



Jayhawk Chapter MOAA Newsletter



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January Program:

LTG Rich Keller, President of the Kansas Council of Chapters will be our guest speaker.



2006

**CHAPTER
Awarded 2007**

As I see it...



As announced and approved by the members at the November meeting our Jayhawk Chapter Officers for 2008 are: President – Bernie Kish; 1st Vice President – Dave Darwin; 2nd Vice President – John Priddle; Treasurer – Jim Cooper; and Secretary – John Halladay. Serving with these officers as Directors on the Board will be: Jim McMurray, Erv Hodges, Tom Arnold, Charles Heller, John Mosher and me.

I wish our new President, Bernie Kish, and his officers all the best in the upcoming year. Bernie has done a terrific job with programs this past year and I'm confident that the future will be equally successful.

It has been a pleasure being your President in 2007 and your Vice President the year before. I was blessed with a great team of officers and Board members. I know it's always risky separating individuals out for special thanks but I must. Of important note is the long standing service and selflessness of John and Shirley Halladay. I don't know what we'd do without the Halladays. Thank you both. Also, both Jim Cooper and John Priddle graciously volunteered to continue in their current roles as Officers for this next year. Our Chapter is well served by Jim's and John's experience and we are all grateful for their service. Thanks guys.

This past year has been most rewarding for me personally. I can't tell you how much I've appreciated all your support. As I see it, we have been moderately successful in recruiting new members. We need to push even harder in that regard in the years ahead. We have made marvelous progress in solidifying and institutionalizing our Clay Comfort Award. We wouldn't have achieved that without Erv Hodges. Thanks Erv. By the way, we'll have to see if we can find a permanent source of "Jarhead Red" for your wine cellar. The Comfort Award is now on a strong footing and it's up to each and every one of us to develop it further. We can do it and I know we will.

I will see you at our next meeting on Tuesday, January 22. Our guest speaker that evening will be retired Lieutenant General Richard Keller, USA, who is the current President of the Kansas Council of MOAA Chapters. Rich will also install our 2008 Officers and Board. Thanks again for allowing me to serve this past year.

Mike Sullivan

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1 January 2008

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*** Reservations should be sent
to Jim Cooper by
15 January.**



JAYHAWK CHAPTER NEWS

Taps

Capt. Wilmont C. "Bill" Grodi:

Funeral services for Wilmont C. "Bill" Grodi were held December 6th at Lawrence Wesleyan Church. Military honors, following the funeral, were provided by the American Legion Dorsey Liberty Post No. 14. Interment will be in Denver. Bill passed away November 28th at Lawrence Memorial Hospital.

Bill was born August 27, 1918, in Toledo, Ohio. He attended the University of Toledo. Bill served with the 8th U.S. Army Air Corp's 385th Bomb Group, where he piloted B-17 bombers during World War II. He earned the

Distinguished Flying Cross as well as other medals and campaign ribbons.

After his military service, Bill was a commercial loan officer at Security Pacific Bank. He later presided over his own commercial and residential appraisal business.

He married Barbara McCandless on August 7, 1946, in Denver. She survives plus a daughter, Cheryl Woolsey and husband Tom of Lawrence, and two grandchildren.

LTC Leonard J. "Len" Zeller:

Leonard J. "Len" Zeller passed away August 25, 2007, at his home. He was born January 10, 1929, in Clear Creek, MO. He graduated from the University of Maryland and worked as a real estate agent in Maryland before moving to Lawrence in 1976 to start a battery business, which later expanded to Topeka, Kansas City and Emporia.

He was a veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars.

A Mass of Christian burial was held at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church on August 28th and graveside

services with military honors followed at Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery.

Len married Kathryn Sams on February 14, 1951, in Ft. Myer, VA. She survives plus a daughter, Robin Shade and husband Steve, Eudora; two sons, Randel and wife Deborah, Clifton, VA and Ronald and wife Rebecca, Lawrence; seven grandchildren; a brother, Vernon, Booneville, MO and a sister, Dee Birch, Tucson, AZ.

Mary Frances Wray:

Mary Frances Wray, wife of Harold Wray, passed away December 17, 2007, at Brandon Woods. She was born June 23, 1921, in Sedalia, MO, and graduated from Booneville High School in Booneville, MO.

Harold and Mary were married July 14, 1950, in Lawrence.

In addition to her husband, she is survived by a daughter, Barbara Dickerson and husband Richard, Overland Park; two sons, Mike and wife Kathy, Temecula, CA and Mark and wife Patty, Lisle, IL; and four grandchildren.

