



AFSA International Legislative Committee Bulletin 2014

Sept 6-27, 2014



1. Action Alert from AFSA HQ Calling for a Full Military Pay Raise for 2015. AFSA Headquarters has issued an alert (www.hqafsa.org), and prepared a Capwiz letter for you to send to your elected officials, calling for the 1.8 percent pay raise to at least let military members keep pace with the growth of the civilian economy in which most service members live.

For you to participate, the AFSA Website instructs:

- On the AFSA Website (hqafsa.org), enter your Zip Code in the “Write Congress Today” window.
- On the following page, select an issue from the “Action Alert” section to send a pre-written letter (drafted by the AFSA staff), or
- To write your own letter on a subject of your choosing, in the sentence just above the photos of your elected officials, that read “Write to ALL of your representatives [with one click](#) or just go to the individual pages linked below,” click on “[with one click](#)”

2. DoD Guidance for Upgrade of Vietnam-era PTSD Discharges.

For more information, the department’s supplemental guidance can be found at <http://www.defense.gov/news/OSD009883-14.pdf> ”

The DoD news release: <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=16915>

3. Call for Advance VA Funding.

Throughout this year, AFSA representatives have told lawmakers that a government shutdown could jeopardize the lives of our nation’s veterans. Due to the work of this Association and others, in 2009 legislation was passed to achieve advance funding for health care provide by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). However, should there be a government shutdown, all other VA programs would be jeopardized--including VA disability claims and payments, education benefits, research, burials at national cemeteries, information technology, construction, etc. For that reason, AFSA has supported legislation to remedy this situation.

The “Putting Veterans First Act,” H.R. 813 and S. 932 would extend advance funding for all VA discretionary programs. To date this legislation has been passed by the Veterans Affairs Committees of both the House and Senate, but the leadership in neither chamber (House Speaker Rep. John Boehner nor Sen. Majority Leader Sen. Harry Reid) has scheduled a vote on the proposed legislation. This would be a good time to urge your elected officials to call for the passage of this important legislation.

4. DoD to Renew Effort on Military Health Care, Other “Reforms.”

To read the full article, go to:

<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140908/DEFREG02/309080018/Hagel-Continue-Push-Pentagon-Reforms-Amid-Global-Threats>

5. New SECVA Says VA Programs Too Complicated for Most Veterans.

To read more about Secretary McDonald’s press conference, go to:

<http://www.newsobserver.com/2014/09/08/4133908/new-va-chief-veterans-agency-too.html>

6. VA Inspector General Says VA Managers Across the System Lied.

To read the complete article, go to:

http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/U/US_VETERANS_AFFAIRS?SITE=AP&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT

7. Air Force Wants DoD to Decide if Airman Must Say “So Help Me God” When Reenlisting.

To read the complete article, go to: <http://www.stripes.com/news/us/air-force-seeks-dod-ruling-on-re-enlistment-oath-1.302225>

8. Veterans COLA Bill Passes Senate.

Source article: <http://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/senate/217481-senate-passes-increase-in-veterans-disability-benefits>

9. Senate Passes Gold Star Fathers’ Legislation.

To read more, go to: <http://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/senate/217350-senate-passes-bills-to-improve-child-health-fathers-of-veterans>

10. Will there be a Government Funding Bill Passed in the Coming Days?

To read more, go to:

<http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140916/CONGRESSWATCH/309160035/Senior-Senator-Both-Chambers-Should-Pass-CR-Syrian-Rebels-Authorities-Before-Weekend>

11. DoD Announces Proposed Changes to Military Lending Act.

To read the entire article, which includes statements from Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) Director Richard Cordray and Assistant Director Holly Petraeus, go to:

<http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123266>

Editor’s note: It is of great interest to our members that, before his retirement from military active duty, AFSA CEO (CMSgt Ret.) Rob Franks worked with the CFPB and helped provide that bureau with great insight on the specific problems facing Airmen.

