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**CMSAF McKinley Testifies Before Congress—Stresses Quality-of-Life Programs.** In testifying before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, CMSAF Rodney J. McKinley and his counterparts from the other military services stressed quality-of-life programs. In his statement, Chief McKinley said, "Quality of life is key to success . . . Our Airmen deserve the best support available, and we are committed to providing the highest quality-of-life standards possible," he said. Child care, healthcare, and education were recurring themes for each branch of service throughout the testimony. To read more about CMSAF McKinley's testimony, click [HERE](#).

To read the Chief's entire statement, click [HERE](#).

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**VA Secretary Peake Welcomes Minority Veteran Advisors.** The Secretary of Veterans Affairs has announced the appointment of six new members to the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans, an expert panel that advises him on issues involving minority veterans. "These new members are veterans who represent the diversity of America and are recognized authorities in areas pertinent to the needs of our veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. To read more about the newly appointed minority advisors, click [HERE](#).

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**VA Secretary Peake Says VA Must Expand Outreach To Guard, Reserve Troops.** Veterans Affairs Secretary Dr. James B. Peake conceded this week that the VA must do more to reach out to Guard and Reserve troops who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan about the mental health help available to them. Peake made his comment during a Capitol Hill hearing in response to a question from Sen. Patty Murray, D-WA, who expressed concern about recently reported VA research that found more than half of all veterans who committed suicide after returning from the recent wars were members of the National Guard or Reserves. Peake said the VA has been working with the military to educate Guard and Reserve troops about VA services. He added that the VA sends these troops a letter, but Secretary Peake said he would like to see more outreach to the veterans as well as better education of the veterans' family members about how to recognize and respond to mental health problems.

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**The Commission on the National Guard and Reserve Releases Its Report.** The commission stated its views of the future of the Guard and Reserve and their role in this nation's defense. In an odd addendum, the commission also addressed the subject of military retirement. It called for changes in the military retirement system, recommending delaying the payment of retirement pay until a veteran reaches age 62. It said the government should allow receipt earlier than that, but at reduced annuity levels. AFSA will work with Congress to ensure the military retirement system is not tampered with. The commission's notion of changing the current military retirement system may please the bean counters at DoD, but the idea is just plain wrong.

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**Senator Evan Bayh Introduces College Loan Interest Forgiveness Legislation.** If Senator Evan Bayh is successful, his "Interest Relief Act" would stop the accumulation of interest on student loans while a servicemember is deployed. To read more about this legislation, click [HERE](#).

**Afterburner On Line.** The “Afterburner” is published by AFPC to provide news to retired Airmen. To read the latest edition of the Afterburner, including comments by CMSAF Rod McKinley on the continuing role of retired Airmen, click [HERE](#).

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**Details of the FY 2009 VA Budget Request.** Honoring the nation’s commitment to care for the newest generation of combat veterans and service members from other conflicts and eras, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake announced today President Bush is seeking a budget of \$93.7 billion in fiscal year 2009 for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), with health care and disability compensation for veterans targeted for most of the spending. To read more about President Bush’s 2009 VA Budget request, click [HERE](#).

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## RECENTLY INTRODUCED LEGISLATION

**H.R. 5223**, by Rep. Leonard Boswell, D-IA, would provide for the enhancement of the suicide prevention programs of the Department of Defense.

**H.R. 5229**, by Rep. Roscoe Bartlett, R-MD, would amend title 38, United States Code, to remove certain limitations on the transfer of entitlement to basic educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill.

**H.R. 5316**, by Rep. Tim Walz, D-MN, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide recovery rebates to certain individuals receiving Social Security or certain veterans’ benefits.

**S. 2610**, by Sen. Salazar, D-Co, would amend title 10, United States Code, to require the establishment of a searchable database containing the names and citations of members of the Armed Forces, members of the United States merchant marine, and civilians affiliated with the Armed Forces who have been awarded the medal of honor or any other medal authorized by Congress for the Armed Forces, the United States merchant marine, or affiliated civilians.

**S. 2617**, by Sen. Daniel Akaka, D-HI, would increase, effective as of December 1, 2008, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans.

**S. 2623**, by Sen. Bill Nelson, D-FL, would amend title 37, United States Code, to authorize travel and transportation allowances for mobilized members of the reserve components of the Armed Forces on leave for suspension of training or to meet minimal staffing requirements.

**S. 2625**, by Sen. Tom Harkin, D-IA, would ensure that deferred Department of Veterans Affairs disability benefits that are received in a lump sum amount or in prospective monthly amounts, be excluded from consideration as annual income when determining eligibility for low-income housing programs.

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## GENERAL NEWS

**Airman’s Roll Call.** This week’s Roll Call discusses the need to maintain professional relationships. Whether considering officer-enlisted relationships or supervisor-subordinate relations, professionalism is the key. To read this week’s Roll Call, click [HERE](#).

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**Air Force Reminds Airmen about the CMSAF Scholarship Fund.** The Air Force Sergeants Association, Airmen Memorial Foundation, and the Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force join together annually to conduct a scholarship program to financially assist the undergraduate studies of eligible dependent children of Air Force Active Duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command enlisted members, and AFSA members in active, retired, or veteran status. To read more about these important programs, click [HERE](#).

