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1. FY 2013 Budget Announcement: The Administration is poised to release its FY 2013 budget request early next week. VFW will be closely monitoring all aspects of the budgets submitted for the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense, especially where it concerns the proper care and treatment of wounded, ill and injured veterans, medical research, women veterans, employment, mental health and homelessness issues, and military personnel programs and funding. As a reminder, the budget proposal serves as blueprint for congressional committees, and final funding levels are often not approved until the new fiscal year begins on Oct. 1. We ask VFW advocates to keep their eye out for updates in the Washington Weekly and on our Blog at <http://www.vfwonthehill.org/>.

2. Legislation Introduced to Protect VA Healthcare: The VFW and our three other *Independent Budget* coauthors praised House VA Committee Chairman Jeff Miller's (R-FL) bill to protect VA healthcare accounts from potential budget cuts. H.R. 3895, the *Protect VA Healthcare Act of 2012*, would exempt veterans' health care programs from mandatory cuts that may occur early next year. The cuts were called for as a part of the Budget Control Act, which requires \$1.2 trillion in across-the-board cuts due to Congress' failure to pass a deficit reduction package in 2011. Current law protects veterans' benefits from automatic cuts, but VFW remains committed to monitoring any changes that may be detrimental to veterans.

Read our letter [here](#):

<http://www.vfw.org/uploadedFiles/IB%20Letter%20to%20Miller%20Sequestration%202.7.2012.pdf>

To read Miller's proposal, type the bill number into the search box at <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>.

3. VA Fiduciary Program Examined: This week the House VA Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations hosted a hearing on the VA's fiduciary system, which has come under scrutiny in recent years over concerns for severely disabled veterans' financial interests. VA assigns fiduciaries to oversee VA benefits paid to severely disabled and incapacitated veterans who are not capable of managing their funds. A [2010 report from the VA's Office of the Inspector General](#) indicated that program loopholes keep VA from properly auditing fiduciary accounts, and prohibits VA from balancing delinquent accounts. VA witnesses testified that more employees have been hired to provide better oversight into potential misuse of funds, and that progress is being made in adopting a new electronic case management system. Committee members questioned the effectiveness of training and asked panelists for ways the program could be improved. VA currently oversees approximately 95,000 fiduciaries, who help more than

121,000 beneficiaries. To learn more and to view the archived webcast of the hearing, go to <http://www.vfwonthehill.org/2012/02/watch-live-house-subcommittee-discusses.html>.

4. DOD to Ease Women in Combat Assignments: The Defense Department notified Congress this week that it will abolish the restriction on assigning women to locations where ground combat troops operate, and to selectively lift the policy barring women from assignments to ground combat units below the brigade level. Those changes will result in more than 14,000 new jobs or assignment opportunities for military women. Women in the Army and Marine Corps face the most job restrictions, with each prohibiting them from serving in about a third of its positions (principally in infantry and special warfare, but also in logistics, signal and intelligence). In contrast, the Air Force excludes women from 1 percent of its positions (pararescue and Tactical Air Control Party, for example), and the Navy about 12 percent, a percentage that will reduce now that women can serve aboard submarines (but not in special warfare units like the SEALs). Policy changes will take effect later this spring after 30 days of continuous session of Congress, as the law requires. Read more at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=67131>.

5. Stolen Valor Case Upheld: By a 2-1 decision, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Denver recently reversed a lower court's decision that the Stolen Valor Act of 2005 violates First Amendment free speech protections. Courts in California, Georgia and Missouri have considered similar cases. In the Colorado case, defendant Rick Strandlof had founded a veterans group in Colorado Springs, and said he had received the Purple Heart and Silver Star, although the military had no record that he ever served. The California case, *U.S. v. Xavier Alvarez*, is currently before the U.S. Supreme Court, primarily because the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco overruled by 2-1 a lower court verdict against Alvarez, a member of the local water district board, who claimed at a public meeting that he was a retired Marine and Medal of Honor recipient. Alvarez, too, had never served in the military. The VFW is the lead cosigner of an amicus curiae brief to the Supreme Court to uphold the Stolen Valor Act.

6. USMC Seeks Montford Point Marines: The Marine Corps is assisting in the search for original Montford Point Marines so they can be recognized when the Montford Point Marines are awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in an awards ceremony tentatively planned for this spring. In order to be counted as an "original" Montford Point Marine, documentation of the individual's DD214 or discharge paperwork verifying completion of training at the Montford Point Camp, N.C., between 1942 and 1949, must be submitted to the Montford Point Marine Association. Read more at <http://www.marines.mil/unit/hqmc/Pages/MARINESASSISTINTHESEARCHFORORIGINALMONTFORDPOINTMARINES.aspx#.TyL-vcUqSSo>.