching, coordinating, reporting and advocating on behalf of one of four veterans’ policy areas: student veteran success on campus and beyond, improving veteran’s health care and benefits, transitioning from military to civilian life, and challenges for service members and military families.

Each selected fellow submitted a policy proposal to address one of these issues through federal legislative action.

“SVA has partnered with the VFW for five years to host the annual VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship Program,” said SVA President and Chief Executive Officer Jared Lyon. “The opportunity provides exceptional student veterans the chance to make their voices heard on Capitol Hill and with other organizations in the veterans’ advocacy space.

“We are fortunate to have a strong partner in the VFW to offer this program, and are grateful for their support to empower tomorrow’s leaders,” said Lyon, a VFW Post 3308 member.

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

During their visit to Washington, each fellow will be paired with a VFW mentor and accompany their VFW state delegation around Capitol Hill for in-person meetings with their members of Congress. The fellows will receive briefings from federal officials regarding ongoing policy initiatives, as well as learn techniques to work with the media when advocating on veterans' issues.

Upon returning home, each of the fellows will also be responsible for executing a community action plan, to include delivering their individual research papers directly to their respective congressional delegations.

The 10 fellows selected for the 2020 class are:

- Tom Baker, Navy veteran, Arizona State University
- Katherine Cassell, Army retiree, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- Carl Chen, Air Force active duty service member, Trident University International
- Clifton Clevenger, Army veteran, Wayland Baptist University
- Ashley Dent, Air Force veteran, New York Institute of Technology
- Sasha Georgiades, Navy veteran, Hawaii Pacific University
- Blake Hite, Navy veteran, Georgetown University
- Matthew Jenkins, Marine Corps veteran, University of South Florida
- Randy Purham, Army active duty service member, American Public University
- Jack Ratliff, Army veteran, University of South Florida

The VFW-SVA Legislative Fellowship Program continues a legacy of collaboration between the two organizations that was formalized in 2013. To interview any of the selected fellows, contact Gabriella Kubinyi at gkubinyi@vfw.org.