

# Air Force Sergeants Association



Friday, February 17, 2006

Founded at Bolling AFB, DC, on May 3, 1961.



***Protecting and defending the quality-of-life benefits of the "TOTAL AIR FORCE" Enlisted Corps and their families since 1961***

This is AFSA's electronic publication. Capitol Hill Update, bulletins, and other news items have been combined into this one e-publication. It will be available every Friday on AFSA's web site. To access the links referenced in the articles, click on them.

*CONGRESS IS FEELING HEAT FROM TRICARE PROPOSALS. HELP AFSA...*

## KEEP THE PRESSURE ON!

**TRICARE FEES:** Congressional staffers note an influx of calls and letters on the proposed TRICARE fees issue. That's good news, and we encourage everyone to keep the pressure on members of Congress. Be sure to ask all voting age family members, friends, neighbors, etc., to send letters as well. Remember we've posted a sample on the AFSA web page to assist you in preparing your written message. You can access that letter by going to: [http://www.afsahq.org/body\\_leg\\_dod.htm](http://www.afsahq.org/body_leg_dod.htm).

In addition to writing your elected representatives, you should also call them. You can contact your Members of Congress through the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.

Affected individuals might consider writing a letter on the proposed fees increase to the editor of your local newspaper. Your letter might be printed in the "Letters to the Editor" section, which is often the second-most read feature in a newspaper. It will help spread the word to other retirees who in turn may contact their elect officials as well.

We encourage you to ask to meet with your elected officials when they are working out of their local offices. In their absence, you can ask to meet with the offices' chief of staff or military legislative assistant; they will pass on your concerns.

Finally, plan to attend town hall meetings or other public venues held by, or attended by your elected officials. These meetings often provide excellent chances to discuss your concerns face-to-face with elected officials. Question-and-Answer forums afford the

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*MORE HEADLINES OF IMPORTANCE TO AIR FORCE ENLISTED MEMBERS APPEAR ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES.*

opportunity to publicly determine an official's support or opposition on an issue. We need members to take advantage of each and every opportunity to convey our message.

## AFSA TESTIFIES TO SET VA PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

**DELIVERING THE MESSAGE:** Earlier this week, AFSA Deputy Executive Director and Director of Military & Government Relations Jim Lokovic testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee on FY 2007 VA program funding priorities. Lokovic's presentation opened by noting that decisions on Veterans' funding should be based on merit, that funding for military veterans must be based on fiscal reality and prudence. However, Congress and, in turn, the VA must never make determinations simply because "the money is just not there" or because there are now "too many" veterans. Funding for veterans' programs should be viewed as a national priority—a "must pay" situation.

He noted that average public college/university tuition rates jumped 10.5 percent in the past year. As the gap between the cost of an education and value of the MGIB widens, the significance of the benefit becomes less apparent. Without an overhaul to reinvigorate the MGIB, this benefit will lose its effectiveness when it comes to recruiting and retention. He recommended that the committee work toward funding a program that pays for books, tuition, and fees, and that the benefit be annually indexed to reflect the *actual* costs of education, especially for enlisted members.

Mr. Lokovic also called on the committee to provide a second chance for those who turned down their initial opportunity to enroll in the Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP), or the MGIB. Hundreds of thousands of military members chose not to enroll in the VEAP program. Many were advised not to enroll in VEAP because a better program was coming along.

Unfortunately, when the MGIB program began, those who turned down the VEAP program were not allowed to enroll in the MGIB program, thousands more have declined enrollment in the MGIB. Most enlisted members did so because they were (and still are) given only a one-time, irrevocable enrollment opportunity at basic military training when many simply could not afford to give up \$100 per month for the first 12 months of their career. While this may not apply to all accessions, it certainly applies to enlisted members.

Without an overhaul to reinvigorate the MGIB, this benefit will lose its effectiveness when it comes to recruiting and retention.

Today in the Air Force alone, there are nearly 50,000 service members on duty who declined to enroll in VEAP or the MGIB. They have made freedom possible during their service. We believe Congress should give these patriots a second chance to get into the MGIB—goodness knows they've earned it.

Finally, Mr. Lokovic discussed several other key MGIB-related issues with the congressional panel including transferability of the benefit to family members, eliminating the benefits loss clock, and allowing military members to spend portions of their G.I. bill benefit as they see fit. Lokovic closed by noting that most of the items he mentioned would have little or no additional obligation to the American taxpayer. However, they would be a large step towards making the MGIB more flexible, user-friendly, and a sincere, equitable benefit for enlisted personnel serving this nation in the Armed Forces.

## BILL STATUS

As we previously reported, legislation not enacted last year carried over into the second session of the 109th Congress. That means AFSA can continue to build on established levels of support. Sample letters for several of these pending issues are posted in the legislative information section of the AFSA

webpage. Here is an update on legislation addressing three issues your AFSA lobbyists are pursuing:

■ **KEEP OUR PROMISE TO AMERICA'S MILITARY RETIREES ACT:** AFSA Executive Director Richard Dean met with Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-MD, this week to discuss his version of the bill. According to the congressman, support for the measure is growing slowly but steadily, and he encourages AFSA members to maintain pressure on those not supporting the bill.

