



February 22, 2008

Volume 3, Edition 8

Exercise Your Right - Vote. The Air Force Sergeants Association through articles in SERGEANTS Magazine, newsletters, briefings, and other avenues informs its members—YOU—of issues affecting the enlisted corps and emphasizes the importance of getting involved in the legislative process. The two easiest ways to get involved are letting elected representatives know your position on issues and exercising your right to vote.

Military members, like their fellow United States citizens, have the power of the ballot and right to communicate with elected officials to express their views. However, this power cannot be realized or wielded if you're not registered or take the time to vote. AFSA encourages you to exercise your rights!

TRICARE and Medicare Patients in Danger--Unless Congress Acts Again. In July 2008, a proposed cut of nearly 10 percent in Medicare payments to doctors will go into effect unless Congress takes action. In 2002, Congress implemented the Sustained Growth Rate (SGR) formula with the intention of limiting the growth of Medicare. Since then, Congress has realized that actually implementing the formula would most likely drive doctors from accepting Medicare patients. To compound the issue even further, TRICARE reimbursement rates are tied to Medicare reimbursement rates. Therefore, a cut in the Medicare rates could also drive doctors away from TRICARE patients. Since 2002, Congress has failed to correct the problem. Instead, it has chosen to defer a permanent fix by extending the mandated cuts 12 months at a time.

In December 2007, Congress inexplicably extended the mandated cuts only six months. Unless corrected, such cuts in payments to doctors could devastate seniors' and military beneficiaries' access to health care by encouraging even more doctors to refuse Medicare and military TRICARE patients. This issue is a particular problem for retirees, survivors, and Guard and Reserve families who don't live near military installations. In many areas, health care providers already refuse TRICARE patients.

Action is needed on this by Congress now. AFSA urges you to contact your two senators and your district representative in the United States Congress to urge an immediate and permanent remedy to this dangerous situation. Remind them you are a voter and will support only those who will act to protect the interests of those who serve this nation.

Mandatory VA Health Care Funding. In response to the efforts of AFSA and its coalition partners, Senator Tim Johnson, D-SD, has introduced S. 2639, the "Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act." Each year, the Administration submits its VA Budget Plan which states a level of preferred funding for VA health care. Congress often disagrees with the Administration's plans, and a battle often ensues. Congress must also introduce a separate piece of authorization legislation in order for this funding to take place. AFSA has long maintained that it is time to stop playing with the well-being of this nation's defenders. VA funding should be mandatory, automatic spending each year, with increases tied to inflation-similar to the annual military retiree cost-of-living adjustments. AFSA applauds Senator Tim Johnson for introducing the legislation that could help make this happen.

Bonuses Retroactive. We reported in an earlier newsletter how all eligible Airmen in Air Force specialty codes with a selective reenlistment bonus or those with a critical skills retention bonus who reenlisted Jan. 1 or later would be authorized retroactive payments. Those payments are effective immediately, according to the Air Force Personnel Center (AFPC)--now that the President has signed the FY 2008 NDAA. According to Chief Master Sergeant Christine Williams, the skills management branch chief at AFPC, affected Airmen do not need to take any action. She said, "The military personnel flights or elements have the responsibility of notifying Airmen whose SRBs and CSRBs were affected by the NDAA. The MPFs will open case files, and the rest of the process is automatic." To read more on these retroactive bonus payments, click [HERE](#).

VA Travel Reimbursement Increases. It is worth repeating that the VA beneficiary travel reimbursement rate recently increased from 11 cents to 28.5 cents per mile. To read more, click [HERE](#).

RECENTLY INTRODUCED LEGISLATION

S. 2623, (No title), by Sen. Ben Nelson, D-NE, 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, the "Fairness in Housing for Disabled Veterans Act," 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.

S. 2639, the "Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act," by Sen. Tim Johnson, D-SD, would amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for an assured adequate level of funding for veterans health care.

S. 2644, (No title), by Sen. Sherrod Brown, D-OH, would clarify and improve information for members and former members of the Armed Forces on upgrades of discharge, to prohibit personality disorder discharges in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

S. 2654, the "Citizen Soldier and Military Veteran Travel Reimbursement Act of 2008," by Sen. Norm Coleman, R-MN, would increase Veteran Beneficiary Travel Program reimbursement (from the current 28.5 cents per mile) to the same rate per mile as used for government employees traveling on business. For Guard and Reserve duty travel, it would set travel reimbursement rates to the same as for POVs used for government business, and lodging and per diem rates the same as used for other government travelers.

H.R. 5441, (No title), by Rep. Walter Jones, R-NC, would amend title 10, United States Code, to extend the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance to survivors of certain members who die on active duty for persons affected by the required Survivor Benefit Plan annuity offset for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

H.R. 5448, the "Full Faith in Veterans Act of 2008," by Rep. Thomas Allen, D-ME, would amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the disability compensation evaluation procedure of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, and to improve the diagnosis and treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

H.R. 5454, (No title), by Rep. Henry E. Brown, Jr., R-SC, would amend title 38, United States Code, to establish a presumption of service connection of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis for purposes of the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

H.R. 5462, (No title), by Rep. Virgil Goode, R-VA, would amend title 10, United States Code, to deny Federal funds for any state, city, county, or other political subdivision of a state that prohibits or unduly restricts the establishment or operation of a military recruiting office.

H.R. 5474, the “Student Veteran Financial Aid Fairness Act of 2008,” by Rep. Harry Mitchell, D-AZ, would prevent payments of educational assistance for veterans and members of the Selected Reserve from being offset in the calculation of financial aid under the Higher Education Act of 1965.

