

December 2020
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NEVER

STOP

SERVING

WE NEED

YOU!!

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Comments from The President

It is almost time to put 2020 in the history books. Gladly! Since our November Council Zoom meeting two major efforts have begun.

First, we are developing an Illinois MOAA website upon which chapters can post appropriate information about their chapter and its activities as well as providing a link to the chapter website if they have their own. Please check out the “in progress” website at: www.Ilcouncilmoaa.org and provide any suggestions or information to Maj. Dave Knieriem at dknieriem@casscomm.com.

The second thing that our illustrious secretary and our special advisor to the Council have been doing is redefining our chapter boundaries to make sure we are covering all of the Illinois MOAA members in light of the two chapters that have “folded their tents.”

I am sure that the legislative column will mention the slow progress of this year’s Defense Appropriations Bill. Here’s hoping that by the time this newsletter gets published, Congress will have completed their work and that it has passed.

As you know legislation in the State Legislature is stalled until next year. In both cases it is a reminder that we need to keep our members engaged in conversations with all of our elected officials.

Finally, as we wind down 2020, please take time to celebrate this holiday season with your loved ones, stay healthy, and (I gotta say it) “Never Stop Serving!” Thanks for all you do for your Chapters and our veterans.

Semper Fi – Bob

2021 Military Retiree and VA Disability Pay Raise

This article by Jim Absher originally appeared on Military.com, a leading source of news for the military and veteran community.

Military retirees, those who receive disability or other benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, federal retirees and Social Security recipients will see a 1.3% increase in their monthly checks for 2021. The annual Cost Of Living Allowance (COLA) is slightly less than the 1.6% increase from last year but in line with the historical increases seen over the last 10 years. Each year, military retirement pay, Survivor Benefit Plan Annuities, VA Compensation and Pensions, and Social Security benefits are adjusted for the rate of inflation. Military retirement pay is one of the top three benefits of military service, along with medical and other benefits. Understanding how to calculate military retirement pay involves understanding the final pay and high 36-month average methods.

Retirement Pay Increase: As a result of the increase, retired military members will see a \$13 increase for each \$1,000 in military retirement pension they receive each month. Retirees who entered military service on or after Aug. 1, 1986, and opted for the Career Status Bonus (CSB/Redux retirement plan) have any COLA increases reduced by 1%, so they will see a smaller increase in 2021. They should see a monthly increase of only \$3 per \$1,000. Survivors receiving Survivor Benefit Plan payments will see the same increase of \$13 per \$1,000 in their monthly payments.

VA Disability Increase: Disabled veterans will also get a bump. The average VA disability check will go up about \$1.85 per month for those with a 10% rating, and \$19.68 for those rated at 100%.

Federal Spending, Emergency Stimulus Aid on Collision Course in Congress

With campaign season behind us and fewer than three weeks before the stopgap measure to fund the government expires, lawmakers have little time not only to get a defense authorization bill across the finish line, but also to agree on an emergency COVID-19 package and the 12 spending bills required to fund federal agencies for the fiscal year that started Oct. 1.

Up to this point, congressional leaders have been working to keep the emergency aid and federal spending bills separate. However, negotiations have stalled over several contentious issues in the relief package, including the topline figure of over nearly \$2 trillion proposed by the administration. Leaders are struggling with several issues, such as national standards for coronavirus testing, contact tracing and research; paycheck and business protections; unemployment insurance; relief for low-income workers; and aid to states for fighting the pandemic.

The longer Congress puts off passing an emergency aid package, the more likely lawmakers will be forced to deal with both pandemic aid and federal spending in one large omnibus appropriations bill. Such a move makes it even harder for lawmakers to agree on what will be a multitrillion-dollar package, likely teeing up another continuing resolution to fill the gap, kicking the decision into the new year — or worse, triggering a partial government shutdown until Congress and the administration can reach an agreement.

TRICARE Prescription Drug Cost Won't Rise in 2021:

Editor's note: This article by Patricia Kime originally appeared on Military.com, a leading source of news for the military and veteran community.

Some good news for Tricare beneficiaries facing increasing costs in Tricare enrollment fees and premiums, next year: Your prescription drug costs will not change. Under the fiscal 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, copayments for medications available at retail pharmacies and through the Tricare mail-order system will not increase next year. Under the fee structure, 30-day prescriptions at Tricare network pharmacies for generic drugs will remain at \$13, and for brand names, \$33.

