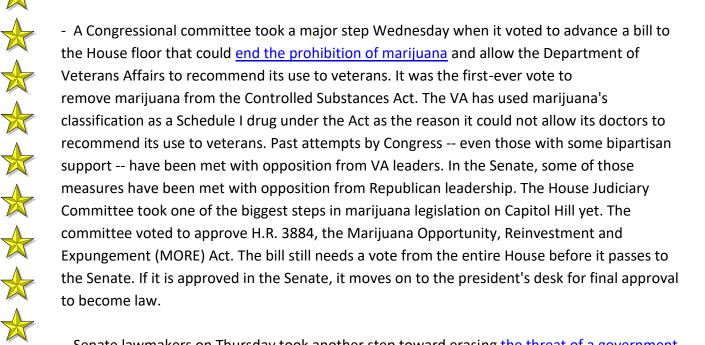
AMVETS LEGISLATIVE UPDATE November 26, 2019

News Driving the Week

- The particulars of a proposed bill intended to provide the Department of Veterans Affairs grants to community groups for veteran suicide prevention created tension on a normally bipartisan Congressional veterans committee. Bill supporters said the proposed legislation creates a pilot program to provide grants to community groups that could help hard-to-reach veterans in areas underserved by the VA, or far from VA services. Opponents said the bill doesn't include enough oversight for the money or groups it would be awarded to. The proposed bill, which has been awaiting a hearing since summer, has yet to be finalized and negotiations are ongoing. House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., sparred with VA Secretary Robert Wilkie over specifics in various versions of the bill. Wilkie argued that the \$18 million in grants in the proposed bill is "not a lot of money for us" compared to VA's \$9.5 billion mental healthcare budget within its \$220 billion overall budget. Following his part of the hearing, Wilkie said he believes Congress is "close" to a passable bill. Wilkie said he believes Bergman's compromise bill is "the best way forward," but added he had no major concerns with Takano's proposed bill, so long as either bill do not create "massive bureaucracy" and allow any qualified groups that could help veterans, regardless of their size to apply for the grants.

- VA researchers recently announced plans to conduct a major study on environmental exposures during military service and the connection to illnesses in those veterans. VA also plans to look at potential intergenerational effects of military exposures, which may or may not include studying children of exposed veterans. VA Chief of Research Development Rachel Ramoni said VA scientists have spoken with hundreds of veterans about the toxic exposures they say they've experienced during deployments. Because of those conversations, Ramoni said VA is planning "major investment in toxic exposures." Veterans "for good reason have been irritated with us as an organization because we have not done a lot of work, especially clinical work, on military exposures," Ramoni said during a conference in Washington, D.C. last week focused on veteran prostate cancer. "I have apologized to them ... I have committed that, in (Fiscal Year 2021), we are going to make major investments in toxic exposures. We are in the planning phases for that now, but in (Fiscal Year 2021), we will start to roll that out. That's something that will cut across all our research."



- Senate lawmakers on Thursday took another step toward erasing the threat of a government shutdown over the Thanksgiving holiday by passing a four-week budget extension, raising the possibility of a Christmas shutdown instead. The move came over continued objections from some defense lawmakers who warned the short-term budget deals jeopardize military planning by keeping Pentagon funding stuck at last fiscal year's levels and adding future uncertainty into long-range procurement plans. But House lawmakers advanced the deal by a 231-192 vote on Wednesday and the Senate by a 74-20 vote a day later, noting that without the one-month reprieve federal workers would have faced furloughs and program halts starting Friday morning. President Donald Trump has indicated he will sign the measure, meaning the new budget extension would run out on Dec. 20.

AMVETS in the News

Helping Each Other Through an Injury

Watch Sesame Street in Community's feature of Sherman Gillums and his family.

AMVTES Legislative Priorities

H.R. 1715 Charitable Equity for Veterans Act of 2019 introduced by Rep. Ron Kind of WI and Rep. Brad Wenstrup of OH

H.R. 1997 Veterans Posttraumatic Growth Act introduced by Rep. Tim Ryan of OH
 H.R. 3495 Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. Jack Bergman of MI and Rep.
 Chrissy Houlahan of PA

S. 1906 Improve Well-Being for Veterans Act introduced by Rep. John Boozman of AR
 H.R. 4154 Leave No Veteran Behind Act introduced by Rep. Susie Lee of NV and Rep. Steve

