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THANKSGIVING WISHES. This season is a time to reflect on the blessings, bounty, and good fortune we Americans enjoy. We must also keep in mind the courageous men and women serving around the world, sacrificing and striving to maintain our freedom and liberty. The AFSA leadership and staff extend to all AFSA members the warmest wishes for a wonderful, safe Thanksgiving.

Because of the Thanksgiving holiday, the next AFSA newsletter will be published on Friday, November 30.

AFSA LEADER AND FRIEND PASSES. Past AFSA President CMSgt (Ret.) John A. McBrien passed away on November 9, 2007. Chief McBrien served as AFSA President from 1985 to 1988. A lifetime trustee of the association, throughout his life, John remained a dedicated leader who continued to contribute to AFSA's success, and remained very involved in his community. We pass on our heartfelt condolences to his wife, Annie, and his family.

STATUS OF DEFENSE/VA LEGISLATION. President Bush signed into law H.R. 1284 (Public Law 110-111), the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2007." This new law provides a 2.3 percent cost-of-living adjustment increase for VA disability compensation, dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), and the clothing allowance for certain veterans. The "Defense Appropriations Act for 2008," Public Law 110-116, will provide funding for a 3.5 percent military pay raise in January 2008, along with a total of \$459.3 billion in discretionary funding. H.R. 2642, the "FY 2008 Military Construction/Veterans Affairs Appropriations Bill," is not completed; it is still being debated between leaders of the House and Senate. The House and Senate continue to confer on H.R. 1585, the "National Defense Authorization Act for 2008."

NEW MGI B LEGISLATION INTRODUCED. On November 9, 2007, Representative Tim Walberg, R-MI, introduced H.R. 4130, the "Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act of 2007." If passed, this bill would satisfy one of AFSA's top education-related legislative targets by providing an opportunity for those who first entered military service prior to July 1, 1985 (i.e., those from the Veterans Educational Assistance Program [VEAP] era) an opportunity to enroll in the Montgomery G.I. Bill. The cost would be \$2,700. As of this time, 20 cosponsors have signed on in support of H.R. 4130.

OTHER LEGISLATION INTRODUCED DURING THE PAST WEEK:

S. 2309, the "**Compensation for Combat Veterans Act**," introduced by Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, D-HI, would amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the service to be treatable as "service engaged in combat with the enemy" for utilization of non-official evidence for proof of service-connection in a combat-related disease or injury. Basically, those serving in a non-taxable pay capacity due to service in a combat zone would meet the requirement for "service engaged in combat with the enemy" for purposes of service-connection to qualify for VA benefits.

H.R. 4084, the “**Veterans Quality of Life Study Act of 2007**,” sponsored by Rep. John J. Hall, D-NY, would amend title 38, United States Code, to require a study of the Department of Veterans Affairs schedule for rating disabilities, to provide for the treatment of claims under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in the case of the death of a claimant, to require an annual report on the workload of the Court of Appeals for Veteran Claims, and for other purposes.

H.R. 4085, the “**Military Service Tax Relief Act of 2007**,” sponsored by Rep. Ron Klein, D-FL, would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to make permanent the penalty-free distributions from retirement plans to individuals called to active duty and the election to include combat pay as earned income for purposes of the earned income tax credit.

H.R. 4107, the “**Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act**,” by Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, D-SD, would amend title 38, United States Code, to expand and improve health care services available to women veterans from the Department of Veterans Affairs, especially those serving in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

H.R. 4116, the “**Veterans’ Health Care Stamp Act**,” sponsored by Rep. Michael C. Burgess, R-TX, would require the United States Postal Service to provide for the issuance and sale of a special postage stamp in order to afford a convenient way for members of the public to contribute to funding for the medical care and treatment of veterans. The Veterans’ Health Care Stamp would bear such illustration, depiction, or other image or design as the Postal Service shall determine in time to allow for its reissuance to coincide with Veterans Day of each year.

H.R. 4146, **no title**, by Rep. Michael M. Honda, D-CA, would amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the availability of emergency medical care for veterans in non-VA medical facilities. The VA would have to weigh the condition of the veteran and the availability of space in an accessible VA facility in determining if care should be in a non-VA facility.

H.R. 4148, the “**National Guard and Reserve Active Duty Higher Education Act**,” introduced by Rep. Nick Lampson, D-TX, would amend title 10, United States Code, to provide for the eligibility of reserve component members supporting contingency operations for educational assistance based on cumulative days (rather than consecutive days) of active duty service.

OTHER IMPORTANT NEWS

Airmen On the Ground. Despite aging equipment and a force stretched thin, the Air Force continues to fulfill its vital mission to “deliver sovereign options for the defense of the United States of America and its global interests – to fly and fight in Air, Space, and Cyberspace.” Today, Airmen play other roles in helping to prosecute successful efforts in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom. Airmen are increasingly engaged in “In Lieu of” taskings, serving alongside Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors on the ground in combat zones. Click [HERE](#) to read an article about one such effort in Afghanistan.