Copayments for prescriptions available through Tricare's home delivery program also will remain the same, a 90-day supply of a generic drug delivered by mail will be \$10, a brand-name medication, \$29 for a 90-day prescription, and \$60 for a medication not listed in the Tricare formulary. Prescriptions remain available to no cost for those who can use a pharmacy at a military treatment facility.

[TAKE ACTION: [Urge Your Lawmakers to Support NDAA Provisions to Stop Cuts to Military Medicine](#)]

The fiscal 2018 defense policy bill set the rates for Tricare pharmacy copayments through 2027. By law, they will increase next year by \$1 to \$8, depending on the type of prescription, unless Congress changes the fee schedule. The stabilization for 2021, also set by law, comes on the heels of a 2020 increase that took many military retirees by surprise. That spike raised each quantity and drug category by several dollars per refill. Earlier this year, Defense Department health officials announced that most retirees using Tricare Select will be required to pay enrollment fees for the health program beginning in January. Military retirees under age 65 who joined the military before 2018 will pay an annual enrollment fee of \$150 for an individual, or \$12.50 per month, or \$300 (\$25 per month) for a family.

Until now, they have been required to make copayments and cost shares as well as some hospitalization and other fees for health services, but no enrollment fees. The new fees were set into law by the fiscal 2017 National Defense Authorization Act but they were delayed until 2021.

Sen. Jon Tester of Montana, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and member of the committee that funds U.S. military construction and VA, wrote a letter to Department of Defense Secretary Mark Esper urging DoD to give retirees a grace period during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Saying that the coronavirus has had "unprecedented impacts on the health and economy of our nation," Tester asked Esper to implement a 12-month grace period to ensure that military retirees and their families who use Select have time to meet the new payment requirements.

"No military retiree or their loved ones should be at risk of losing their health care coverage and not receiving the care they need in the midst of this pandemic," Tester wrote.

DoD is required by law to implement the new fees this year, but Tester said it is unlikely Congress could change the requirement before the end of the year. He noted that it is within Esper's authority to delay implementation.

The Defense Health Agency also announced that military dependents who use Tricare Young Adult for their health coverage will see their health care costs rise next year. Monthly premiums for those on TYA Prime will increase by \$83, to \$459, and for those on TYA Select, by \$29, to \$257.

Enrollment fees for retirees and their family members who use Tricare Prime, as well as premiums, catastrophic caps, deductibles and copays for other Tricare programs have yet to be announced for 2021. These fees are based on the annual retiree cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, which was projected to be 1.3% as of late summer.

Tricare officials said any new out-of-pocket expenses determined by the COLA increase will be published before the start of open enrollment Nov. 9. The enrollment window closes Dec. 14.

Key Bills in the US Congress

The following key bills are important issues before the 116th Congress that MOAA recommends supporting. However, most of the bills will not come to fruition in the current Congress, but be re-initiated in the next congressional session. You may find more details about each bill, such as the sponsor, status, prognosis, what stakeholders are saying, and the history on the MOAA website or at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/#find:>

Federal – HR 5995. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to expand eligibility to certain military retirees for concurrent receipt of veterans' disability compensation and retired pay or combat-related special compensation, and for other purposes.

Introduced February 27, 2020

Original sponsor: Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL); 98 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors:

Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL)

Rep. Darin LaHood (R-IL)

Rep. Rodney Davis (R-IL)

Federal - S 21: Pay Our Coast Guard Act. A bill making continuing appropriations for Coast Guard pay in the event of an appropriations act expired prior to the enactment of new appropriations (official title to be confirmed). [MOAA supports.](#)

Introduced January 3, 2019

Original sponsor: Sen. John Thune (R-SD); 40 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors: Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)

Federal – HR 333: Disabled Veterans Tax Termination Act. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability rated less than 50 percent to receive concurrent payment of both retired pay and veterans' disability compensation, to extend eligibility for concurrent receipt to chapter 61 disability retirees with less than 20 years of service, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports.](#)

Introduced: January 8, 2019

Original Sponsor: Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA); 36 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors: None

Federal - HR 413: Hire A Hero Act of 2019. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow the work opportunity credit to small businesses which hire individuals who are members of the Ready Reserve or National Guard, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports](#).