Private family services will be held at a later date.

Chapter Dues

Don't forget that **Chapter dues** (\$20.00) are payable in **January**. The earlier we get them in, the fewer reminders need to go out and the faster we can get busy on the 2008 Chapter Directory.

John Hadl and KU Army ROTC Cadre and Cadets Highlight November Meeting

Former KU All-American football player, John Hadl, was the featured speaker for the Jayhawk Chapter's November meeting. Hadl, one of the few players in college football history, to be named All-America at two different positions, reviewed KU's history making 2007 football season.

Hadl praised Coach Mark Mangino as an outstanding recruiter with the unique ability to uncover hidden gems such as quarterback Todd Reising and cornerback Aquib Talib. Hadl commented that these two players are representative of young Jayhawks on both sides of the ball who have been overlooked by the nation's top programs. Mangino and his coaching staff have developed these players into a cohesive high-morale squad that is prepared to outperform opponents week after week. The result this past year was a sterling 11-1 record.

Hadl also noted the commitment to excellence in football by Athletics Director Lew Perkins. The coaching staff is among the highest paid in the Big 12 Conference and a new \$30 Million Football Facility will debut in the Summer of 2008.

The popular Lawrence native, who had an outstanding professional football career, most notably with the San Diego Chargers and Los Angeles Rams, concluded by noting that "Mangino is building a solid program that will be competitive for many years to come." Hadl, a Captain in the US Air Force Reserve, then answered several questions from the audience.

The additional highlight of the November meeting was the presence of cadre and cadets of KU' Army ROTC Program. The Army ROTC Color Guard posted the colors to begin the evening's program. LTC John Basso, the Professor of Military Science, introduced his people and talked about the many noteworthy achievements of the young patriots of the Jayhawk Battalion. Basso stated that a major initiative for the next few years is a step up in recruitment, particularly of outstanding minority students. And, he asked for help in that regard from members of the Jayhawk MOAA Chapter. Finally, Basso expressed his sincere appreciation to the Chapter for the wonderful support provided by MOAA to the active duty personnel in all branches of the military.

Our Salvation Army Bell Ringers



Bernie Kish



Buck Newsom & John Mosher



Darlene & Don Sheriff



Shirley & John Halladay



Navy News **CAPT Thomas Arnold, USN**



Happy Holidays from the Jayhawk Navy!

This has been another outstanding semester for the KU Naval ROTC Battalion. On December 15th we commissioned five new officers – three Ensigns and two Second Lieutenants. They are:

- ENS Sean McIntosh, a Special Warfare Officer who departs for training in San Diego
- ENS Kathryn Barger, a Nurse Corps Officer whose first tour will be in Portsmouth, VA
- ENS Christopher Jeffries, a future Submarine Officer who will depart for nuclear power training in Charleston in late January
- 2nd LT Heather Redenius, who will be attending The Basic School (TBS) at Quantico in April
- 2nd LT Sean Regehr, a PLC program graduate, who will also attend TBS early in 2008

Please join me in wishing them the best of luck as they begin their careers as officers in the Navy and Marine Corps!

We have one member of the active duty staff leaving us early in 2008. LT Mike Beaty and his wife Erin will depart in February as Mike heads off to Newport, RI to attend Surface Warfare Department Head School before going back to sea duty as the Combat Systems Officer in a frigate in Mayport. Mike has had a great tour as a Naval Science Instructor here at KU and both he and Erin will be missed!

Mike's replacement is LT Christa Mann, a Surface Warfare Officer coming to us from Norfolk, VA where she has been serving aboard the USS CARL VINSON. Christa is originally from Colorado and is glad to be close to home again. Please join me in welcoming her to the staff.

One of our other Naval Science Instructors, LT Laura Jeffries, was recently selected for lateral transfer to the Information Warfare Community (formerly the Cryptologic Community). Please join me in congratulating her as she embarks on a new direction in her Naval career! Laura will be leaving us in mid-2008 to begin the transition to her new community.

As a reminder, we are still seeking members of the KU NROTC Alumni Association. If you haven't joined already and are interested in becoming a member, please contact LT Jeffries at 785-864-1187.

In closing, I want wish you all a happy and safe holiday season and also extend my heartfelt thanks to the MOAA Jayhawk Chapter membership for your support to the KU NROTC Unit over the past year!!

CAPT Tom Arnold



Air Force News

LtCol Sandra Leiker, USAF

Happy Holidays, Jayhawk MOAA!

