



April 25, 2008

Volume 3, Edition 17

Wow! It has been another busy week in Washington, DC! Legislators and their staff members along with your AFSA lobbyist worked late into the evenings crafting precise wording and striking compromises to win support from co-sponsors and move bills forward. Your AFSA team now, as in the past, bolstered its reputation as a trusted source when it comes to what matters most to our Air Force enlisted Airmen.

In our continuing series on legislative platform issues, this week we focus on Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan (RSFPP).

Here is the latest on legislation and other news you can use.

**Paid-Up SBP/RSFPP—The Delayed Fruit of an AFSA Victory.** In 1998, AFSA and its coalition partners successfully convinced Congress those veterans 70 years of age and having paid into the SBP for at least 360 months (30 years) have paid enough. Unfortunately, at the last minute the 106th Congress amended the language in the FY 1999 National Defense Authorization Act to delay the effective date for the "SBP Paid-up" provision until October 2008—ten years in the future. In the intervening years, we were unsuccessful in accelerating that effective date, but it is now just 6 months away.

According to the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS), reductions in retired pay for the SBP will terminate on October 1, 2008, for retired members who are 70 years old and have paid SBP or RSFPP premiums for at least 360 months. DFAS is reviewing all military retiree accounts to ensure those affected are notified. The change will be reflected in the November 2008 pay statements. If a retiree does not meet the eligibility criteria on October 1, the premiums will stop when the retiree has met both criteria. Eligible retirees will be notified by DFAS via mail regarding the status of their account and premium payment count. To contact DFAS about annuity accounts, call toll-free 1.800.321.1080 or commercial 216.522.5955.

**Senator McCain's MGIB Enhancement Legislation.** Senator John McCain, R-AZ, was joined by Senators Lindsey Graham, R-SC, and Richard Burr, R-NC, in introducing the "Enhancement of Recruitment, Retention, and Readjustment through Education Act." This legislation would:

- (1) Immediately increase education benefits for active duty personnel to \$1,500 a month and, to improve retention, those benefits would increase to \$2,000 a month after 12 or more years of service;
- (2) Significantly increase the benefit for members of the National Guard and Reserves;
- (3) Provide transferability of up to half of the benefit to their spouse and children after 6 years and after 12 years 100 percent of any unused portion of the benefit;
- (4) Allow up to \$6,000 per year to repay student federal student loans;
- (5) Establish a partnership program between participating school and Department of Veterans Affairs to allow veterans graduate debt-free;

(6) Provide access to Montgomery G.I. Bill benefits for service academy graduates and senior ROTC officers who continue serving 5 years; and

(7) Give another enrollment opportunity to Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) era Airmen. AFSA notes this proposed bill falls short of desired features capping education at a bachelor's degree and requiring a \$2,700 buy-in by VEAPers.

AFSA has been in touch with SASC to provide specific comments on the key features of this bill and will provide more information as it becomes available.

---

**GAO Report Examines Cost of Military Prescription Program.** In a recent report, the General Accounting Office (GAO) found DoD total spending on prescription drugs at retail pharmacies, military treatment facilities, and through the TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy program more than tripled from \$1.6 billion in fiscal year 2000 to \$6.2 billion in fiscal year 2006. Most of this increase was driven by increased use of the TRICARE retail pharmacy, and federal pricing arrangements were not applied to drugs dispensed at retail pharmacies. Future cost growth may be curbed because the FY 2008 NDAA requires federal pricing arrangements to be applied. To read the entire GAO report, click [HERE](#).

---

**Services Chief Art Myers Testifies About Funding Challenges.** In recent testimony before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel, the Director of Air Force Services, Mr. Art Myers, spoke about the impact of budget cuts on childcare and other morale, welfare, and recreation programs. In speaking of childcare, he indicated that over the past two years the Air Force has been able to reduce the backlog of childcare requirements by 2,400—yet 4,000 positions are still needed. Progress in this area was only possible through emergency DoD funding. To read Mr. Myers' entire statement, click [HERE](#).

---

**Campaign Stars for Afghanistan and Iraq Campaign Medals.** According to DoD, servicemembers who have qualified for the Afghanistan Campaign Medal or Iraq Campaign Medal may now display a bronze campaign star on their medal for each designated campaign phase in which they participated. The stars will be worn on the suspension and campaign ribbon of the campaign medal. To read more about the phases of each campaign or to get more information about the campaign stars, click [HERE](#).

---

**Defense Secretary Gates Visits Air University, Challenges Airmen.** While visiting the Air War College on April 21 at Maxwell-Gunter AFB, Alabama, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates said military leaders need to be more forward thinking and brave enough to try new approaches to deal with today's challenges and threats. Although delivered to an audience of commissioned students, the Secretary's thoughts could well apply to all military leaders. To read more about Secretary Gates' comments, click [HERE](#).