Introduced: January 9, 2019

Original Sponsor: Del. Stacey Plaskett (D-VI); 20 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors: Rep. Robin Kelly (D-IL2)

Federal – HR 847: Protecting Gold Star Spouses Act of 2019. A bill to provide interim appropriations for the Coast Guard Retired Serviceman's Family Protection and Survivor Benefits Plans for each fiscal year after fiscal year 2018, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports](#).

Introduced: January 29, 2019

Original Sponsor: Rep. Mark Green (R-TN); 45 Co-Sponsors

[Illinois Co-Sponsors:](#)

Rep. Bobby Rush (D-IL1)

Rep. Robin Kelly (D-IL2)

Federal – S 3393: Concurrent Receipts of Veterans' Disability. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide for concurrent receipt of veterans' disability compensation and retired pay for disability retirees with fewer than 20 years of service and a combat-related disability, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports](#)

Introduced March 4, 2020

Original sponsor: Sen. Jon Tester; 31 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors: None

Federal – S 1047: Surviving Spouse DIC Compensation. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to create a dependency and indemnity compensation allowance for surviving spouses receiving dependency and indemnity compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports](#).

Introduced: April 4, 2019

Original Sponsor: Sen. Jon Tester (D-MT); 4 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors: None

Federal – S 2216: Secretary of Veterans Affairs recognition caregivers of veterans. A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to formally recognize caregivers of veterans, notify veterans and caregivers of clinical determinations relating to eligibility for caregiver programs, and temporarily extend benefits for veterans who are determined ineligible for the family caregiver program, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports](#).

Introduced: July 23, 2019

Original Sponsor: Senator Gary Peters (D-MI); 18 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors:

Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL)

Status: Read twice and referred to: Senate Veterans' Affairs. Congressional record P.S5012.

Federal – S 2981: Amend National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002. A bill to reauthorize and amend the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports](#).

Introduced: December 4, 2019

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Introduced: December 4, 2019

Original Sponsor: Sen. Daniel Sullivan (R-AK); 2 Co-Sponsor

Illinois Co-Sponsors: None

Latest action:

December 4, 2019 – Read twice and referred to: Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee. Congressional record P.S6858

December 11, 2019 – Full committee consideration and markup held by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee

December 11, 2019 – Committee vote: En bloc bills and amendments-vote to report ordered reported favorable to the full senate (en bloc, as amended) by voice vote.

December 11, 2019 – Committee vote: En bloc bills and amendments. Vote to report ordered. Reported favorably to the full Senate (en bloc, as amended) by voice vote.

September 30, 2020 – Reported to the Senate amended by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee and placed on the Senate legislative calendar. S REPT 116-273 (in the legislative day that began on Tuesday, September 29, 2020.) Congressional record P. S5948

Federal – HR 2406: Amend National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002. A bill to reauthorize and amend the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports.](#)

Introduced: April 30, 2019

Original Sponsor: Rep. Ed Case; 11 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors: None

Latest actions:

September 18, 2019 – Committee vote: NOAA commissioned officer corps – substitute amendment Grijalva, D-AZ

Full committee consideration and markup held by the House Natural Resources Committee.

Federal – S 2629: Amend Public Health Service Act with respect to the Public Health Service Corps. A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to the Public Health Service Corps. [MOAA supports.](#)

Introduced: April October 17, 2019

Original Sponsor: Sen. Mike Rounds (R-SD); 2 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors: None

Latest action:

January 9, 2020 – Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee-Reported amendment adopted by unanimous consent. Congressional record P.S147.

January 9, 2020 – Measure, as amended, passed in the senate by voice vote. Congressional record P.S147.

January 13, 2020 – Received in the House and referred to the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Congressional record P.H184.

Our New Council Website: www.Ilcouncilmoaa.org

Website POC: Major (USAF, Ret) Dave Knieriem email: dknieriem@casscomm.com

Federal – S 2297: Appropriations for the Coast Guard. A bill to authorize appropriations for the Coast Guard, and for other purposes. [MOAA supports.](#)

Introduced: April July 25, 2019

Original Sponsor: Sen. Daniel Sullivan (R-AK); 3 Co-Sponsors

Illinois Co-Sponsors: None

Latest action:

July 31, 2019 – Committee vote: Coast Guard reauthorization-En bloc amendments

July 31, 2019 – Full committee consideration and markup held by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee.

