

VFW to Deliver Veterans' Voice to Congress

Senate VA Committee Chairman Isakson to receive VFW's top legislator award

Feb 28, 2019

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 continue improving the programs and services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Highlighting the annual legislative conference will be the VFW national commander's testimony before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, and the presentation of two VFW national awards: the VFW Congressional Award to Senate VA Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), and the VFW News Media Award to Military Times Deputy Editor Leo Shane.

Elected in July 2018 to lead America's largest and oldest major war veterans' organization, VFW National Commander B.J. Lawrence is set to present the VFW's legislative priorities on Wednesday at 10 a.m. before a special joint hearing of the House and Senate VA Committees in room G-50 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

Topping his list of VFW legislative priorities is a call for full congressional oversight over the implementation of the VA Mission Act of 2018 and the combined VA and Defense Department electronic health record initiative. Other priorities include getting the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act signed into law, improving burn pits research and accountability, eliminating the so-called "Widow's Tax," allowing military retirees to receive full retirement pay and disability pay without offset, and expanding and improving VA health care and research programs. [Read the VFW's full list of 2019 Priority Goals here.](#)

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Conference highlights include:

- Presenting the 2019 VFW Congressional Award to Senate VA Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson for securing the passage of numerous VFW legislative priority goals, to include expediting VA employee accountability, modernizing the VA appeals process, Forever GI Bill passage, improving veterans' health care through the VA MISSION Act, and expanding caregiver programs to veterans of all eras.
- Presenting the 2019 VFW News Media Award to Military Times Deputy Editor Leo Shane, whose reporting helps Congress, the administration, military service members, their families, and all of America to better understand the unique challenges that those involved in our nation's wars encounter both in uniform and afterwards.
- Awarding a \$30,000 scholarship to the winner of the annual [VFW Voice of Democracy program](#), a patriotic-themed audio contest that this year judged more than 40,000 high school student entries. The winner will be joined onstage by 2019 VFW Patriot's Pen first-place winner Daniel Rodriguez, a sixth-grade student from Nogales, Ariz., who bested more than 111,000 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's two youth scholarship competitions here.](#)
- And hosting the fifth 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 staffs. The student veterans will also meet with administration officials about ongoing policy initiatives. The VFW-SVA Class of 2019 are: Army veteran Chad Baer, University of Pennsylvania; Coast Guard veteran Tammy Barlet, George Washington University; Army veteran Matthew Deller, The American University of Paris; Air Force veteran Christopher Lamy, Louisiana State University; Army veteran Angela Peacock, Washington University-St. Louis; Army veteran Chanel Powell, University at Buffalo; Army veteran Lobsang Salaka, Northeastern University; Army veteran Amy Sleath, Minnesota State University Moorhead; and Marine Corps veteran Tom Wike, Ohio State University. [Learn more about the VFW's support of student veterans here.](#)

The VFW will again livestream this year's conference. Visit www.vfw.org/VFWDC2019 on Monday at 6 p.m. EST to watch the Voice of Democracy Parade of Winners, plus on Wednesday afternoon to watch a delayed recording of the VFW national commander's

congressional testimony. Look for #VFWDC2019 on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), and be sure to visit www.vfw.org for all the latest legislative conference updates beginning Sunday.