

VFW to Deliver Veterans' Voice to Congress

Ending sequestration, fixing VA atop VFW legislative agenda

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WASHINGTON — More than 500 members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliary are arriving in the nation's capital this weekend to urge their respective members of Congress to end sequestration and to continue improving the programs and services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"The VFW is appreciative of the two-year budget agreement because it will bring temporary funding stability to the Defense Department," said VFW National Keith Harman, "but a two-year agreement doesn't end the continued threat of sequestration on a military that is still at war with an all-volunteer force that is fighting with less training and overused equipment," he said. "Sequestration has been the law of the land for seven years, so service members, veterans, their families and the VFW are counting on the newly-established super committee on budget and appropriations reform to finally repeal it once and for all. We need our troops to keep their heads in the fight instead of wondering about the well-being of their families back at home."

Harman, a Vietnam veteran from Delphos, Ohio, was elected in July 2017 to represent America's largest and oldest major war veterans organization. He is set to testify Wednesday morning at 10 a.m. before a special joint hearing of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans Affairs in room G-50 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building. Prior to then, he will have already met with a host of military leaders inside the Pentagon.

Along with ending sequestration, Harman will also recommend enhancements to numerous VA programs and policies, as well as weigh in on current legislation, such as calling for the quick passage of the *Caring for Veterans Act of 2017* to help ensure veterans have timely access to high-quality health care that is tailored to their unique needs. He will urge expanding the Caregiver Bill to include pre-9/11 families, allowing VA doctors to practice telemedicine across state lines, increase gender-specific services and peer-to-peer support

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groups, end the *Widow's Tax*, eliminate the pay offset for military retirees with VA disability ratings of 40 percent or less, bolster mental health and homeless veterans programs, extend toxic exposure presumptions for wherever Agent Orange was used, stored or transported, and authorize the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency community to have budget carryover authority between fiscal years, among many others.

Other legislative conference highlights include:

- Presenting the 2018 VFW Congressional Award to Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.), who was selected for his unwavering support of veterans, service members and their families, as well as for strengthening the Defense Department, boosting national intelligence capabilities, and for providing an enhanced and more accountable Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Awarding a \$30,000 scholarship to the winner of the annual [VFW Voice of Democracy program](#), a patriotic audio-themed contest that this year judged more than 46,000 high school student entries. The winner will be joined onstage by 2018 VFW Patriot's Pen first-place winner Karolina Mazur, an eighth-grade student from Glyndon, Md., who bested more than 122,000 other middle school students to win the \$5,000 top prize. The awards ceremony will begin at 6 p.m., Monday, inside the Regency Ballroom, Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Va. Learn more about VFW youth scholarship competitions [here](#).
- The Women Veterans Advisory Committee will meet with the House and Senate VA Committees, as well conduct women veteran's outreach and visit VFW national service officers who are helping transitioning military in the National Capital Region to assemble and submit their VA claims.
- And hosting the fourth annual VFW-Student Veterans of America Legislative Fellowship Program. The nine selected Fellows will be paired with mentors 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 meet with White House and Department of Labor staff on ongoing policy initiatives. The VFW-SVA Class of 2018 are Army veteran Jennifer Hosley (Army), University of Arkansas-Fort Smith; Hannah Joyce (Air Force), Simmons College in Massachusetts; Ryan Rehberg (Army), University of North Dakota; Joseph Sacco (Navy), Idaho State University; Francheska Salazar (Navy), Anne Arundel Community College in Maryland; Gabriel Snashall (Navy), Wesleyan University in Connecticut; Edward Tjaden (Army), Washington University in St. Louis; Brian Walker (Navy),

Northeastern University in Massachusetts; and Brad Ward (Army), University of Central Oklahoma. Learn more about the VFW's support of student veterans [here](#).

The VFW will again livestream this year's conference. Visit www.vfw.org/VFWDC2018 on Monday at 6 p.m. EST to watch the Voice of Democracy Parade of Winners, plus a delayed viewing of the VFW national commander's congressional testimony Wednesday afternoon. Look for #VFWDC2018 on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), and be sure to visit www.vfw.org for all the latest legislative conference updates beginning Sunday.