This semester (my 5th here at wonderful KU) felt like the usual whirlwind as it wound down. It really was a good one – we had a super cadet wing staff, composed of six senior cadets, who did an absolutely terrific job of planning and executing each week's Leadership Laboratory, all of the weekly workout sessions and special events such as the Veterans Day Retreat Ceremony and Vigil, Field Leadership Exercise (FLX), and Joint Service Military Ball, as well as a number of extracurricular and community service activities. I'd like to recognize one cadet especially – C/Garrett Kohl, who served as C/Wing Commander all term and who was ultimately responsible for the term's success.

While I am "dropping" names, now might be the appropriate time to mention the incredible contributions of two of my staff members whom we bid farewell to this month – SSgt Crystal Cronley (our personnelist) and Maj (Sel) Dan Hatchel (our unit admissions officer). Crystal is on terminal leave until early January, when she separates from active duty – the front office will seem very quiet without her infectious laugh. Her replacement is inbound from Shaw AFB in South Carolina, but is not due in until March. Capt Hatchel is deploying (365-TDY to Afghanistan) – these are the second orders he's had to do so (the first tasking was cancelled back in August) so a number of you may be saying your second set of "goodbyes" to him within the span of sixth months. This time he trains at Ft Riley from Jan - Mar before heading overseas. His laugh is not quite as

infectious as Crystal's – but he has held the fort down here at AFROTC for almost four years now and the staff and students will miss him greatly. His replacement is due in this summer.

Finally, to really end our semester, our December Commissioning ceremony was held on 15 Dec. Again, our friends at the Dole Institute of Politics, on West Campus, welcomed us in their beautiful facility for this special occasion. Jaxon Lee, Laurel Sheridan, and William (Kyle) Wamser became 2nd lieutenants in the company of many family members and friends. 2Lt Lee, an Air Battle Manager, will be heading soon to Keesler AFB Mississippi for training. 2Lt Sheridan, a Combat Systems Officer (or CSO, formerly the AF Navigator specialty) will be heading soon to Randolph AFB Texas for her training. 2Lt Wamser, who was recognized as a distinguished ROTC graduate, will be staying in the Lawrence area for one more semester to work on his geography master's degree at KU before heading to pilot training at Vance AFB Oklahoma. We wish all of them the best!

Well, that's it for this year, MOAA – but the spring semester is going to be exciting – so keep your eyes/ears open. Wishing all of you the best. Thanks so much for your continued support and we'll see you in 2008!

Lt Col Sandra S. Leiker

MOAA LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

MOAA's LEGISLATIVE UPDATE for November 9, 2007:

VA, Defense Funding On the Way

The House and Senate voted this week to adopt legislation that will fund defense operations for FY2008 and also renew a "continuing resolution" that will keep the rest of the government running at last year's spending levels, pending enactment of FY2008 appropriations bills for other federal departments.

The new defense spending bill provides the Pentagon \$459 billion - about 10% more than last year's funding but \$3.5 billion less than the Administration requested. It also includes \$11.6 billion to send more mine-resistant vehicles to ground troops in Iraq.

MOAA's LEGISLATIVE UPDATE for November 16, 2007:

Meet MOAA's New Lobbyist

We're pleased to announce that Mrs. Joy Dunlap assumed duties this week as MOAA's Deputy Director for

Military Family Issues. Joy has a degree in journalism and has had a varied 25-year career in journalism and marketing, including service as a Vice President of the National Association of Broadcasters.

Mrs. Dunlap has been serving on MOAA's Military Spouse Advisory Committee, where she demonstrated expertise on military family issues. Joy is also the creator and coordinator of an independent electronic newsletter with hundreds of military spouse subscribers.

Joy is a 24-year Air Force spouse, and her husband currently serves on active duty at the Pentagon. We're most pleased to welcome Joy Dunlap to the Government Relations team.

Vet COLA and Suicide Prevention Measures Signed.

The President has signed into law (P.L. 110-111) the annual COLA adjustment for certain veterans benefits. The 2.3% hike is the same as the annual Social Security rate and military retired pay. The COLA applies to VA disability compensation payments, survivors' dependency and

indemnity compensation (DIC), and a clothing allowance for certain veterans'.

The change becomes effective on December 1 and will be reflected in checks mailed in early January 2008. One example, the new basic monthly DIC rate for survivors of veterans who died of service-related causes after January 1, 1993 will increase to approximately \$1,091 from \$1,067.

