



# Jayhawk Chapter MOAA Newsletter



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## January Program:

Our speaker for the January meeting will be Sarah Hill-Nelson. Her focus will be on the construction of the North Powerhouse and how it can serve as an example of a public/private partnership that shares costs for improving and maintaining critical water infrastructure.

★★★★★ CHAPTER  
awarded for

2002 / 2003 / 2005 / 2008 / 2009  
2010 / 2011 / 2012 / 2013 / 2014

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awarded for

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## President's Comments. . .

With the elections of 2016 now completed and new Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches starting their work in January, our MOAA mission and focus will remain to be the premier organization advocating for ALL military personnel, and a major voice for our organization. This holds true for MOAA at the National, State and Local Chapter organizations. We can do this by having our Jayhawk Chapter membership be active in responding to the MOAA Take Action requests, reading the MOAA Magazine (paper version and/or on-line), keeping current with National, State and local issues, and being active in our Jayhawk Chapter both internal to the Chapter (i.e., become an Officer or Board Member on our Board of Directors, help with recruiting new Chapter members, etc.), and/or external to the Chapter in our community (i.e., assist with placing and retrieving U.S. Flags on Memorial Day, be a Veteran in the Classroom on Veterans Day, volunteer to work at any of the local community organizations, coach in a youth league, act in a show at one of the venues around town, help with some job/activity at your place of worship, etc.).



Moving forward into 2017 our Jayhawk Chapter MOAA will be very busy starting with our January Board Meeting on January 10, and Dinner and Membership Meeting on January 17. At the end of our January Dinner and Membership Meeting we will vote for approval of the 2017 Chapter Board of Directors, and follow that with the swearing in of the 2017 Officers and Board Members. The leadership of the Jayhawk Chapter will pass into the capable hands of COL George Pogge at this time. If you are interested in serving as an Officer and/or Board Member please contact me or COL George Pogge, USA (RET), COL John Halladay, USA, (RET) or any other Board Member. Surviving Spouses are eligible to serve on our Board of Directors.

I have one final request of the Jayhawk Chapter Members to complete on or before the middle of January 2017 (unless you have already provided it). The MOAA Level of Excellence (LOE) Recognition Program submission for 2016 has a due date to MOAA of March 1, 2017. My request is that you provide me information on what organizations and activities you participate in by the middle of January, or the end of January, 2017 at the latest. This can include anything you do individually or collectively such as volunteer at LMH, volunteer at Watkins Museum, act in theater performances, coach a youth team, participate in local government, serve in a position in your church, mentor and/or give presentations to schools or groups, help place and recover flags for Memorial Day observation, be a "Bell Ringer" for the Salvation Army Red Kettle Drive, or any other things you may be involved with. **Please don't be shy with your input.** Thank you in advance for doing this.

This will be my final President's Comments column as I will be moving into the Past President position on the Jayhawk Chapter Board for 2017. It has been a distinct honor, pleasure and privilege to have served and represented our Jayhawk Chapter in 2015 and 2016 at the Local, State and National level. Thank you for this opportunity, and remember to "Never Stop Serving".

Mike

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\* Reservations should be sent  
to Jim Cooper by  
12 January



# JAYHAWK CHAPTER NEWS



## PERSONAL NEWS

**Dean Bevan:** The fabulous soprano, Sarah Young, and I will sing as "Dueling Duos" in Theatre Lawrence's February 3 fundraiser.

**David Darwin:** I was recently elected to the rank of Fellow in the American Society for the Advancement of Science. (<https://news.ku.edu/2016/12/02/two-ku-professors-named-fellows-american-association-advancement-science>)

**Lee Gerhard:** Darcy and I are moving to Tennessee to be with kids and grandkids, leaving mid-December.

**Charles Heller:** I have been elected as the Commander of the Samuel J. Churchill Camp 4, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Lawrence, KS.

**John Halladay:** Shirley & I spent Thanksgiving in Texas with her younger son, Jim, and his family. Her older son, John Jr., flew in from Huntsville, AL for four days.