---

## RECENTLY INTRODUCED LEGISLATION

**H.R. 5825, the "Hubbard Act,"** by Rep. Devin Nunes, R-CA (and 248 cosponsors), and its Senate companion bill, S. 2874, by Sen. Diane Feinstein, D-CA, would amend titles 5, 10, 37, and 38, United States Code, to ensure the fair treatment of a member of the Armed Forces who is discharged from the Armed Forces, at the request of the member, pursuant to the Department of Defense policy permitting the early discharge of a member who is the only surviving child in a family in which the father or mother, or one or more siblings, served in the Armed Forces and, because of hazards incident to such service, was killed,

died as a result of wounds, accident, or disease, is in a captured or missing in action status, or is permanently disabled.

**H.R. 5826, “The Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2008,”** by Rep. Ciro Rodriguez, D-TX, would increase, effective as of December 1, 2008, the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans.

**H.R. 5831, the “Separating Servicemember Handbook Development Act,”** by Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-NY, would amend the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 to provide injured members of the Armed Forces information concerning benefits.

**H.R. 5832, the “Military Healthcare for Dependents Act,”** by Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-NY, would eliminate the requirement for dependents to reside with members of the Armed Forces to be eligible for TRICARE Prime Remote.

**H.R. 5856,** by Rep. Michael Michaud, D-ME, would authorize major medical facility projects and major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2009.

**H.R. 5868,** by Rep. Steve Pearce, R-NM, would provide for the retention of members of the Armed Forces on active service or in an active status who would otherwise be retired or separated for a combat-related disability, but who are still medically able to perform non-combat related military occupational specialties or duties.

**S. 2870, the “Veterans Disability Fairness Act,”** by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-OH, would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out quality assurance activities with respect to the administration of disability compensation.

**S. 2871, the “Reserve Educational Assistance Program Enhancement Act of 2008,”** by Sen. Blanche Lincoln, D-AR, would recodify chapter 1607 of title 10, United States Code, (Reserve Educational Assistance Program). It would provide accruable benefits for reserve component members who serve multiple deployments, replace the three-tiered formula for REAP benefits, and shift jurisdiction for REAP benefits from DoD to the VA.

**S. 2872, the “Benefit Rating Acceleration for Veterans Entitlements Act of 2008,”** by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-OH, would provide for treatment of disability rates certified as total by reason of unemployability by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs as disability for purposes of titles II and XVI of the Social Security Act.

**S. 2882,** by Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-ME, would provide for the presentation of a flag of the United States to the children of members of the Armed Forces who die in service.

**S. 2889, the “Veterans’ Health Care Act of 2008,”** by Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, D-HI, would improve veterans' health care benefits.

**S. 2899,** by Sen. Tom Harkin, D-IA, would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on suicides among veterans.

## GENERAL NEWS

**Senior Air Force Leaders Meet at “Blue Summit.”** Air Force Secretary Michael W. Wynne and Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley recently summoned every Air Force general officer and senior civilian to San Antonio to chart the future of air, space, and cyberspace power at the “Blue Summit.” To read more about this important summit, click [HERE](#).

---

**National Guard Enlisted Leaders Meet in Saratoga Springs, New York.** Senior Air Force and Army enlisted leaders from the 54 state and territorial National Guards held their first national meeting April 18 to 21 in Saratoga Springs, New York. The event was to allow these senior enlisted leaders, who provide critical advice to their State National Commanders, the opportunity to learn from each other and share ideas on training and leadership. To read more about this important meeting, click [HERE](#).

---

**Total Force Airmen Fly Last Operation Deep Freeze Mission of 2007-2008.** Airmen from the 446th and 62nd Airlift Wings brought 100 scientific researchers, support personnel, and their equipment back to civilization. The mid-April flight is the closest to winter a Deep Freeze crew has ever landed in Antarctica. To read more, click [HERE](#).

---

**CMSAF McKinley Joins DoD Effort to Discourage Smoking.** The Department of Defense has increased its efforts to encourage Airmen to quit smoking. Every year, the Department of Defense spends approximately \$1.6 billion in additional medical care due to the harmful effects of tobacco. The Air Force alone spends about \$115 million annually. Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Rodney J. McKinley is participating in newspaper and television ads promoting the Web site [youcanquit2.org](http://youcanquit2.org). To Read more about this smoking cessation campaign, click [HERE](#).

---

**Dover Chosen Best Base in Air Force.** Dover Air Force Base has won the Commander-in-Chief’s Award for Installation Excellence for 2008. The achievement of Team Dover has earned them an additional \$1 million in quality-of-life funds. To read how Dover Airmen garnered this award, click [HERE](#).