Glass Half Full

It's important to distinguish between the Defense Appropriations Bill and the Defense Authorization Bill. Congress considers both bills at about the same time, and that's a source of confusion every year. Even more so this year, since Congress has completed the Defense Appropriation, but not the Defense Authorization.

The authorization bill includes the law changes needed to authorize troop levels, weapons procurement, new programs, and changes in pay and benefits (including pay raises, health coverage, concurrent receipt and survivor benefits). Final provisions of the authorization bill are currently being negotiated by leaders of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, but the final bill won't be ready for congressional passage until some time after Thanksgiving.

Hill sources say that the bill is ready to go except for contentious debate over a hate crimes provision. The appropriations bill, on the other hand, provides the funding to pay for the things that are approved in the authorization bill. It was signed into law this week PL 110-116. Key items include:

- * \$459 billion for the Department of Defense, \$39.7 billion above 2007, a 9.5% increase.
- * Defense Health Programs. \$23.5 billion, \$918 million above the President's budget request. Cancels proposed increases in TRICARE co-pays by fully funding the \$1.9 billion TRICARE shortfall without cost to our troops.
- * Adds \$70 million to fund programs authorized under the Dignified Treatment of Wounded Warrior Act.
- * Military Pay and End strength: Fully funds a 3.5 percent pay increase for all service members, 0.5 percent above the President's request. Adds funds to increase the Army by 7000 troops, the USMC by 5,000 and the Army National Guard by 1,300.
- * National Guard: Adds \$980 million to help National Guard and Reserve forces better equip themselves in light of the severe shortages these components faced as a result of overseas deployments.
- * Military Families: Includes \$2.6 billion for military family counselors, teachers, and child care providers.
- * Body Armor: increases funding for body armor and other protective equipment for Special Operations Command.

Compensation and Pay Questions Answered

Col Mike Hayden USAF (Ret) spent an hour answering live and previously e-mailed questions from members about our legislative issues on Wednesday Nov. 28, from 11 - 12 (EST). Col Hayden is MOAA's legislative expert in pay and compensation issues for both retirees and the active force.

During Mike's first chat in February we received an overwhelming response. Below is an excerpt from that chat. Email your questions to legischat@moaa.org and don't forget to join us on the 28th.

James B.: It is my understanding that my widow will be docked for my disability pay so that she will not be able to draw my full SBP. Why is this? Can you explain it to me?

Mike H.: James, if you predecease your spouse she will not receive ANY of your disability pay; she's technically not entitled to your disability pay. She may, however, be entitled to DIC. If your spouse is entitled to DIC from the VA, DIC would offset her SBP amount.

We are hoping that Senate and House conferees to the defense authorization bill will make some progress this year on this MOAA priority

MOAA's LEGISLATIVE UPDATE for December 7, 2007:

Hill OKs Concurrent Receipt, SBP, Reserve Retired Pay Upgrades

On Dec. 6, House and Senate leaders agreed to drop the last contentious item from the FY2008 Defense Authorization Act - a Senate-proposed provision that would have stiffened penalties for discrimination against homosexuals.

Yesterday's agreement clears the way for what is expected to be rapid passage and presidential signature of the Act, which includes a substantial number of improvements for virtually all segments of the military community. Key provisions include:

- * Concurrent Receipt: Authorizes full, immediate concurrent receipt for disabled retirees with at least 20 years of service deemed "unemployable" by the VA, with payment retroactive to Jan. 1, 2005. Payments will begin October 1, 2008. Another provision extends eligibility for Combat-Related Special Compensation to all military disability (chapter 61) retirees with less than 20 years of service who suffer from combat- or operations-caused conditions.
- * TRICARE Fees: Prohibits increases in TRICARE fees, including pharmacy copays, for FY2008.
- * Military Pay Raise: Authorizes a 3.5% raise in January 2008 for active duty, Guard and Reserve personnel.
- * Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP): Authorizes a special payment of \$50 per month to survivors of members entitled to retired pay (or of Guard/Reserve retirees who died before age 60) whose SBP annuities are reduced by VA survivor benefits, effective Oct. 1, 2008. That amount will increase by \$10 each year for 5 years. Another provision adopted was a MOAA recommendation to direct the Defense Accounting and Finance Center to implement simplified and more sympathetic recoupment processes to assist affected survivors. Unfortunately, the bill does not include a provision to accelerate SBP paid-up status from Oct. 1, 2008 to Oct. 1, 2007.
- * Guard/Reserve Retirement: Reduces the retirement age by 3 months for each cumulative 90 days spent on active duty since Oct. 7, 2001. Increases the maximum annual drill points creditable for retirement (from 90 to 130), effective for 2007.
- * Guard/Reserve GI Bill: Authorizes Selected Reserve members 10 years after separation to use GI Bill benefits earned from active duty service. Selected Reserve members who spend at least 3 years on active duty can earn up to 80% of the active duty GI Bill benefit.