## Salvation Army Bell Ringers



Mike Miller & Bernie Kish



Jim & Vicki McMurray



Ray Finch & Jim Cooper



Al Ballard & Mike Devlin



## Army News LTC Tracey Olson, USA

### Greetings Jayhawk Chapter!

Our new SMI, MSG Neil Moore, reported 10 NOV. His prior position as a 1SG at Fort Riley will provide our cadets additional insight as future Platoon Leaders from an NCO's perspective. He brings with him his wife and four children. He has integrated very well and is a great addition to our team.

LTC Olson attended the NASSP Conference. She would like to host a similar event (smaller scale) for the state of Kansas. She met the POCs that coordinated the event at the national level and remains in contact with them. Our ROO is also looking into details (costs, location, time) to make this event possible. We will be coordinating with our fellow Kansas universities to see if they'd be interested in participating with us.

LTC Olson, MSG Moore and CPT Lavery (NG) attended a conference hosted by the KSARNG. The Officer Strength Manager provided an informational briefing about units, assignments, and scholarship

opportunities for cadets. While our ROO is already tracking most of this information, it was an opportunity to meet key staff leaders in the KSARNG. We plan to do an engagement with them quarterly.

As for building improvement/renovation, we are slowly, but surely headed in the right direction. Dr. Bendapudi toured the building and placed Mr. Mike Denning in charge of building updates. As always, money is the issue, but we are headed in the right direction.

We are also proud to announce that on 17 December we will be commissioning two officers, Julian Lidback, branched Aviation and Mikah Wolf, branched Nurse.

**MAJ TODD HARALSON**  
Asst. Professor of Military Science



## Navy News CAPT Dave Meron, USN



### Greetings from the Jayhawk Navy!

November has been another busy month for the Jayhawk Battalion. The month started off with the Joint Service Ball where all three ROTC units recognized their graduating seniors. The entire Battalion supported the Marine Corps Birthday and Veteran's Day with several activities including: cake cutting ceremony, standing watch at KU war memorials, and the "Salute to Service" football game.

Air Force ROTC Detachment 280 hosted this year's Joint Service Ball on November 4<sup>th</sup> at the Double Tree Hotel in Lawrence, KS. Colonel Bradley Hoagland, USAF, Chief of Congressional Actions, Secretariat of the Air Force Legislative was the guest speaker. He shared memories of his time in the Air Force and gave thoughts on the characteristics of a good leader. Following the dinner, seniors were recognized and congratulated on service assignments. Once the formal ceremonies concluded, the cadets and midshipmen stayed for an after-dinner dance in the adjoining ballroom.



KU NROTC Seniors with the Commanding Officer

In commemoration of the Marine Corps Birthday and Veterans Day, the Battalion was involved with many campus events. The first event was that our lab was a ceremonial cake cutting followed by some friendly paintball competitions. Our PT on November 10<sup>th</sup> was a motivating run through campus while chanting cadences and carrying our nations colors. In



MIDN and MOI at the cake cutting ceremony

addition, members of the Battalion stood watch at the Campanile and the Vietnam War Memorials on November 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. Veteran's day events concluded with the annual "Salute to Service" football game, where the midshipmen had the honor to hold the National Ensign. This year we ran out on the field and did pushups in the end zone after each KU score.



MIDN and Cadets doing pushups in the end zone

Reported with a heavy heart, one of our seniors, Nicholas Herren passed away November 27<sup>th</sup>. KU will miss him but his legacy will live on in the unit.

After a busy November, our Midshipmen are continuing their academic efforts while concluding the last of our Battalion activities. The next few weeks brings our annual ugly sweater competition and holiday celebration to wrap up another successful semester in KU NROTC. To stay up to date on the day-to-day happenings of the Battalion be sure to visit our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/KUNROTC](http://www.facebook.com/KUNROTC) or by searching "University of Kansas Naval ROTC".

Thank you for your continued support of the Jayhawk Battalion!