---

**Air Force Achieves One Million Sorties.** Thanks to the extraordinary efforts of Air Force maintainers, operational coordinators, and many Airmen in various AFSCs, the Air Force has achieved one million sorties--operational military flying missions, flown in support of the war on terrorism. To read more about this achievement, click [HERE](#).

---

**Nine Individuals Save the Air Force \$14.7 million.** Nine individuals saved the Air Force \$14.7 million through their performance and innovative ideas. Seven were recognized with this year’s Productivity Excellence Awards; two received Exceptional Innovator Awards. To read more about exceptional performance and innovative ideas, click [HERE](#).

---

**OSI Agents Teach WMD Training.** One of the AFOSI’s forensic science consultants recently provided chemical and weapons of mass destruction training to bioenvironmental, AFOSI, security forces, and fire department personnel at Vance Air Force Base, Oklahoma. To read about this essential training, click [HERE](#).

---

**The Mission of Kirkuk Regional Air Base Iraq.** Several hundred security forces Airmen help maintain security at Kirkuk Air Base--helping to protect the 5,000 personnel who are assigned there. To read more about the role Airmen are playing at Kirkuk Air Base, click [HERE](#).

---

**Senior Enlisted Advisor Approaches Retirement with a new outlook.** As he approaches retirement week after 33 and a half years of service, Army Command Sgt Maj. William J. "Joe" Gainey said he's preparing for the next phase of his life with a new outlook: It's not necessary to always be "Number One" For the rest of the story click [HERE](#).

---

**First Recruits Enlist Using Biometric Technology.** When 20 recruits gathered yesterday at the Baltimore Military Entrance Processing Station to sign their enlistment contracts, none needed a pen. Instead, they read their contracts on a computer screen, then pressed their index fingers onto an electronic pad next to it, becoming the first servicemembers to enlist using biometric technology. For the rest of the story click [HERE](#)

---

**Growing AFSA: Ideas + Action = results! (150 words or less)**

Share your success story with us! We want to highlight your Chapter or Division recruiting efforts and share your great ideas with others. Membership growth is critical to every aspect of our organization. Set your recruiting goals and go for it!

This link listed below is one example of how Air Force Sergeants Association members make a positive impact on our community be selfless acts of service with in our community. Click [HERE](#) to view the video. Scroll down the menu to the segment titled wall washing, to watch members of AFSA Division 3 "Pacesetters" washing the wall.

---

**NOW AVAILABLE: NEW POW COIN TO COMMEMORATE NATIONAL POW/MIA REMEMBRANCE DAY.** No one left behind... No one forgotten... this beautifully crafted coin is dedicated to America's unsung heroes and their families. Minted in pewter with an enameled black and antique finish, the obverse features a rendering of former POW BGen Robbie Risner, USAF (Ret). The reverse bears the image of a sunlit barred window. The inscription proudly states "Freedoms Light... Eternal Hope" and the "National Remembrance Day, September 19, 2009." Size: 2" diameter.

Price: \$12.50, plus \$1.50 shipping and handling. To order, visit the Air Force Sergeants Association website: [www.hqafsa.org](http://www.hqafsa.org). Or, call AFSA Member & Field Relations. 800-638-0594.

All proceeds from this sale support the Airmen Memorial Museum (AMM), and its mission to collect, preserve, and chronicle the undocumented stories of enlisted personnel who serve in the United States Air Force. The Airmen Memorial Museum is located in Suitland, Maryland.

---

**A MOMENT OF REMEMBRANCE.** The White House Commission on the National Moment of Remembrance was established by Congress as an independent government agency. The Commission encourages Americans to honor the sacrifices of America's fallen and the families they left behind. It promotes acts of remembrance throughout the year and asks Americans to pay our debt of gratitude in memory of our fallen by giving something back to the Nation. The Commission is dedicated to educating this and future generations of Americans to remember the sacrifices and costs in human life made to preserve our liberties, and to instill in them an understanding of what it means to be an American.

---

Each year at 3:00 p.m. on Memorial Day, Americans unite in a National Moment of Remembrance which honors America's fallen and their families. During this Moment, 200 Amtrak trains blast their whistles, approximately 500,000 Major League Baseball fans are joined in silence, and countless other participants make a vow to remember.

We'd like to hear your thoughts. Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA) members and newsletter readers, tell us what Memorial Day means to you personally; who or what you will be remembering, and how you plan to observe the National Moment of Remembrance at 3:00 p.m. (your local time) on Memorial Day, May 26, 2008.

Send an email (200 words or less) to: [marketing@hqafsa.org](mailto:marketing@hqafsa.org). We'll publish a sampling of reader's letters in our May Newsletters, through our member email program, and on our website. All essays must include a contact name, phone number and e-mail address for verification.

To visit the White House Commission of Remembrance website click [HERE](#).

*For access to the "click [HERE](#)" links, please visit [www.hqafsa.org](http://www.hqafsa.org)*