- * Wounded Warrior Care: Requires comprehensive plan for care, management and transition of wounded servicemembers by July 1, 2008. Requires recovery, medical and non-medical care case managers for recuperating servicemembers and establishes maximum caseloads for each.
- * Wounded Warrior Family Support: Authorizes medical care, training, and job placement service for family members of recovering servicemembers and authorizes respite care for primary caregivers of servicemembers with a serious injury or illness. Authorizes leave (from civilian employers) for family members of injured personnel.
- * DoD/VA Electronic Records: Implements a fully interoperable electronic DoD/VA health record and a joint interagency office to serve as a single authority for the development and administration of the system. Requires the development of a process to send electronic records necessary to support eligibility for VA benefits, including the DD Form 214, from DoD to VA.
- * Deployment of Single Parents and Dual Military Couples: Requires procedures to ensure parents with minor dependents have adequate plans for family care upon deployment. Authorizes request for deployment deferment in certain circumstances.
- * Military Family Readiness Council: Establishes council of servicemembers, spouses, and representatives of military family organizations to make recommendations for DoD policy on military family readiness and to evaluate programs and services that prepare and support military families.
- * Follow-On TRICARE Eligibility: Authorizes active-duty-level TRICARE coverage for members separated or retired from the armed forces for a serious injury or illness when care is not reasonably available in the VA. Expires Dec. 31, 2012.
- * Disability Retirement: Requires by July 1, 2008 a standardized process for medical and physical disability evaluations that takes into account timely decisions, uniformity between services, and provides servicemembers with advice and counsel. Requires DoD to include all conditions that render a member unfit for duty in determining disability ratings for military disability retirement purposes. Requires three pilot programs: use of the disability rating assigned by the VA, use of joint DoD/VA rating system, and use of a single DoD website for accessing DoD disability evaluation information.
- * Wounded Warrior Separations Review: Requires review of all disability separation cases between Sept. 11, 2001 and Dec. 31, 2009 in which a rating of 20% or below was assigned. Review is to be conducted upon request of member or next of kin or under the board's own initiative.
- * Disability Severance Pay: Eliminates offset of disability severance pay by VA disability compensation. Increases minimum disability severance pay to 12 months of basic pay and maximum to 38 months of basic pay. Applies to separation pay for injuries incurred in combat.
- * VA Health Care: Authorizes 5 years (versus 2) of automatic VA health care eligibility for members who serve in a combat theater.
- * Guard/Reserve TRICARE Coverage: Restores eligibility for Selected Reserve members and families whose coverage previously earned by active service since Oct 7, 2001 had expired.
- * Child Custody: Bars courts from vacating child custody agreements because of the deployment of a military member.
- * Reserve Drill Expenses: Authorizes reimbursement of up to \$300 in drill-related travel expenses for certain members, effective upon the date the president signs the legislation into law.
- * World War II POW Payments: Authorizes retroactive payment of inflation-adjusted promotion pay amounts for Navy and Marine Corps POWs of World War II (equalizes with past treatment of POWs of other services).
- * Honoring the Flag: Expressly authorizes veterans the option of saluting the US Flag (vs. putting the hand over the heart).

VA Legislation Held Hostage

Two bills to improve VA care for wounded warriors appear to have been shelved for the year due to "holds" placed on them by former Ranking Member Senator Craig of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC).

S. 1233, an omnibus veterans' health measure, would direct the VA to develop individualized plans for the treatment and rehabilitation of veterans with traumatic brain injury (TBI), among many other things. S.1315, the Veterans Benefits Enhancement Act, would authorize additional wounded warrior benefits including a new term life insurance program for disabled veterans. The sticking point is that the bill also would increase disability benefits for World War II Filipino veterans, including non-citizens living outside the US, in part by barring recent court-directed expansion of VA compensation to certain additional categories of disabled US veterans.

SVAC Chairman Daniel Akaka (D-HI) says Congress never intended the expansion directed by the court. His legislation would block the court-directed expansion and use those savings to pay for other upgrades in the bill for US veterans, as well as the Filipino benefits expansion.

