VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

 DEPT SERVICE OFFICE – NORTH DAKOTA

 VA REGIONAL OFFICE BLDG, SUITE 205

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# SERVICE OFFICE REPORT – April 2020

 THIS MONTH YEAR TO DATE

CONTACTS: 828 10,877 (Phone calls, emails and walk-ins)

## COMPENSATION: $ 1,260,371.04 $ 15,290,347.32

(Service-connected disability)

PENSION: $ 76,878.88 $ 627,055.57

(NSC Pension, Death, Burial and DIC)

## MISC BENEFITS: $ 1,233.00 $ 167,914.28

(Education, Waivers, etc.)

## RETROACTIVE: $ 264,530.22 $ 2,328,207.42

TOTAL: $ 1,603,013.14 $ 18,635,704.35

**1. VFW National Convention in Reno is Canceled:** On Monday, the VFW announced that the 121st VFW National Convention scheduled to be held in Reno, Nevada, this July, has been officially canceled. The decision comes as public-health concerns and social-distancing mandates are expected to span into the summer months. This year will mark the first in the organization’s storied 121-year history where a national convention will not be held. The VFW Auxiliary has also canceled its convention. “We explored every effort to move forward with the convention in its current form, and the decision was not made lightly,” explained VFW National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz. “But, the fact is the health and well-being of our members, partners and supporters remains our priority, and we will not put them at risk.”

**2. VFW-Supported Bill to Protect Student Veterans Sent to Become Law:** **WASHINGTON, D.C. –** Today,the House of Representatives unanimously passed House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs Chairman Mark Takano (D-Calif.) and Ranking Member Dr. Phil Roe’s (R-Tenn.) bipartisan [Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act of 2020](https://www.dropbox.com/s/fhmhc0oylycv6nx/FINALH6322_ANS_xml.pdf?dl=0) (H.R. 6322). This key legislation— [introduced last week](https://veterans.house.gov/news/press-releases/chairman-takano-ranking-member-roe-introduce-legislation-to-minimize-covid-19-impact-on-student-veterans) with more than 51 cosponsors and wide VSO support— expands on language passed in S. 3503 and signed into law to further minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student veterans as schools and universities take proactive measures to mitigate the spread of the virus.

“We cannot let any student veterans lose their work study payments, have their housing cut off, exhaust their disaster housing stipend continuation  payments, or lose their benefits due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic,” **said Chairman Takano.** “I was proud to introduce this bipartisan legislation with my friend Ranking Member Dr. Roe last week, and I’m so pleased to see that these key fixes are one step closer to becoming a reality for our student veterans. I urge the Senate to quickly follow suit, so we can safeguard our student veterans’ benefits.”

“I know firsthand how important the GI Bill is since I relied on it to put food on the table for my family after I got out of the Army,” **said Ranking Member Roe.** “With so many veterans struggling because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has never been more important than it is now to make sure the GI Bill is there for them, just like it was there for me. The bill that the House passed today builds on the work we have already done to ensure that GI Bill benefits remain protected for the duration of this crisis. By including further protections to preserve work study and vocational rehabilitation and employment programs and allowing students to maintain their GI Bill eligibility next semester if their school was forced to close, we are sending a message to the hundreds of thousands of student veterans and their families that they are not alone in their time of need. I applaud the House for working quickly to pass this bill and I urge my colleagues in the Senate to follow suit and deliver this bill to the President’s desk without delay.”

**Background:** The [Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act of 2020](https://veterans.house.gov/news/press-releases/chairman-takano-ranking-member-roe-introduce-legislation-to-minimize-covid-19-impact-on-student-veterans) builds on recent legislation, passed by the House and Senate and signed into law by the president, to ensure student veterans will not see a reduction in their monthly housing allowance as a result of their schools moving to online instruction due to COVID-19. This legislation has been endorsed widely by the VSO community and cosponsored by 51 Members including Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Chair Levin. Final text of HR 6322 can be found [here](https://www.dropbox.com/s/fhmhc0oylycv6nx/FINALH6322_ANS_xml.pdf?dl=0).

