



Air Force Sergeants Association

The CMSAF Bud Andrew Gateway Chapter 872

Legislative Update Summary

5 Mar 2014

<http://www.capwiz.com/>



See page 4-5 for the 2013 – 2014 Platform

We got our COLA back!!!!!!!!!!

HEALTHCARE

- **TFL Long-term Meds by Mail Order starting Next Month.** An article by *Military Times* reports, “Tricare has begun notifying military retirees and family members who use Tricare for Life that they must start filling long-term prescriptions by mail or at a military treatment facility starting next month.
 - “Under the five-year pilot program, TFL beneficiaries must transfer prescriptions for maintenance medications to — or start new medications for chronic conditions through — the Tricare Mail Order Pharmacy or a military pharmacy by March 15. . . The requirement also will save beneficiaries money: a 90-day refill of a generic medication costs nothing by mail, but require a \$5 co-payment for a 30-day prescription at retail stores. Brand-name drugs cost \$13 for a 90-day prescription by mail but \$17 for a 30-day prescription at a store.
 - Beneficiaries may call the TRICARE pharmacy contractor, Express Scripts, at 1-877-882-3335 or visit the Express Scripts website to switch to Home Delivery or with questions about their medications. To switch a prescription to a military pharmacy, beneficiaries may need to get a new prescription from their doctor, officials said. Refills can be ordered by calling 1-877-363-1303 or by visiting Express Scripts online at <http://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE/> .”
 - Source:
 - <http://www.militarytimes.com/article/20140218/NEWS/302180029/Tricare-Life-beneficiaries-reminded-mail-order-Rx-requirement>
 - <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121679>
- **TRICARE Preventive Healthcare Services.**
 - AFSA and our coalition partners worked hard to convince Congress that requiring DoD to provide free or low-cost preventive healthcare services could save the government money in the long run. As a result, several years ago DoD began offering several preventive treatments, many at no cost to the beneficiary. For example, some adult beneficiaries can receive immunizations, Pap tests, mammograms, colon cancer screenings, prostate cancer screenings, and more (depending on your TRICARE plan). To read the details of how these free procedures may apply to you, go to:
http://www.tricare.mil/CoveredServices/SeeWhatsCovered/PreventiveServices.aspx?sc_database=web

VETERANS/RETIREE BENEFITS

- **Sanders Omnibus Veterans Bill Fails.** The United States Senate did not approve S. 1982, a massive, omnibus bill that included numerous proposals relative to veterans, expansion of VA programs, and an increase of eligibility for such benefits and programs. The bill was sponsored by the chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt.

- Source article: <http://www.militarytimes.com/article/20140227/NEWS05/302270033/Senate-blocks-huge-vets-benefits-bill>

CARING FOR SURVIVORS

No update

MILITARY BENEFITS & PROGRAMS

- **President Signs Military Retiree COLA Restoration and Debt Limit Extension Bills.** An *Associated Press* report as presented by *ABC News* reads, in part, “President Barack Obama on Saturday [15 February] signed separate measures into law to lift the federal debt limit [S. 540] and restore benefits that had been cut for younger military retirees [S. 25].
- **Now Home, Members of Congress, Taking Credit for Reinstatement of Military Retiree COLAs.** Not surprisingly, newspaper/media articles from around the country show that many members of the House and Senate who voted for the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 that created the military retiree COLA cuts are now home hoping to make political “points” by touting the fact that they voted for corrective legislation (S. 25). As our members know, this legislation reversing the cuts (for current military retirees and those who entered service before 1 January 2014) resulted from a very strong lobbying/grassroots effort that made many members of Congress “uneasy” in this important election year.