Sen. Craig has blocked action on the bill because he opposes funding expanded benefits for Filipino veterans by barring the court-directed expanded benefits. Under Senate rules, any Senator may place a "hold" on a bill to prevent a floor vote. Senator Richard Burr (R-NC), the SVAC's new Ranking Member said this week, "Having talked to at least those that I know have holds on [the bills], nobody has a position where they would entertain lifting the holds by the end of the year." That leaves wounded warriors caught in the middle.

S. 1315, contains \$633 million in benefit upgrades for Afghanistan and Iraq conflict veterans. But the bill also would provide \$332 million for Filipino veterans. Some of its other provisions would:

- * Create a new term life insurance program for disabled veterans (\$326 million)
- * Allow retroactive coverage (to Oct 7, 2001) of traumatic injury insurance (TSGLI) payments to severely disabled veterans (\$47 million)

- * Upgrade veterans mortgage life insurance (\$51 million)
- * Increase job training benefits (\$31 million)
- * Improve adaptive housing and automobile equipment benefits for severely wounded warriors (\$22 million)
- * Increase Supplemental Disabled Veterans Insurance (\$26 million)
- * Authorize COLAs for surviving spouse dependent benefits (\$9 million)

Something's wrong when wounded warriors and other veterans are held hostage to procedural maneuvers. MOAA recognizes and honors the service of Filipino veterans, but there are legitimate concerns about relative priority accorded to funding US vs. Filipino benefits. This impasse could be resolved by removing the Filipino benefits provisions from S.1315 and taking them up separately. In particular, Senate leaders ought to be able to find a way to lift the hold on the TBI bill so the VA can upgrade assistance to wounded members suffering the "signature injury" of the current war.

MOAA's LEGISLATIVE UPDATE for December 14, 2007:

Hill Struggling to Address Wounded, Family Needs

On December 12, the House Committee on Veterans Affairs held a hearing on military and veteran suicide rates in the wake of a CBS report that veterans are twice as likely to commit suicide as non-veterans, with recent war veterans in their early 20s at even greater risk.

Parents of a National Guard soldier told the Committee of their son's struggle with PTSD and a seemingly insensitive veterans' system before taking his life on Thanksgiving Day in 2005. A series of mental health professionals, researchers, families, veterans groups, and legislators urged more open discussion and destigmatization of mental health issues. They urged recognizing PTSD as an injury, as we do visible combat wounds, rather than as a "disease" or "disorder". Troops and their families must have confidence that seeking care for this injury won't hurt their careers.

Families and the Committee expressed dismay that the reaction of VA officials has seemed more focused on critiquing CBS' findings rather than viewing them as a wake-up call. Chairman Filner (D-CA) closed the hearing upset with what he called the VA's "analysis paralysis" and vowed to take up these issues early next year when the new VA Secretary, former Army Surgeon General James Peake, is on board.

The same day, the House Veterans Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigation took up the issue of outpatient waiting times in the VA, expressing frustration that no solution seems imminent to control wait times and improve access.

Subcommittee members expressed frustration with the lack of a common VA definition of 'waiting time' or scheduling process, noting that the new scheduling system scheduled to roll out in 2011 will have taken ten years to build. One member expressed frustration that some veterans' organizations are adamantly opposed to contracting health care outside the VA system, saying "If you can't get timely care in the VA, you're not getting good care."

New provisions in the FY2008 Defense Authorization Act offer a start on some improvements for veterans and families struggling with the visible and not so visible wounds of war. MOAA remains committed to pursuing the full support and care they deserve.

More Defense Bill Provisions

This week, the House passed the final version of the FY2008 Defense Authorization Act by a vote of 370 to 49. The Senate is expected to follow suit imminently, and every indication is that the President will sign it into law.

Last week's update highlighted some of the key fixes in this huge piece of legislation that's the primary vehicle every year for manpower, compensation and benefit changes.

Unfortunately, last week's update included one important error. In scrambling to run through the 1,000 page bill Friday morning before putting out the update, we misread the provision that reduced the Reserve retirement age by 3 months for each cumulative 90 days ordered to active duty during war, emergency or certain other circumstances. We initially thought it was the Senate-approved language, which would have allowed credit for such active service retroactive to October 7, 2001.

Upon rereading the provision, we were extremely disappointed to realize that the final legislation only allows credit for active service performed after the new language is signed into law - which will happen sometime in the next few weeks. MOAA thinks that's extremely unfair to the thousands of Guard and Reserve members who have sacrificed for one or more tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we will work hard next year to win retroactive credit for that service.