Since this crisis began, [the Committee has continued its oversight of VA’s response to COVID-19 and the Fourth Mission](https://veterans.house.gov/news/press-releases/house-committee-on-veterans-affairs-statement-on-actions-to-protect-va-and-veterans-from-covid-19), worked to mitigate the impact on student veterans, and been in constant contact with VA to ensure they can continue to provide high quality care for veterans. For more information about the Committee’s efforts to address the COVID-19 crisis and resources for available for veterans, please visit: <https://veterans.house.gov/covid-19>.

**3. VA Committee Urges VA to Postpone Elimination of 48-Hour Rule:** On Monday, the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs (HVAC) sent a bipartisan letter to VA Secretary Robert Wilkie regarding VA’s decision to repeal the 48-hour review policy. On April 24, VA intends to rescind a decades-long policy that allows accredited veteran service officers to review claims for accuracy prior to a veteran being notified of a ratings decision. In the letter, Chairman Mark Takano (D-CA) and Ranking Member David Roe (R-TN) requested information from Secretary Wilkie regarding any alternatives to the 48-hour review policy VA has considered and whether service officers would be provided with access to draft decisions before they are finalized. The VFW thanks Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe for their support in preventing this dangerous change.

**4. Executive in Charge of VHA Expresses Gratitude for VSOs:** Dr. Richard Stone, Executive in Charge of the Veterans Health Administration sent out a video earlier this week expressing his gratitude for the Veteran Service Organization (VSOs). Throughout the world, VFW members are [#StillServing](https://todaysvfw.org/) our fellow veterans, and communities even during the COVID pandemic by holding blood drives, performing well-being checks, linking national mental health resources to those who may require their aid, and relaying critical updates and resources. [Listen to the message](https://players.brightcove.net/2851863979001/default_default/index.html?videoId=6149606517001).

 **5. No Copayments for COVID-19 Testing**: Under the H.R. 6201, the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/6201), TRICARE will waive copays for approved COVID-19 testing that is ordered by a doctor. Beneficiaries are not responsible for copays for tests (and related provider services and supplies) furnished on or after the date of enactment. Claims that were filed with a copay will be reprocessed to remove the copayment or cost share. Beneficiaries who already paid a copay for now-covered tests can file for reimbursement by filing a [factual appeal](https://tricare.mil/ContactUs/FileComplaint/Factual). [Learn more about TRICARE and COVID-19](https://www.tricare.mil/coronavirus).

 **6. Mortgage Forbearance During the COVID-19 Pandemic:** The Department of Housing and Urban Development has partnered with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to produce a “What You Need to Know: Mortgage Forbearance” video to educate consumers who may have difficulty making on-time mortgage payments due to the national coronavirus emergency.

 **7. MIA Update**: The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced five new identifications for service members who have been missing and unaccounted-for from the Korean War. Returning home for burial with full military honors are:

**-- Army Sgt. Lloyd A. Alumbaugh,** 21, was a member of Ambulance Company, 7th Medical Battalion, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Nov. 28, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. [Read about Alumbaugh](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2161564/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-alumbaugh-l/).
**-- Army Cpl. Charles E. Hiltibran,** 19, was a member of Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. [Read about Hiltibran](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2160039/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-hiltibran-c/).
**-- Army Pfc. Louis N. Crosby,** 18, was a member of Company A, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 1, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. [Read about Crosby](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2159459/soldier-accounted-for-from-korea-war-crosby-l/).
**-- Army Pfc. Bill F. Hobbs,** 20, was a member of Heavy Mortar Company, 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was killed in action on November 30, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. [Read about Hobbs](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2159417/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-hobbs-b/).
**-- Army Cpl. Ralph S. Boughman,** 21, was a member of Company B, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division. He was reported missing in action on Dec. 2, 1950, when his unit was attacked by enemy forces near the Chosin Reservoir, North Korea. [Read about Boughman](https://www.dpaa.mil/News-Stories/News-Releases/PressReleaseArticleView/Article/2157738/soldier-accounted-for-from-korean-war-boughman-r/).

Brian Deckert

Department Service Officer