***Happy Holidays!***

Rock Chalk and Go Navy!

***CAPT David J. Meron***



## Air Force News LtCol Bill Pastewait, USAF

### Hello from Detachment 280, the Flying Jayhawks!

We just had a great finish to the Fall Semester with some strong accomplishments for both our cadre and cadets. First, Detachment 280 was selected as the Northwest Region Team of the Quarter for 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2016. This is our third Team of the Quarter award this year. Additionally, Major Andrew Robinson was selected as the Northwest Region Field Grade Officer of the Quarter for 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, 2016. We also say farewell to Captain David Rogers and his family. Captain

Rogers will be separating from the Air Force and pursuing a Physician's Assistant Degree with the University of Missouri Kansas City. He hopes to continue his military career with the Navy as a PA.

Second, Cadets Halle Haas and Catherine Palleson from the University of Kansas were recipients of a Type-II Air Force ROTC scholarship for sophomore cadets. This competitive scholarship covers \$18,000 in tuition per year

and includes books and stipend payments. Finally, Cadet Brian Frew was selected as the Cadet Wing Commander for the Spring 2017 semester. He, along with his Cadet Vice Wing Commander, Cadet Caitlin Longhofer, will plan and run all training and activities for the Flying Jayhawk Cadet Wing during the next 15 weeks.

#### *Detachment update:*

Senior cadets received their Air Force Specialty Codes in preparation for active duty. The seven graduating seniors were classified as follows: 2x Nuclear Operations, 2x Pilots, 1x Air Battle Manager and 1x Space Operations. Cadets are now waiting to receive their base preferences.

We hosted a Career Day on Thursday, 27 October. There was a strong turnout of Air Force officers from the Army's Command and General Staff College. The cadets had an opportunity to speak with officers representing 19 different career fields. The event concluded with a BBQ that allowed cadets to socialize with officers in a more informal environment.

Detachment 280 also participated in the Joint Service Ball on 4 November. This annual event is a formal military

dinner that includes approximately 200 cadets/midshipmen from the Army, Navy and Air Force ROTC programs. During the event, graduating seniors are presented to the audience and recognized by their respective Commander. The guest speaker for the event was Colonel Brad Hoagland from the Secretary of the Air Force's office.

#### *Coming Up:*

Cadets are on winter break until the Spring Semester starts. We've got several new events planned for the Spring and another big recruiting push to try and improve our numbers in the Fall.

Happy Holidays and thanks for your great support of our program.

#### **Rock, Chalk!**

Very Respectfully,

***LtCol Bill Pastewait***

Commander, Air Force ROTC Det 280

## **MOAA LEGISLATIVE UPDATES**

This is a summary of the many items MOAA produces each week on legislative activities.

Those who have e-mail receive the full Legislative Updates each week.

#### **MOAA Legislative Update, 04 November 2016:**

##### Arlington – Maybe Not Your Final Resting Place?

For veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, even a Medal of Honor may not guarantee a spot in Arlington National Cemetery.

That's according to a report by Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) staff.

Over the last several months, the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery (ACANC), an independent federal advisory committee, has been meeting to discuss ways to address the remaining capacity at ANC.

Because the committee's stated goal is to keep ANC active for centuries to come, one of the options being discussed is to drastically limit eligibility in the near term.

Current rules permit anyone with an honorable discharged and with at least one day of active duty service to be interred or inurned at ANC. That's a looser eligibility standard than used for other veteran cemeteries, which can require at least 24 months' service.

The cemetery presently is undergoing two expansion projects to add 27 acres, which will be completed next year. Plans underway (but not finalized) are expected to add another 40 acres, to be completed in 2022.

With these additions, the date by which ANC would reach capacity at current burial rates would be extended from 2041 to 2050.

Additional expansion is an option, but it won't be easy and could be expensive (e.g., annexing part of Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall or purchasing private property).

According to the report presented to the committee, the cemetery could remain open until 2337 if it is able to partially expand, and if eligibility is restricted to active duty deaths and for veterans with certain qualifying awards (e.g., Medal of Honor) in the very near future.