Additional provisions of interest in the new legislation include:

- * End Strength: Authorizes Army and Marine Corps increase of 13,000 and 9,000, respectively.
- * Army Referral Bonus: Authorizes the Army to pay up to \$2,000 to active and retired Army personnel (including civilian employees) for referral of an individual who completes Army basic training.
- * Thrift Savings Plan: Includes a MOAA recommendation to authorize the Department of Defense to make mid-month contributions to Thrift Savings accounts (previously, contributions were made once per month even though deductions from pay were made twice per month, so participants haven't been able to maximize returns on their investments).
- * Income Replacement for Reservists: Extends income replacement pay to reservists who are retained on active duty for medical care or disability if otherwise eligible.
- * Space-A-Travel: Allows Space-A-travel for retired members and dependents living in U.S. possessions for specialized medical care not available at their location.
- * TRICARE Pharmacy: Requires drug manufacturers to provide the Defense Department the same discounts on drugs sold to military patients through retail pharmacies that it provides through military and VA installations and TRICARE's mail order pharmacy.

MOAA's LEGISLATIVE UPDATE for December 21, 2007:

20-Yard Punt on Medicare/TRICARE Fees

All year long, members of Congress have known they'd have to do something by the end of the year to stop the 9.9% cut in Medicare and TRICARE payments to doctors scheduled to happen in January 2008 if Congress didn't change the law.

But they also knew that coming up with the money to pay for that fix was going to be a problem. They thought they might

cut payments to insurance companies that run Medicare HMOs and several other kinds of providers that some contend are over-reimbursed. But those potential groups all have their own lobbyists fighting to keep their ox from being gored.

By waiting until right before Christmas to approve a payment fix, Hill leaders thought that legislators anxious to get home for the holidays might be pressured into accepting a deal to stop the cuts for at least another year. But that strategy didn't work out very well.

In football terms, the best Congress could do before adjourning for the year amounted to a 20-yard punt out of bounds.

Instead of a 9.9% payment cut in January, Medicare and TRICARE doctors will see a 1% increase - for 6 months.

But if Congress doesn't find the money to extend the fix during the first half of next year (which won't be any easier in an election year than it was in 2007), an 11% payment cut will kick in on July 1.

Kicking this political football out of bounds may not technically be a foul. But it's a huge potential penalty for military and Medicare beneficiaries who could find their doctors turning them away if Congress keeps flirting with these big payment cuts.

Task Force: Military Benefits "Unfair to Taxpayers"

The DoD Task Force on the Future of Military Health Care released its final report on December 20, and the results were pretty much as expected.

The report said the relatively low health fees paid by military retirees vs. the growing cost of military health benefits are "out of step with overall trends in the U.S. health care system" and "unfair to the U.S. taxpayer."

The task force, co-chaired by Gen. John D.W. Corley, USAF, Commander of Air Combat Command, and economist Dr. Gail Wilensky, recommended retiree fee increases that were patterned generally after those recommended by the Department of Defense for the past two years.

Under the task force's plan, fees would be stratified in three tiers, based on the amount of the member's military retired pay. Most retired officers with families covered under TRICARE Prime would pay an annual enrollment fee of \$780 for 2008, with the fee rising steeply to \$1,800 a year by 2011.

Those in TRICARE Standard would end up paying about \$1,100 a year in enrollment fees and deductibles.

Medicare-eligibles would have to pay an annual enrollment fee of \$120 per year by 2011. Any beneficiary who didn't pay the enrollment fee also wouldn't be allowed to use military pharmacies.

As for pharmacy coverage, the task force recommended raising copayments for retail pharmacy use from the current \$3 (generic), \$9 (brand-name formulary), and \$22 (non-formulary) to \$15, \$25, and \$45, respectively - significantly greater increases than previously proposed by the Pentagon.

MOAA's first-blush reaction to the proposals is that (a) they impose means-tested premiums that don't apply to other federal health benefits and (b) they focus almost exclusively on DoD costs and very little on what level of benefit career military people earn by virtue of their decades of service and sacrifice. In other words, focusing only on cash fees ignores

that military people pay far larger premiums than any civilian - but pay them up front and in-kind. When asked that question directly, one of the commissioners answered, "That's for Congress to decide."

MOAA believes that should have been a key topic in any even-handed report. That's why we've pushed hard for the last two years in support of H.R. 579 and S. 604, the bipartisan Military Health Care Protection Act introduced by Rep. Chet Edwards (D-TX) and Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC) in the House and Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE) in the Senate, which would specify that point in law and put appropriate limits on military health care fee increases. Click on the links below to check whether your legislators have cosponsored these bills and send them a MOAA-suggested message tailored to their status.