September 26, 2019 – Reported to the senate amended and without a written report by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee and placed on the senate legislative calendar. Congressional record P.S5747.

Key Bills in the Illinois Legislature

Last month COL (USA, Ret) Michael Peck, (a member of the Illinois Council of Chapters) sent out an email stating that he and the Lake County VAC were developing a voter legislative guide on veteran issues in Illinois. They were using 10 priority legislations developed by the IDVA Advisory Council to urge voters to contact their state legislators and urge them to be co-sponsors. The 10 bills were viewed as key for veterans, but none of the 10 were voted on in the Illinois House. Especially sad was the failure of SB 110, an amendment to the disabled veterans act to provide DIC for surviving spouses. The Illinois bills that are listed below that have direct impact on our veterans and military families.

Illinois - SB 110 Surviving Spouse. Amends the Property Tax Code. Provides that, for the 2015 taxable year and thereafter, the exemption for veterans with disabilities also carries over to the surviving spouse of a veteran who was killed in the line of duty in the current taxable year or any preceding taxable year.

Provides that, for the 2019 taxable year and thereafter, the exemption for veterans with disabilities also carries over to (i) the surviving spouse of a veteran who did not obtain the exemption before death, but who would have qualified for the exemption in the current taxable year if he or she had survived and (ii) the surviving spouse of a veteran whose death was determined to be service-connected and who is certified by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as being a current recipient of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. Provides that, in the case of a surviving spouse who is certified by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs as being a current recipient of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, the property is exempt.



Illinois - SB 1255 Transfer of Veterans Education Benefits Amends the Higher Education Student Assistance Act. With regard to the Illinois Veteran grant program, provides that, beginning with the 2019-2020 academic year, a veteran may transfer his or her benefits to a qualified dependent if certain conditions are met; defines "qualified dependent". Provides that a veteran may transfer benefits to multiple qualified dependents; however, the total number of credit hours of assistance transferred may not exceed 120 credit hours, and a veteran may transfer benefits to only one qualified dependent at a time.

Illinois – SB 2293 Admission to the Veterans Homes for Retired Guard Reserve Amends the Department of Veterans' Affairs Act. Provides that a veteran is entitled to admission to an Illinois Veterans Home if he or she has served in the National Guard or Reserve Forces of the United States and completed 20 years of satisfactory service, is otherwise eligible to receive reserve or active duty retirement benefits, and has been an Illinois resident for at least one year before applying for admission for purposes of eligibility for domiciliary care or nursing home care (currently, only domiciliary care).

Illinois – HB 5422 - Tax Credit for Guard and Reserve Employers Amends the Illinois Income Tax Act. Makes changes to a credit awarded for wages paid to qualified veterans. Provides that the credit shall be: (1) \$5,000 (instead of 20% of the gross wages, but not to exceed \$5,000) for certain veterans who were unemployed at the time of hire; and (2) \$1,200 (instead of 10% of the gross wages, but not to exceed \$1,200) for other qualified veterans. Changes the definition of "qualified veteran" to include all Illinois residents who are members of the National Guard, reserve, or regular component of the Armed Forces of the United States. Allows the credit to be prorated. Provides that the credit is exempt from the Act's automatic sunset provision.

Illinois – SB 3761 - Tax Credit for Guard and Reserve Employers Amends the School Code. Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, requires a school district to provide to students enrolled in grades 10 through 12 the opportunity to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test and consult with a military recruiter during. There will not be a veto session of the Illinois legislature. The bills before Illinois and the Congress will probably be addressed next year.

MOAA is the nation's largest and most influential association of military officers. It is an independent, nonprofit, politically nonpartisan organization.

While MOAA is permitted by law to lobby—and does so actively—its status as a tax-exempt veterans organization precludes it from participating in political activities, which are defined as intervening directly or indirectly in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.

Stated briefly: the association may advocate issues, but it may not advocate the election or defeat of particular candidates or political parties. This newsletter follows the policies of MOAA National.





COL (USMC, Ret) Tyler meeting with Congressman Rodney Davis



From The Chaplain

I greet everyone in Illinois MOAA in this new year 2021 in the hope that all find it disease free and that a peaceful transition in our National Government will occur.