This legislation would restore free, lifetime health care to military retirees that enlisted prior to December 7, 1956. Other provisions in the bill allow eligible retirees the option of enrollment in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) and reimbursement of pharmaceutical costs for drugs purchase from non-network pharmacies. The two long-standing champions on this issue are the bills' authors, Rep. Van Hollen, and Sen. Tim Johnson, D-SD. The House bill, H.R. 602, currently has 239 cosponsors, and the Senate companion bill, S. 407, has 11.

■ **CONCURRENT RECEIPT:** The principal House bill which would authorize full concurrent receipt to all longevity retirees, regardless of disability level, is H.R. 303. Rep. Mike Bilirakis, R-FL, reintroduced this bill at the start of the 109th Congress, and it currently has 216 Cosponsors. In May of last year Rep. Jim Marshall, D-GA, introduced House Res. 270, a Discharge Petition to H.R. 303. H. Res. 270 currently contains 191 signatures, and a minimum of 218 signatures is required for this effort to be successful. S. 558, the Senate companion bill to H.R. 303 was introduced by Sen. Harry Reid, D-NV. S. 558 currently has 31 cosponsors. Members may recall that Rep. Bilirakis also introduced legislation that would extend concurrent receipt to individuals who served less than 20 years and were medically retired (Chap 61). That bill, H.R. 2076, currently has 24 cosponsors, and a Senate companion bill, S. 845, introduced by Sen. Reid has just one cosponsor.

■ **MGIB OPEN ENROLLMENT OPPORTUNITY:** AFSA continues to lead the effort on the Hill to try to get a Montgomery G.I. Bill (MGIB) enrollment opportunity for those who declined enrollment in the old Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP). Hundreds of thousands of service members declined enrollment because it was such a poorly counseled, relatively inadequate, two-for-one, matching program. H.R. 269, sponsored by Rep. Dave Camp, R-MI, and its companion bill, S. 2091, by Sen. Tim Johnson, D-SD, would give those who entered service before July 1, 1985, who are still serving (without a break in service), an opportunity to enroll in the MGIB. As of press time, H.R. 269 had 30 cosponsors and S. 2091 none. A third bill, H.R. 3195, sponsored by Rep. Peter Visclosky, D-IN, would allow all active duty personnel to withdraw their election not to participate in transitional educational programs (VEAP/MGIB) and directs DoD to establish an annual open enrollment opportunity during the month of October thereafter. H.R. 3195 has garnered more support than H.R. 269 and currently has 59 cosponsors.

## OTHER NEWS AND UPDATES

### **"SPECKLED TROUT" ENDS:**

The Air Force recently bid farewell to this unique plane which transported every Air Force chief of staff since General David C. Jones (July 1974 to June 1978). Read the complete story at:

<http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123016232>.

### **FIRST PIECE OF AIR FORCE MEMORIAL PLACED:**

(Air Force Print News Article)

Construction crews have raised the first piece of the Air Force Memorial on the site overlooking Arlington National Cemetery.

The 40-foot long piece of stainless steel, which weighs more



*Construction on Air Force Memorial begins.*

than 20,000 tons, is the first of 15 pieces to be placed. When completed, the memorial will be 270 feet tall. The memorial is scheduled to open October 13, 2006.

"The design is a take-off on the Air Force (jet aircraft) doing the bomb burst maneuver . . . also, that graceful arc of a missile launch and there are three spires," said retired Maj. Gen. Ed Grillo, Air Force Memorial Foundation president. The three upward spires represent the Air Force's core values -- integrity, service before self and excellence in all we do. "We thought that was very emblematic of representing today's Air Force," he said.

The memorial will also include a bronze honor guard, inscription walls, and a glass "chamber of contemplation" to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

"There have been a total, including Air Force predecessor organizations, of over 54,000 people that have been killed in action. We need a tribute, and it's long overdue to the United States Air Force," General Grillo said.

To find out more about the memorial, visit the Web site at [www.airforcememorial.org/](http://www.airforcememorial.org/).

#### **UNIFORM FORMULARY:**

Public Law 106-65 required DoD to establish a uniform formulary for its prescription benefit. The TRICARE Uniform Formulary (UF) is a set of medications approved by the Department of Defense for distribution throughout the Military Health System. Drugs are grouped into three tiers: formulary generic (tier one), formulary brand name (tier two) and non-formulary (tier three). Beneficiaries' copayments are based on a medication's grouping within the uniform formulary. Over the past few months, DoD has been scrutinizing what type of drugs will remain in the uniform formulary. Dr. William Winkewerder Jr., Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs and Director, TRICARE Management Activity, made the decision to place additional medications on the TRICARE Uniform Formulary and to designate others as nonformulary (or third tier) on January 19, 2006. The process determining which drugs will remain on the uniform formulary will continue on a recurring basis for many years to come. In the meantime you can go to <http://tricare.osd.mil/news/news.aspx?fid=11> to view a complete list of the drugs that have already undergone this process and their status.