GENERAL NEWS

Airman’s Roll Call. This week’s Roll Call reminds Airmen of the need to file their income tax returns and offers information and advice about deadlines, types of income, and non-taxable allowances and special pays. To read this week’s Roll Call, click [HERE](#).

New Air Force Advertising Slogan: Air Force is “Above All.” The Air Force has a new advertising campaign to recruit the next generation of Airmen as well as better inform people about the Air Force mission: "Above All." "The new slogan is admittedly a bold one," said Col. Michael Caldwell, deputy director of Air Force public affairs, "but so are Airmen." To read more about this new campaign slogan, click [HERE](#).

Deployed Airmen May Qualify for Assignments/Deferments. A new Advanced Assignment Deferment (AAD) program will be offered to some deployed Airmen who have served hazardous duty pay-area tours of at least 300 days in a given year. According to the Air Force Personnel Center, this program is designed to allow all qualified Airmen to request an advance assignment or an in-place, 24-month assignment deferment. To read more about the AAD program, click [HERE](#).

New Web-based Assignment Application Debuts on March 3. Starting March 3, all active-duty enlisted members and officers, lieutenant colonel and below, who are slated to serve an unaccompanied tour of 15 months or less will have the ability to submit Web-based applications from any location worldwide, 24/7. To read more about this new process, how it works, and what assignments are included, click [HERE](#).

Air Force Aid Society’s New Falcon Loans. Beginning in March, the Air Force Aid Society will offer a new loan program, “The Falcon Loan.” The Falcon Loan is a loan of \$500 or less that can be used for emergency needs such as basic living expenses such as rent, utilities, food, car repairs, emergency travel, or other approved needs. The streamlined application process for a Falcon Loan requires no budget information, backup documentation, or first sergeant or commander’s approval. There is minimal information required to process an allotment or “Paymatic” transaction (automatic withdrawal from a bank account), and a member’s signature is all that is needed to complete the application. Applicants can download the application off the AFAS website at www.afas.org. After completing the application, they will bring it, a DoD identification card, and a current leave and earnings statement to the Airman and Family Readiness Center. To be eligible for a Falcon Loan, you must be an Active Duty Air Force member or spouse with Power of Attorney stationed at an Air Force base with an Airman and Family Readiness Center, and you cannot have a current Air Force Aid Society loan. Anyone approved for a Falcon Loan will be expected to repay it by allotment within 10 months or by your Estimated Time of Separation from Military Service if less than 10 months. Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard personnel activated on Title 10 orders at the time of application are also eligible for a Falcon Loan. To read more about the Falcon Loan and how to apply, click [HERE](#).

AFPC Reminds Students of Air Force Summer Hire Program. According to the Air Force Personnel Center, students and certain other eligible persons can gain marketable skills and earn money while enjoying their summer vacations, thanks to the Air Force Summer Hire Program. The program provides temporary jobs that run from May through September. Bases are looking for clerical workers, lifeguards, recreation aides, computer clerks, and general laborers. Job vacancies will be posted on the [USAJobs website](#) and may be advertised locally by a base's civilian personnel flight via bulletin boards, Services squadron newsletters, or base newspapers. To read more on the Air Force Summer Hire Program, click [HERE](#).

Agent Saves Downed Helicopter Crew-Receives Airman's Medal. Air Force Special Agent Jim Collins sprang into action, braving the 50-degree, 300-foot deep, cholera-filled water of Iraq's Lake Quadisya to swim toward a downed helicopter. Approximately a half an hour earlier, on a cold and blustery Dec. 3, 2006, at Haditha Dam, Special Agent Collins witnessed a Marine CH-46 Sea Knight crash into the lake. Aboard the helicopter were 16 troops -- 14 passengers including a mix of Airmen, Soldiers, and Marines and the two Marine pilots. To read how Special Agent Collins effected the rescue and earned the Airman's Medal, click [HERE](#).

Airmen Bring Romance and Roses to Air Force Enlisted Village. The Air Force Enlisted Village is one of the four official charities of the Air Force. It provides a home to the surviving spouses of enlisted Airmen. Those living in the Hawthorn House, the AFEV's assisted living facility, got a special treat on Valentine's Day when more than 30 Airmen from Eglin AFB and Hurlburt Field joined the residents of Hawthorn House for a Valentine Ball. The Airmen wore their service dress or mess dress uniforms. AFEV President and CEO, Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force (Retired) Jim Binnicker, said, "I can't say enough about the way Eglin and Hurlburt Field Airmen always support us. They are out here volunteering their off-duty time every week. My hat's off to them." To read more about this special Valentine's Day event, click [HERE](#).

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. 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.

SCHOLARSHIPS FOR AIR FORCE ENLISTED MEMBERS DEPENDENT CHILDREN AND AIR FORCE SERGEANTS ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL AUXILIARY MEMBERS NOW AVAILABLE. The Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA), the Airmen Memorial Foundation (AMF), and the Chief Master Sergeants of the Air Force (CMSAF) 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, Air Force Reserve Command enlisted members, and Air Force Sergeants Association members in active, retired, or veteran status. To date, the AFSA Scholarship programs have granted \$1.5 million to dependents of the *Total* Air Force enlisted members. Dependent youth who have a grade point average of 3.5 or higher and a minimum combined SAT score of 1650 or minimum combined ACT score of 24 are encouraged to submit an application. More criteria and application package information is available on the AFSA website, click [HERE](#). All completed applications packets must be received at AFSA Headquarters no later than Monday, March 31, 2008. Incomplete packages are ineligible for the competition.

For access to the "click HERE" links, please visit www.afsahq.org