12. Military Retiree COLA to Be Announced in October.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has announced that it will release its September measurement of inflation (the Consumer Price Index) figures on 22 October. This figure will determine the January 2015 cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for military and federal retirees, Social Security recipients, and VA benefits recipients. Figures up-to-date suggest the COLA will be in the neighborhood of 1.8 percent.

13. 113th Congress Will End, 114th Will Begin. The 2-year 113th Congress began on 3 January 2013, and its members (House and Senate) were based on the November 2012 elections. The 114th Congress will begin the first week of January 2015 and will seat those senators and representatives elected this November.

The period between the November 2014 elections and the start of the 114th Congress is referred to as the “lame duck session.” The term “Congress” refers to our nation’s entire legislative branch, including all members of the House and Senate.

14. Support AFSA HQ Action Alert on Full Military Pay Raise. A continuing resolution has been passed funding government programs through 11 December. This will, at least for now, prevent a government shutdown. Congress is essentially out of action (in their hometown/state areas) until after the November elections.

Especially with AFSA Chapters preparing for early October’s Legislative Awareness Week, it is a good time for AFSA members to once again help our AFSA Headquarters legislative representatives attempt to secure a full pay raise for military members.

As we indicated in earlier bulletins, last year when President Obama pushed for a reduced pay raise for 2014, it set in motion the 1.0 percent pay raise that was enacted starting in January 2014. This was the lowest military pay raise in 50 years. The President is once again lobbying to reduce the 2015 military pay raise from 1.8 percent to 1.0 percent. By law, military pay raises are dictated by the employment cost index (ECI), a measurement of private sector wage growth. That law is intended to allow military members and their families to receive a pay raise that allows them to keep pace with the economy in general. AFSA Headquarters explains,

“The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) historically has two versions that eventually merge via a Conference between the two Chambers of Congress. Both versions include a pay raise for the military, but the House version (H.R. 4435) follows existing law by tying it to the Employment Cost Index (ECI) and grants an increase of 1.8%. However, the Senate version (S. 2289) which has only cleared the Armed Services Committee and has yet to pass a full floor vote, actually specifies a 1% raise as does the President’s budget.

“AFSA fought too hard for too long in closing the pay gaps between military and private sectors to stop now. A strikingly similar scenario was encountered last year, and now for the 2nd year in a row Defense budgets directly reflect government-wide efforts to compensate for sequestration. Whenever there is a deviation from the ECI numbers, it is recreating the gap Congress helped close. So we urge our CapWiz users to communicate with elected leaders on this key issue for the Fiscal Year 2015 Budget.”

A visit to the AFSA-sponsored Capwiz program Action Alert explains our Association’s position, the rationale behind providing a full pay raise, and a letter for you to send to your elected representatives. Please support that effort and send a letter to your Senators and Congressman/woman by going to <http://www.capwiz.com/hqafsa/home/>

15. Legislation of Interest. In the days before Congress headed home to deal with the November elections, it introduced some legislation of interest. However, it is important to keep in mind that all bills introduced during the 113th Congress, unless passed into law, will die at the end of this year. The bills of interest introduced prior to Congress' departure:

S. 2810, by Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., would require the Secretary of Defense to develop procedures to share certain information with State veterans agencies to facilitate the transition of members of the Armed Forces from military service to civilian life.

H.R. 5475, by Rep. Doug Collins, R-Ga., would improve the care provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to newborn children.

H.R. 5500, by Rep. Michael G. Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., would protect employment and training services for veterans.

H.R. 5524, by Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., and several others, would ensure that women members of the Armed Forces and their families have access to the contraception they need in order to promote the health and readiness of all members of the Armed Forces.

H.R. 5676, by Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick, D-Ariz., would ensure that members of a reserve component who are pursuing a course of education using educational assistance administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs are accommodated by the institution of higher learning for an absence caused by performing certain training.

H.R. 5680, by Rep. Tim Walz, D-Minn., would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a registry for certain toxic exposures, and it would direct the Secretary to include certain information in the electronic health records of veterans.

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