



AFSA NEWSLETTER



Protecting and Defending the Quality-of-Life Benefits for the
TOTAL AIR FORCE
Enlisted Corps and their Families Since 1961

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Hearings, hearings, and more hearings—the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and House Armed Services Subcommittees addressed important issues and your Air Force Sergeants Association representatives interacted with legislators and their staffs.

We'll highlight a few of the key points from these hearings and ask for your help generating grassroots support in this edition of the newsletter. Our weekly legislative platform spotlight will resume next week.

House Armed Services Subcommittees Mark-up H.R. 5658 the FY2009 National Defense Authorization Act (FY 09 NDAA). A full slate of subcommittees met to address the FY09 NDAA and here are the Air Force related highlights:

- Blocks TRICARE health and pharmacy fee increases for retirees for another year
- Provides a 3.9 percent pay raise, one-half of one percent above ECI
- Increases end strength for the Army and the Marine Corps
- Restores 1,473 military positions in the Navy and Air Force related to military-to-civilian conversions within the medical community
- Establishes a tuition assistance program for eligible military spouses
- Authorizes a career intermission pilot program (allows a break in service up to 3 years)
- Includes preventive health care provision to improve medical readiness of the force and the health status of the beneficiaries. *Note: This proposal doesn't include TRICARE for Life population due to funding, but subcommittee promised to expand in the future.*
- Provides \$110M for Air Force Reserve and Air Guard depot maintenance programs
- Authorizes more than \$24B for military construction, base realignment and closure, and family housing in FY09

Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (VAC) Recommendations. As reported earlier, CEO Rick Dean testified before the Joint House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee in Feb 08. The VAC responded to two specific areas he spotlighted: women veterans' health care and access to VA health care for priority 8 veterans by adding \$10M and \$700M for these respective programs. In total, this committee allocated \$2.6B more than the Administration requested for the VA budget.

Health Care Warning Flare. Averting TRICARE fee increases will continue to be a challenge and a statement by Chairwoman Davis during the HASC Military Personnel Subcommittee hearing this week sets the stage for another attempt at increases next year. She stated the following:

"Each year it has been extremely challenging for the subcommittee to meet all the worthwhile and important programs that need our support-and this year was certainly no exception. The subcommittee's greatest challenge was to find the funding to offset the President's budget proposal which assumed nearly \$1.2 billion in savings for TRICARE health and pharmacy fee increases.

"As you know, prohibiting the TRICARE pharmacy fee increase also came with a \$345 million direct spending bill as well. We are working with our leadership to find the necessary offsets to once again prohibit the fee increases for pharmacy to protect our military beneficiaries from being forced to pay higher cost shares proposed in the President's budget.

"While we prohibit a fee increase this year, it is unclear that we will be able to continue to sustain prohibitions on health care fees in the future, we will need to work together to find a fair and equitable solution that protects our beneficiaries and ensures the financial viability of the military health care system for the future."

Call to Action - TRICARE: AFSA encourages you to write to your elected officials to express at least two things regarding health care costs: first, appreciation for the House Armed Services Committee and, in particular, the Military Personnel Subcommittee for blocking TRICARE health and pharmacy fee increases. As illustrated in the quoted statement above, this is nearly \$1.5B appropriators must find elsewhere in the budget and second remind legislators how important the promise of free healthcare for life was in your decision to continue serving. Whether a direct or implied promise, this is a matter of trust and delivering on a benefit earned through service and sacrifice.

Long Sought Benefit for Spouses. Kudos to Jim Lokovic, Morgan Brown and many other AFSA professionals that worked tirelessly over the past 5 to 10 years advocating for a 500 lbs. professional books and equipment allowance for military spouses during PCS moves. As noted last week, this was included in the Senate Armed Services Committee mark up of the FY09 NDAA. We are optimistic it will survive the conference and be in the final bill--a great illustration of the steadfast work your association does for you every day.

Sparks Fly on MGIB Proposals. During a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing there was an uncharacteristically tense exchange between senators concerning "competing" MGIB reform proposals. Sen. Jim Webb, D-VA, advocated for S. 22, the "Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act," and Sen. Richard Burr, R-NC, and Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-NC, spoke on behalf of S. 2938, "Enhancement of Recruitment, Retention, and Readjustment through Education Act." Last week, we reported "G.I. Bill Reform Advances" noting a lack of transferability in S. 22. The key concerns Department of Veterans' Affairs officials expressed about S. 22 centered on cost, administrative complexities and retention impact. AFSA is non-partisan as it seeks to improve benefits for its members and it appears MGIB reform will go forward. We believe it is absolutely crucial whatever is enacted reflect the right priorities and you can impact the outcome of the compromise. Click [HERE](#) for the full text of S. 22 and [HERE](#) for S. 2938.