NATIONAL GUARD AND AIR FORCE RESERVE

No update

EDUCATION

No update

MISCELLANEOUS

- **President Releases FY 2015 Budget**
 - **Remember:** The President’s plan, as voiced by his Secretary of Defense is non-binding and the details within will only actually happen if Congress passes enacting legislation. That is why the Air Force Sergeants Association is so important to its members—it will give voice to the importance of quality-of-life programs and work with Congress—in this major election year—to help them understand the importance of these benefits
 - Provides \$495.6 billion in discretionary funding for the base budget of the Department of Defense to carry out our national defense strategy and protect national security.
 - The Budget includes a placeholder for DOD’s 2015 Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding equivalent to the amount provided in the President’s 2014 Budget. The Administration continues to propose a multiyear cap that limits Government-wide OCO funding to \$450 billion over the 2013-to-2021 period.
 - The Budget provides \$198.7 billion in operation and maintenance funding, in addition to other resources, to continue the Department’s efforts to restore readiness and avoid a hollow force
 - For calendar year 2015, the Budget provides a 1.0 percent increase to basic pay, a 1.5 percent increase in the Basic Allowance for Housing, and a 3.4 percent increase in the Basic Allowance for Subsistence.
 - The Budget provides \$47.4 billion for the DOD Unified Medical Budget to support the DOD Military Health System
- Source: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Overview>

- **FY 2015 Budget Concerns – Remember, these are ideas, not proposals. Let your congressmen and senators know what is important to you.**
 - “Health insurance - The triple-option TRICARE program of Prime, Extra and Standard would be merged into some sort of fee-for-service insurance option, like Standard, for beneficiaries under age 65.
 - “While active duty members still would have access to free health care, dependents and working-age retirees would face higher costs to include a share of medical expenses and perhaps a new annual enrollment fee, set initially at \$285 for individuals and \$569 for families. . . New co-pays would be set for retiree visits to military treatment facilities. Co-pays also would be set for military families and retirees who use emergency rooms inappropriately for routine care.
 - “Commissary cuts - The prized commissary system, which offers deep discounts on groceries, would see taxpayer support slashed from \$1.4 billion annually to \$400 million. This would occur over three years and lower average shopper discounts from 30 percent down to 10 percent compared to commercial grocers. The military would continue to subsidize commissaries overseas and at remote U.S. bases.
 - “The intent, said Hagel, is not to close any stores. But resale industry experts say closings are inevitable once stateside stores can't offer enough savings to keep patrons from using commercial discounters off base. . . ‘We are not closing commissaries,’ agreed one Defense official. ‘They will be forced to close on their own.’
 - “Exchanges, or base department stores, are self-sustaining. But they too could be jeopardized if they lose patrons because their top priority for shopping on base is discounted groceries. If exchanges profits fall, so too will funds for base morale, welfare and recreation programs, critics contend.
 - “Hagel and military chiefs want to cap the allowance until average BAH covers 95 percent of rent and utilities. BAH also no longer would be set to cover renter's insurance, saving perhaps \$200 a year per recipient.”
- Source: <http://progress-index.com/news/dod-squeeze-tricare-slash-grocery-savings-cap-bah-1.1644059>

UPCOMING LEGISLATION OF INTEREST

- **H.R. 4095**, by Rep. Jon Runyan, R-N.J., would increase, effective as of December 1, 2014, 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.
- **H.R. 4096**, by Rep. Jon Runyan, R-N.J., would provide for annual cost-of-living adjustments to be made automatically by law each year in 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. 4101**, by Rep. Rene Ellmers, R-N.C., would ensure that a TRICARE beneficiary receives written notice of any change to benefits received by the beneficiary under the TRICARE program.
- **H.R. 4102**, by Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., would clarify that the estate of a deceased veteran may receive certain accrued benefits upon the death of the veteran.
- **S. 2053**, by Senator Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., would direct the Architect of the Capitol to place a chair honoring American Prisoners of War/Missing in Action on the Capitol Grounds.
- **H.R. 4134**, by Rep. Richard Nugent, R-Fla., would repeal the reduced annual cost-of-living adjustment of the retired pay of retired members of the Armed Forces under the age of 62 imposed by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013.