Lump of Coal on G.I. Tax Relief

HR 3997, the Defenders of Freedom Tax Relief Act of 2007 certainly sounds like a mom-and-apple-pie bill, doesn't it?

Every single senator and representative apparently thought so, too. Enough so that, in the last month, the House and Senate each passed it unanimously - twice. The problem is that every time it passed, it was a slightly different version, and the House and Senate never passed the same one before Congress adjourned for the year.

The bill calls for a range of tax relief for military members, their families and some small business employers of mobilized reservists. Among other things, it would allow disabled retirees who suffer delays in the VA claims process file for refunds of up to five years of back taxes (vs. three under current law). It would let military widows put their death gratuity amounts (now up to \$100,000) into tax-deferred IRA, and let employers make deposits in 401(k)s for employees who are deployed to combat zones.

We've given kudos to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) and House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charles Rangel (D-NY) for championing various provisions of the bill.

So it's sad to say that Senate-vs.-House quibbling over a few final details derailed the whole bill, virtually on Christmas Eve.

We certainly hope the parties can reconcile their differences and get this worthwhile legislation passed when they return to work in January.

Let's Call It a Year

With many of the MOAA staff out of town for the holidays, this will be the last legislative update until Friday, January 4.

For those of you who are deployed, along with your spouses, moms, dads and children who remain on the home front, please know that we recognize the gift you are giving to our country. You are especially in our hearts and on our minds.

We wish you and yours the merriest of Christmases, a belated happy Hanukkah, and all the best in the New Year. If you're traveling over the next two weeks, please be safe. We'll need every possible member back with us for the tough legislative battles to come in 2008.



JAYHAWK CHAPTER MOAA



A membership meeting will be held **Tuesday, 22 January 2008**, at the Lawrence Country Club. Dinner cost is **\$20.00** per meal.

The Program: LTG Rich Keller, President of the Kansas Council of Chapters, will be our speaker.

Social Hour: 1800 hours

Dinner: 1900 hours

The Menu: *Chicken, baked potato, vegetable, rolls, salad, tea or coffee and ice cream*

Send your reservation and check payable to **Jayhawk Chapter MOAA** to arrive no later than **15 January 2008**, to:
CAPT (Ret) Jim Cooper - 1115 Stone Meadows Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049-3961

Dinner reservations are confirmed on Monday before the dinner. Cancellations, if necessary, should be made prior to Monday noon; otherwise, the Lawrence Country Club will charge us for those meals.

If you have any questions, you may contact Jim at 842-7037 or John Halladay at 843-6184.

cut here

Yes, please make _____ reservations for me and my guests. (Spouse and other guests are welcome.)

The cost is \$20.00 per meal. I am enclosing a check for \$ _____ for meal(s).

2008 Dues (\$20.00) \$ _____

Clayton L. Comfort Award program contribution \$ _____
(Separate check made out to "KU Endowment")

TOTAL: \$ _____

Name

Telephone

**IF YOU NEED A RIDE TO MEETINGS, PLEASE LET US KNOW HERE _____
AND GIVE US YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER _____**

**TEAR OFF AND RETURN THIS FORM WITH A CHECK PAYABLE TO:
JAYHAWK CHAPTER MOAA
CAPT (Ret) Jim Cooper, 1115 Stone Meadows Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049-3961**

MOAA WEBSITE: www.moaa.org

KANSAS COUNCIL WEBSITE: www.kansasmoa.org

JAYHAWK CHAPTER WEBSITE: www.jayhawkmoaa.org

When the last issue went out, I hit the wrong button and sent it via e-mail to all members who have e-mail addresses. If you found you could handle it just as well via e-mail, please let us know at jwhalladay@sunflower.com

2007-08 Jayhawk MOAA Calendar:

2008

Tuesday 22 January MOAA meeting
(note change of meeting date)

Tuesday 18 March MOAA meeting

Tuesday 20 May MOAA meeting

Tuesday 15 July MOAA meeting

Tuesday 16 September MOAA meeting

Tuesday 18 November MOAA meeting

Happy New Year to everyone from your Editors



*Newsletter Editor
Jayhawk Chapter, MOAA
2403 Manchester Road
Lawrence, KS 66049-1646*

One Powerful Voice.®

For every officer at every stage of life and career.

Meeting Date Change:

22 January 2008