New Selective Reenlistment Bonus (SRB) Listing Released. The Air Force has released its latest SRB listing which contains 43 Air Force specialties, effective December 15, 2007. The Air Force pays SRBs to meet staffing requirements. Selective Reenlistment Bonuses for enlisted skills are determined based on current and projected manning levels, retention trends, career field force structure changes, and career field stress levels. Bonuses are authorized in three reenlistment zones for people with 17 months to 6 years of service (Zone A), 6 to 10 years of service (Zone B), and from 10 to 14 years of service (Zone C). The Air Force is testing a fourth zone (for explosive ordnance disposal Airmen with 18 to 20 years of service). To

view the updated SRB listing, click [HERE](#) and type in "SRB" in the search box, then select the "Updated—List of Air Force Specialty Codes (AFSCs) Receiving Selective Reenlistment Bonuses." Those wanting more information on SRBs should contact their military personnel flight (MPF) or call the Air Force Customer Service Center at toll-free (800) 616-3775.

AAFES Tunes. On November 16, in News Release 07-090, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service announced a partnership with "America Supports You" to offer a special gift to servicemembers this holiday season--a free compilation of songs produced exclusively for Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors and Marines. The free song collection, "CD for the Troops," will be available on the AAFES secure website (click [HERE](#)) for active-duty military members and veterans with valid military IDs beginning Nov. 17. The list of artists on the CD include Billy Joel, Brooks & Dunn, Five for Fighting, The Fray, Gary Sinese and the Lt. Dan Band, the Goo Goo Dolls, Jewel, Josh Groban, Los Lonely Boys, Melissa Etheridge, Montgomery Gentry, the Neville Brothers, and Sarah McLachlan.

Military Spouse Career Advancement Initiative. On November 14, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and Labor Secretary Elaine L. Chao announced a joint initiative to help military spouses get the education and other credentials needed to pursue careers in high-demand, high-growth occupations. The \$35 million program will set up accounts for eligible spouses in eight states to cover expenses directly related to post-secondary education and training. "This will include costs for tuition, fees, books, equipment, and credentialing and licensing fees required for careers in education, health care, information technology, construction trades, financial services, and other "high-growth, portable" fields," according to Secretary Chao. Click [HERE](#) to read more about this demonstration program.

One Physical Upon Separation to Determine Disability Pay. Servicemembers have long faced a separation physical when leaving military service, then a separate physical administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs when seeking VA disability determinations. Perhaps that redundant, time-wasting situation will soon end. On November 7, the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs announced a landmark agreement to pilot a single physical examination that will be used by both departments. This physical will be used to determine the medical fitness of injured personnel to remain in uniform and by the VA for awarding disability compensation. The pilot will begin in late November and will involve three facilities in the Washington, D.C., area: Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C; the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, MD; and Malcolm Grow Medical Center at Andrews AFB, Maryland. The VA will perform the medical evaluations, although the physicals could take place in VA medical centers, on military installations, at VA-contracted examination centers, or at other facilities. According to the joint VA-DoD announcement, the evaluations will be based upon the VA's system for disability examinations and will include an examination of medical conditions identified by military physicians that call into question a service member's fitness for duty, as well as other applicable medical conditions identified by the service member together with the VA.

Shingles Vaccine Now Available. According to the TRICARE Management Activity (TMA), TRICARE now covers Zostavax. This vaccine, designed to prevent shingles, is available under TRICARE for beneficiaries age 60 and older. Shingles (also known as Herpes Zoster) is a debilitating, viral disease that affects more than one million Americans every year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a single dose of shingles vaccine for everyone in this age group. According to TMA, beneficiaries who receive the shingles vaccine after October 19, 2007, must have vaccinations administered in a provider's office. Zostavax is covered under the TRICARE medical benefit and is not reimbursable under the pharmacy benefit. Beneficiaries with coverage or claims questions should contact their Primary Care Manager, their TRICARE regional claims processor found on their beneficiary explanation of benefits (EOB) notice, or if living overseas contact the local TRICARE Service Center or the TRICARE Area Office for the area in which they live. For more information on shingles and its treatment, visit the CDC Website by clicking [HERE](#).

TRICARE Beneficiary Web Enrollment. TRICARE Prime and Prime Remote beneficiaries in the U.S., including Hawaii and Alaska, can enroll online with the new Beneficiary Web Enrollment (BWE) program. With BWE, “beneficiaries can manage some of their health care information from the comfort of home 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” according to Army Major General Elder Granger, deputy director, TRICARE Management Activity (TMA). Prime and Prime Remote beneficiaries can click [HERE](#) to enroll, disenroll, choose primary care managers (PCM), transfer regions, update personal information, add other health care information, and request enrollment cards. BWE also allows TRICARE Standard beneficiaries to update personal information, add other health care information, and enroll in TRICARE Prime. BWE also links to the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) to facilitate updates for both TRICARE and DEERS at the same time. Sponsors and family members can access their TRICARE information by using their Common Access Card; Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) “myPay” Personal Identification Number (PIN), or Family Member Account PIN. You can get more information by visiting the TMA Web site, click [HERE](#), or calling the TMA Communications and Customer Service Center at (703) 681-1770. (Information provided by TMA)

For access to the “click [HERE](#)” links, please visit www.afsahq.org