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**Secretary Wynne Reflects on his Southwest Asia Visit in his Latest “Letter to Airmen.”** Airmen continue to serve in the front lines of the Global War on Terror. After a recent visit to Southwest Asia, Air Force Secretary Michael W. Wynne reflects on the great job being done by Airmen in defending the interests of this nation. To read Secretary Wynne’s most recent “Letter to Airmen,” click [HERE](#).

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**The Role of the First Sergeant.** A Cannon AFB first sergeant discussed the challenges and lifestyle of a first sergeant. He points out that the daily job depends on the needs of the unit and Airmen. Those needs can vary, as the job of a first sergeant is multi-layered, consisting of duties that include, but are not limited to, financial issues, marital problems, family deaths, disciplinary matters, and even separation issues stemming from deployments. To read more about the role of first sergeants and what they must do to become a “First Shirt,” click [HERE](#).

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**Airmen come to the rescue of Afghan boy.** Airmen recently came to the assistance of an Afghani boy who was in critical condition after being struck by a vehicle. Members of the 210th Expeditionary Rescue Squadron quickly responded. To read more, click [HERE](#).

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**Absentee Voting Information—The Key Role Played by Postal Service.** As AFSA encourages all of our members to vote, an article from Ramstein Air Base points out the key role played by postal officials in making your vote count. To read more, click [HERE](#).

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**Airmen Who Reenlisted After January 1st Due Retroactive Bonus.** Because of the delayed signature of the FY 2008 NDAA, some Airmen who reenlisted since January 1st are due a retroactive bonus. To read more, click [HERE](#).

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**Airmen Come to Aid of People’s Republic of China.** Kadena Air Base Airmen coordinated delivery of humanitarian supplies to the People's Liberation Army at Shanghai International Airport, China, as the country faced the most severe winter storms in the past 50 years. The supplies included cold weather gear such as blankets, jackets and mittens, and cases of Meals Ready to Eat. To read about this rescue mission, click [HERE](#).

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**Nurse Commissioning Program Looking for Enlisted Applicants.** Officials at the Air Force Personnel Center will conduct the annual Nurse Enlisted Commissioning Program board May 13-14 to select candidates for fall 2008 and spring 2009 start dates. The program offers active duty enlisted personnel the opportunity to earn a bachelor's degree in a high-need academic major. To read more, click [HERE](#).

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**Airmen Perform ILO Tasking at Camp Bucca.** Airmen continue to carry out “in lieu of” taskings in support of Army units. 600 Airmen deployed to the Theater Internment Facility at Camp Bucca, Iraq, are charged with providing safe, humane treatment for detainees. To read more, click [HERE](#).

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**Postal Service Offers First-time Military Discount.** Planning to send a care package to a military servicemember serving abroad? Send it after March 3 to take advantage of a new flat-rate box from the Postal Service that is 50 percent larger and delivered for \$10.95 to an APO/FPO address--\$2 less than for domestic destinations. "This is the first time the Postal Service has offered a special price for our armed forces serving overseas," said Postmaster Gen. John Potter. "We're proud that family and friends will be able to use this new larger-sized box to send much appreciated packages from home to our dedicated troops overseas." To read more about this special military rate, click [HERE](#).

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**PACAF Commander Discusses The Readiness-People Balance.** Pacific Air Forces Commander General Carrol "Howie" Chandler recently visited Kadena Air Base. He pledged that "as we balance readiness and ability to fight, we will do our absolute best to ensure Airmen have the conditions they need both on and off the job." He pointed out that in a tight fiscal environment, hard choices must be made—but people always have to be a priority in that equation. To read more about the General's visit and his comments, click [HERE](#).

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**Kunsan Airmen Teach English to South Korean Cadets.** Kunsan Airmen volunteered to teach English to South Korean army cadets at the South Korean Army NCO Academy. Team 5/6, a group of staff and technical sergeants answered the call and got the job done. To read more, click [HERE](#).

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**New ALS Curriculum Now Being Used in the Field--A report from RAF Lakenheath.** In an earlier weekly update, we wrote about the new Airman Leadership School curriculum. The new course is now being taught in the field. To read about the implementation of the new course, click [HERE](#).

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**Virtual Military Personnel Flight Makes Assignment Process Easier.** A new self-service assignments application will launch on February 19th. The new process will eliminate a visit to the Military Personnel Flight/Element, saving Airmen both time and effort as part of the continuing initiatives of the Air Force's Personnel Services Delivery Transformation. Using the Expanded Permissive Assignment program, active duty Airmen lieutenant colonel and below can list up to eight CONUS preferences - bases or locales - and apply via the virtual Military Personnel Flight. To read more about this new program, click [HERE](#).

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## **ANNOUNCING THE ALL NEW CMSAF CHALLENGE COINS!**

After more than a year working with CMSAF (Ret) Paul Airey, and CMSAF (Ret) Sam Parish the first and only CMSAF Challenge Coin site has been launched!

With the sole purpose of raising funds for the CMSAF Scholarship program, these exceptional challenge coins and commemorative sets have the blessing of all of the former CMSAFs and CMSAF McKinley. Purchased as a complete set, or individually, these finely crafted coins will make a wonderful addition to any coin collection. To order your CMSAF coins, visit [www.cmsafcoin.com](http://www.cmsafcoin.com)

All proceeds from the coin sales will go to the CMSAF Scholarship (managed by the Airmen Memorial Foundation) program that provides scholarships to dependent children of AFAD, ANG, AFRC active and retired enlisted members.

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