Call to Action - MGIB: Now is the time to engage your legislators to ensure they fully understand what you believe is most important in an improved MGIB. Between these two bills (and about 25 others), nearly all of the education benefit elements of the AFSA legislative platform are covered. Your elected officials are interested in hearing your thoughts on eliminating the fee-for-benefit (\$1,200 enrollment fee), giving a

second chance enrollment opportunity for VEAP-era and MGIB-eligible service members that declined earlier in their careers, the value of benefit transferability toward retention, and extending the period to use from 10 to 15 years. The underlying objective is “improving the value of your education benefit to cover the full costs of tuition, books, and fees at an average 4-year college or university, and annually indexed to education inflation.”

Letter Writing Tool. We called you to action--writing your legislators--and we offer the letter writing tool under the LEGISLATIVE tab in the “members only” section of the AFSA Website to help you (members click [HERE](#)). Thank you in advance for your support. It makes a tremendous difference as AFSA lobbyists advocate on your behalf.

New Feature. Get the AFSA Weekly Newsletter delivered directly to you. Simply click on the “Subscribe to Newsletter” button at the bottom of this edition.

RECENTLY INTRODUCED LEGISLATION

H.R. 5939, the “Montgomery G.I. Bill Degree Extension Act of 2008,” by Rep. Julia Carson, D-IN, would extend the time limitation for the use of entitlement to educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill for certain persons actively pursuing a qualifying educational degree or certificate.

H.R. 5941, (no title), by Rep. Bill Foster, D-IL, would authorize taxpayers to designate a portion of their income tax payments to a National Military Family Relief Fund to be used by the Secretary of Defense to assist the families of members of the Armed Forces who are serving in, or have served in, Iraq or Afghanistan.

H.R. 5944, the “Enhancement of Recruitment, Retention, and Readjustment through Education Act of 2008,” by Rep. Adam Putnam, R-FL, would improve educational assistance for members of the Armed Forces and veterans in order to enhance recruitment and retention for the Armed Forces.

H.R. 5947, the “Returning Soldiers’ Bill of Rights Act,” by Rep. Peter King, R-NY, would establish a returning soldiers' bill of rights.

H.R. 5954, (no title), by Rep. Mike Thompson, D-CA, would provide veterans the presumption of service connection for purposes of benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for diseases associated with service in the Armed Forces and exposure to biological, chemical, or other toxic agents as part of Project 112 (SHAD – Shipboard Hazard and Defense).

S. 2939, (no title), the “National Guard and Reserve Mental Health Access Act of 2008,” by Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-MA, would expand and improve mental health care and reintegration programs for members of the National Guard and Reserve.

S. 2946, (no title), by Sen. David Vitter, R-LA, would make a stillborn child an insurable dependent under the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program.

S. 2951, (no title), by Sen. Max Baucus, D-MT, would require reports on the progress of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs in addressing causes for variances in compensation payments for veterans for service-connected disabilities.

S. 2961, (no title), by Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, D-HI, would enhance the refinancing of home loans by veterans.

S. 2963, (no title), by Sen. Christopher Bond, R-MO, would improve and enhance the mental health care benefits available to members of the Armed Forces and veterans, to enhance counseling and other benefits available to survivors of members of the Armed Forces and veterans.

S. 2965, (no title), by Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-CA, would require a report on the inclusion of severe and acute Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among the conditions covered by traumatic injury protection coverage under Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance.

S. 2969, the “Veterans' Medical Personnel Recruitment and Retention Act of 2008,” by Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, D-HI, would enhance the capacity of the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit and retain nurses and other critical health-care professionals.

S. 2984, the “Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act of 2008,” by Sen. Daniel K. Akaka, D-HI, (introduced at the request of the Administration) would expand and enhance veterans' benefits by clarifying administration requirements in educational benefit programs, claims matters, and VA health care programs.

GENERAL NEWS

Airman’s Roll Call. Identifies what uniforms are authorized for civilian travel. To read more, click [HERE](#).

The Enlisted Perspective. In this installment, CMSAF McKinley discusses a key leadership role to developing and caring for Airmen—that of First Sergeant. Click [HERE](#) to read more.

Defense Secretary Gates Works to Reduce Mental Health Stigma. Servicemembers often avoid seeking mental health assistance because they fear such assistance could result in loss of security clearances or potential government jobs. To read more about how Secretary Gates is addressing this matter, click [HERE](#).

Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has been enhanced to provide a new service for servicemembers or veterans in crisis. Call toll-free (800) 273-TALK (8255) and press 1 to be connected immediately to VA suicide prevention and mental health service professionals.

VA-DoD Program Serves Severely Disabled Combat Veterans. Bolstering its commitment to improve services to those seriously injured in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and its federal partners have marked a milestone with establishment of a promised new office and deployment of workers to key military treatment facilities. Click [HERE](#) for the rest of the story.

President Bush Proclamation Honors Spouses of those who Serve. On May 5, President Bush took time to pay tribute to military spouses. In doing so, he cited their great contributions to this nation’s defense. To read more about President Bush’s proclamation, click [HERE](#).

E-mails Claiming to Come from IRS are Bogus. The scammers are already starting to bilk people out of their economic stimulus payments by sending bogus e-mails claiming to be from the Internal Revenue Service. To access the true IRS guidance, click [HERE](#).

National Memorial Day Concert, “A Time to Remember, to Heal and Bring our Nation Together.” On Sunday, May 25, 2008, The National Memorial Day Concert, will be presented live from the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol and pay special tribute to the veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam as well as the valiant warriors from today’s battlefields. It will be broadcast on PBS 8:00 – 9:30 PM Eastern Time (check local listings for times in your area).

Memorial Day Ceremony at the Women’s Memorial. The ceremony will be held May 26, 2008 at 4:00 p.m. It is open to the public and includes formal military honors, a keynote address and personal tributes to departed comrades. For more information, call 703-533-1155 or 800-222-2294.

AFA & AFSA Announce Memorial Day Ceremony at Air Force Memorial. The Air Force Association and Air Force Sergeants Association will host a 9 a.m. wreath laying ceremony Monday, May 26, 2008, at the Air Force Memorial. Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Rodney J. McKinley is the keynote speaker at this ceremony, which is open to the public. For more information about this event, contact Pete Lindquist at 703-979-0674 or pindquist@airforcememorial.org.

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

We continue to seek your success stories! AFSA wants 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!

National Moment of Remembrance. In an effort to put the “Memorial” back into Memorial Day, Congress established the White House Commission on Remembrance to promote the National Moment of Remembrance. Each year, at 3:00 p.m. on Memorial Day, Americans are asked to participate in an act of remembrance and national unity by pausing for a Moment to remember the more than one million of their fellow citizens who sacrificed their lives for our freedom.

Second in the Series: Shared Memorial Day Thoughts. We asked our Air Force Sergeants Association members and newsletter readers to share their thoughts and emotions about who they will remember on Memorial Day, especially how they will observe the Moment. Here is a sampling of those letters:

Senior Airman Dion J. Lewis II – AFSA Chapter 358, Langley AFB, VA: To me, Memorial Day means what the U.S. Military is all about. This is a day designed to preserve the memories of the U.S. men and women who have died while serving their country in the military. For this reason, we should all take this special moment at 3 p.m. on May 26 and pay the respect in a moment of silence as the U.S. men and women of the military service who have died paid their lives protecting this country’s freedom. On this day, I personally will be remembering all the 4,000 plus fallen soldiers that the war on Iraqi Freedom has claimed. All the memorial e-mails, videos, and websites that have crossed my path over the past few years. On this day, I plan to give back to the fallen soldiers by participating in the local Fallen Soldier’s Program, posting American flags on Military graves at the local Veteran Gravesite. I hope and pray that the souls of all the

fallen soldiers of all U.S. wars, past and present, are looking down with joy as I and the rest of the U.S. honors them as rightfully so. We love you, we thank you, and we will never forget!

SSgt Chamita Tillman, Langley AFB: Our main goal in life and our endeavors is for the freedom of all mankind. Let us not forget the foundation of our constitution; "Establish Justice and Promote the General Welfare". Let us all form reverence of which our country was founded upon. A patriotic heart and a firm foundation this country was built on. From the strength of our forefathers, to the dedication of our countryman, to the fallen ones' who have not died in vain. From our children to our children's children we always stand for virtue, merit and vigilance. Let us not forget, let us remember the lives that were sacrificed, the blood that was shed and the freedom in which we desperately hold on to. Let not the lives that were/are being scarified be in vain. Take hold of our stance and pride in our heritage and never forget and remember who was lost in our upheld battle to: "establish justice and promote the general welfare" for all mankind. You will never be forgotten and we will never forget the blood, tears and sweat of the fallen. Let us not forget! Remember!

CMSgt David Dunlap - AFSA Life Member: "Memorial Day is, of course, the day to remember the brave women and men that have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. It is also the day on which we are duty bound to remember those who have come home with wounds both visible and unseen that need our love, gratitude and support."

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