Sincerely,

Jacob Sanabia

AFSA Chapter 872, Legislative Trustee

HQ AFSA website: <http://www.hqafsa.org>

AFSA Chapter 872 website: <http://www.afsa872.org/>

AFSA Chapter 872 EIM site: <https://eim.amc.af.mil/org/375amw/afsa/default.aspx>



AIR FORCE SERGEANTS ASSOCIATION

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LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM 2013 – 2014

HEALTHCARE

- Resist TRICARE-related fee increases and protect military healthcare benefits earned through a career of military service
- Improve access to health care
- Enhance the TRICARE Active Duty Dental and Retiree Dental Plans
- Exempt military retirees who entered service prior to December 7, 1956, from the obligation of Medicare Part B payments
- Authorize pre-tax payment of health, dental and long-term care premiums
- Fix the Medicare/TRICARE reimbursement rate formula ("Doc Fix")

VETERANS/RETIREE BENEFITS

- Protect annual Cost-of-Living Adjustments
- Ensure adequate VA healthcare funding and access to quality care
- Oppose user fees at VA medical facilities
- Expand concurrent receipt legislation to include ALL military retirees
- Support efforts to reduce the VA claims and appeals backlog
- Promote and encourage efforts that enhance transition programs and employment opportunities for Veterans
- Improve military skills transferability for service members
- Extend the VA Caregivers Act to full-time Caregivers of catastrophically disabled veterans of conflicts before September 11, 2001
- Ensure sufficient capacity and full funding at national cemeteries
- Where permissible by Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), provide full overseas retiree exchange/commissary benefits including postal services
- Repeal/Modify the Former Spouse Protection Act

CARING FOR SURVIVORS

- Permit the full receipt of DIC and Survivor Benefit Plan without an offset
- Pursue Dependency and Indemnity Compensation widows to remarry after age 55 without losing their entitlement
- Preserve and enhance the military Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)
- Allow survivors of retirees to draw the final full month's retired pay
- Improve education programs for surviving spouses and children

MILITARY BENEFITS & PROGRAMS

- Sustain military pay comparability with the private sector and protect current benefits against significant degradation
- Preserve and/or enhance bonuses and special pays
- Ensure adequate spending on base support and facility maintenance
- Protect funding for commissary, exchange, dependent schools and family support programs
- Improve access to affordable child care and encourage payment policies that accommodate military lifestyles (e.g., periods of leave)

- Seek adjustments to allowances to better reimburse members for expenses they incur for housing and government-directed PCS moves
- Establish a catastrophic leave program
- Reauthorize and fully fund DoD's Homeowners' Assistance Program
- Support educational and employment opportunities for military spouses

NATIONAL GUARD AND AIR FORCE RESERVE

- Streamline the complex reserve duty status system without reducing compensation value
- Improve transition and reintegration support services for G-R families
- Reduce the earliest Guard & Reserve retirement compensation age from 60 to 55
- Credit all post-9/11 active duty service toward Guard/Reserve early retirement
- Permit "rollover" credit of qualifying active duty tours performed over multiple fiscal years toward early Reserve retirement
- Remove the annual cap of 130 points on inactive duty points that can be applied towards retirement
- Provide employer and self-employed tax credits and enhance job security
- Support greater transparency in reporting and resolving Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) violations
- Authorize reimbursement for military duty-related travel of at least 50 miles
- Enhance Selected Reserve Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB-SR) benefits
- Award Veterans' status to all Guard & Reserve members

EDUCATION

- Restore and preserve the military Tuition Assistance program
- Support legislation that promotes Veterans success through their use of their Post 9/11 or Montgomery GI Bill programs and ensure these benefits remain relevant
- Seek transparency of the education programs provided by universities and colleges to military members and their families using TA and/or Post 9/11 and Montgomery GI Bill programs
- Ensure full funding of the Impact Aid Program
- Pursue with all State and US territory legislatures, the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

MISCELLANEOUS

- Provide a full accounting of POW/MIAs from all past and future military actions, and promote international compliance in recovery efforts
- Preserve the honor and dignity of service to the Country in uniform
- Protect the American flag from purposeful acts of physical desecration
- Improve voter participation in Federal elections & expedite military mail processing of overseas ballots