One resource which the US Military has provided for our moral and spiritual comfort has been The Armed Forces Hymnal. I have three editions, a small red one dated 1940, another larger but with no date and a third dated 1974.

The Preface in this last one states that it is a " repository of selected resources reflecting both traditional and contemporary communities from among the respective faith groups.

Many dedicated chaplains and civilian consultants worked under the direction of the Armed Forces Chaplain Board to produce this volume. Hymns and worship resources have been carefully selected to provide for the spiritual needs of many diverse groups within the military communities.

Designed in language and style to appeal to young adults" A more recent edition - if one exists - should also provide for those of the Muslim faith and those who simply identify themselves as " religious " .

Among my favorite hymns is " O God (or, Our God) Our Help in Ages Past "number 5 in the 1974 edition. It is attributed to Issac Watts in 1714 and is noted for its " simple strength, its transparency, its hold upon the common mind, its straightforwardness, its accents and punctuation perfection and its faithfulness to Scripture. " It is quite common to many Christian Hymnals and states quite clearly where true lasting help comes from.

I for one found it pleasurable that The Armed Forces Hymnal was found in the many chapels I visited and occasionally at some Illinois Army Guard Armories. It showed the Army's willingness to encourage public worship so that its military mission could be accomplished. Perhaps our MOAA meetings this year could begin with one or more selections from this fine resource.

Blessings for 2021

Ch (Major) Ralph Woehrmann USA RET

Illinois Council of Chapter Presidents, Chaplain



Surviving Spouse Corner: **There's a Facebook Group for That!**

By: Nancy Mullen

NOVEMBER 30, 2020

Are you wondering where to go to get information about issues affecting surviving spouses and families? Are you looking for a supportive, nonjudgmental group to assist you in learning and keeping up to date on benefits and legislation impacting our surviving families? Need a pick-me-up or to connect with others who share similar interests as you?

JOIN THE MOAA Surviving Spouses and Friends Facebook page!

Who can join? We have recently expanded our membership to include not only surviving spouses but also our families, military spouses, council and chapter surviving spouse liaisons, advocates, and others with an interest in issues that impact the survivor community, regardless of MOAA membership. Particularly in these times of COVID-19 restrictions, we all need a way to connect with others whom which we have common interests.

Is this a public or private group? This is a private group, and there are no fees or dues. You are required to answer a couple of brief questions and be approved by the administrators of the group to join. These questions are designed to ensure we provide a safe place to share information and connect with other like-minded people as well as protect the group from those who do not have a legitimate interest in our issues.

The group's rules are simple, and members may be removed at the discretion of the administrators.

Here are a few of the do's and don'ts to remember:

- Do be kind and courteous; remember the Golden Rule and treat everyone with respect.

- Don't attack someone else just because you disagree with them. We can disagree with one another but keep it respectful. Hate speech and bullying will not be tolerated and such comments will be removed.
- Do respect the privacy of the group. Comments made within this group are not to be shared outside of the group. Some of the discussions can be sensitive and private in nature, and it is important that we can trust each other. Files may also not be shared without the approval of the administrators. Posts within the page cannot be seen by the Facebook "friends" of others in the group, unless they are members of the group themselves.
- Don't post sensitive information, such as your phone number, address, social security number, or bank account information. If you need advice that requires you to share this type of information, please privately contact the administrators for assistance.
- Do remember that "tone" is sometimes difficult to determine online. Stop and think before reacting negatively as you may have misinterpreted a comment or response. Remember that many of us are grieving, so please give a little grace.
- Don't post about politics or political events. This page is apolitical and will not be used to promote any candidate or political party.
- Do feel free to contribute material to the site, provided it does not violate group rules. If you are unsure, please reach out to one of the Facebook group administrators.
- Don't sell products or advertise your business. This is also not a dating site.

If you are a member of the group, you might have noticed more activity recently and even posts that are not benefit or surviving family specific.

We intend this page to be not only an efficient way to disseminate information on benefits, proposed legislation, advocacy efforts, etcetera, but also a way for all of us to connect and uplift one another.

Feel free to share an encouraging or funny meme and pictures of your loved ones and pets and post comments supporting each other.

Our group is expanding, and we would be happy to welcome more members. We would love to get to know each of you, and look forward to your comments on our page.

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I January 2020 supersedes 17 March 2019

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Now and Always
We'll be There.



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