Just as a reminder, TRICARE beneficiaries must pay \$22 for up to a 30- or 90-day supply for non-formulary medications, depending on whether they fill the prescription at a TRICARE Retail Network Pharmacy (TRRx) or through the TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy (TMOP). Beneficiaries are required to pay the higher of \$22 or 20 percent of the cost of the prescription at non-network retail pharmacies.

Patients currently using any of the newly designated non-formulary medications should consult with their doctor about formulary alternatives or if a medical necessity is appropriate for them. If medical necessity is established for using a non-formulary medication, patients may qualify for the \$9 copayment for up to a 30-day TRRx supply or up to a 90-day TMOP supply. Military treatment facilities (MTF) will no longer carry these or other non-formulary medications on their local formularies. Non-formulary medications may be available at MTFs only when medical necessity is established and the prescription was written by a MTF provider. Active duty members have no copays and, unless medical necessity is established, they may not obtain non-formulary drugs. Medical necessity forms and procedures for completing and submitting medical necessity information are available on the TRICARE Pharmacy Web site at [www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy/medical-nonformulary.cfm](http://www.tricare.osd.mil/pharmacy/medical-nonformulary.cfm).

## **Enlisted Quote For the Week**

*"I love my job as a crew chief in the USAF, because it challenges me and allows me to experience something different each day. I am also able to teach others around me when I have learned something new." A1C Noah W. Stratton, 55 AMXS/45<sup>th</sup> AMU, Offutt AFB, NE*

# **AFSA MEMBER BENEFITS and SERVICE PROVIDERS**

If you've logged on to AFSA's Web site [www.afsahq.org](http://www.afsahq.org), you may notice some very familiar logos like Office Depot, Barnes & Noble, Earthlink, and ADT Home Security on our home page.

Each retailer above offers some type of discount, while helping your AFSA at the same time. When you click on the icon for one of the above retailers, not only do you get their latest, on line discount offers, but a percentage of sales made through this link come back to your AFSA! **Any discounts on your purchases, or commissions earned by AFSA through your purchases, are only accomplished through the links on our home page ([www.afsahq.org](http://www.afsahq.org)).** They are not redeemable in stores.

Also, **AFSA recently reached agreement for a cellular phone service with Verizon Wireless.** A web page will be completed soon and AFSA members will be able to obtain Verizon Wireless service through the AFSA Web site.

So, the next time you are looking for discount offers, remember to log on to AFSA's Web site and support the organization that supports you!

## **DON'T LET THE NAME FOOL YOU**

Confused about who is eligible for membership in the Air Force Sergeants Association? Can only sergeants join AFSA? Don't let the name fool you. We're about ALL ENLISTED- Air Force Active Duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve Command, active, retired, veteran and their families. We even have officers who are proud AFSA members because they know what AFSA does and want to have their voices counted.

You see, in the 1960s, four sergeants founded AFSA as a voice for Air Force folks. Naturally that had to grow to become the voice for ALL ENLISTED GRADES. Our registered lobbyists are on Capitol Hill daily and their efforts benefit all enlisted people. Heck, it even benefits officers who gain from pay and entitlement victories when enlisted folks do.

AFSA is about service. Did you know that "to serve" is actually in our name? That's right, the word "sergeant" translates from Latin for "to serve." That's what the enlisted corps is all about—service to our country and service to one another. The duty of sergeants is to train, mentor and be there for the entire enlisted corps, our Air Force and our country. And, the sergeants job is to take care of the enlisted personnel in their charge. AFSA is there for the same reasons and you.

**HOW MANY OTHER ORGANIZATIONS DO YOU KNOW THAT HAS "TO SERVE" IN THEIR NAME? ONLY YOUR AIR FORCE SERGEANTS ASSOCIATION.**

## **AFSA: YOUR ENLISTED VOICE**

AFSA works to gain and protect the quality of life benefits of the *Total Air Force* (Active Duty, Air National Guard, Air Force Reserve Command) enlisted personnel in active, retired, and veteran status and their families. AFSA does this through visits to congressional leaders, visits with Presidential staff members, visits with DoD personnel, and others who may have an influence upon the decisions that could affect the enlisted Airmen.

AFSA was founded on May 3, 1961, as a private, not-for-profit organization in Washington D.C. It was founded by four enlisted personnel, for enlisted personnel. It was federally chartered in 1998. Since its founding, AFSA has had one mission—to protect the enlisted Airmen's quality of life. It has never wavered from that mission. It is the only association with the word "SERGEANTS" in its title because the word sergeant means "to serve," and that is what AFSA does for its members.

If you are not a member, go to our Web site at [www.afsahq.org](http://www.afsahq.org) or call 1-800-638-0594. ext 0 and ask to speak to someone in Member and Field Relations. If you are a member, we greatly appreciate your professionalism in supporting your Association and would appreciate you helping to build your voice by recruiting a new member today!