If retirees remain eligible, the cemetery will reach maximum capacity in 2072.

##### Why Tie Military Kids to Medicare?

Medicare, the federal health insurance program for America's elderly, is causing real problems for military children.

Huh?

You might ask how that can be, but it's because TRICARE payments to medical providers are tied to Medicare's.

And Medicare's payments are mainly designed for older patients, not for kids.

The result is TRICARE often doesn't pay for services unique to children.

One particularly awful example is coverage of hospice care for children facing late stage terminal illness.

Normally, when someone has a terminal illness and faces a short prognosis (e.g., less than six months), they can elect to begin hospice care. Hospice provides medical services, like pain and symptom control, and an option to be at home with caregiving assistance. But it also provides emotional support for the ill and their families, with counseling and support in preparing for death.

Under Medicare rules, electing hospice care requires giving up coverage for curative care. So TRICARE does, too.

That means, when a military family has a child in hospice care and the child has a medical crisis, TRICARE won't cover readmission or treatment in hospital for curative care.

In other words, the family must make the decision to let the child die, or bear the full cost of any medical treatment.

But a child's body is not like an adult's body. Children are faster healers, and every part of their body is still growing, developing, and renewing, while adults are in a steady state of aging.

The health variables are much higher for children, and their quality of life needs are different. Parents shouldn't have to forego all needed curative efforts in order to use hospice programs.

Nearly 10 years ago, a DoD-commissioned study concluded, "The requirements for these services severely restrict pediatric access and do not provide appropriate pediatric care." But this egregious policy is still in place.

It is unclear whether the Defense Health Agency (DHA) can fix this without legislation. When the policy was identified to DHA, it reached out to families facing this choice with additional options, but it remains unclear what additional services they are receiving and how such flexibility will be applied going forward.

MOAA and the TRICARE for Kids Coalition are committed to making a change to this regulation - and a law change, if necessary - a top priority.

#### **MOAA Legislative Update, 10 November 2016:**

Trump's military: Here's what troops can expect from their next commander in chief

*By Gina Harkins, Senior Staff Writer*

A Washington outsider who pledged to rebuild what he's called a weak and ineffective military soon will serve as the new commander in chief.

He recently released a [10-point plan for VA reform](#), and he'll face tough decisions about the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

(ISIS), who will serve as his defense secretary, and how he'll lead the armed forces through ongoing personnel and budget cuts.

Trump will be joined in office by Republican Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, who is the father of a Marine Corps officer currently training to become a pilot. Here's what troops can expect from their new commander in chief.

#### *People and pay*

After repeatedly arguing that President Barack Obama's administration had undercut the military, Trump [laid out plans in September](#) to:

Increase the number of active-duty soldiers to 540,000, up nearly 100,000 troops from the Army's current drawdown plans.

Boost the number of Marine Corps battalions to 36 in order to deal with major contingencies. That would add about a dozen battalions to the force

Build a Navy that has 350 surface ships and submarines, about a 28-percent bump from today's fleet.

Build an Air Force of at least 1,200 fighter aircraft.

With another round of across-the-board spending cuts, known as sequestration, threatening to wreak havoc on the 2018 defense budget, the military currently doesn't have the funds to carry out those plans. Trump said in his plan that he would "ask Congress to fully eliminate the defense sequester and will submit a new budget to rebuild our military."

#### *Overseas operations*

The fight against ISIS could [get even more complicated](#) after the Iraqis retake Mosul, and Trump said that on his first day in office he'd give general officers 30 days to present a plan to defeat the terror group. That followed comments he'd made about knowing "more about ISIS than the generals do, believe me."

Trump has blasted the Obama administration's handling of the fight on the terror group. Trump argued that the Iraqis were giving ISIS fighters too much notice about their offensive plans, but Trump offered few details on what else he'd do differently, Friedman said.

#### *Reforming the VA*

During his campaign, Trump released a 10-part plan to reform the VA in which he said he'd support veterans' physical and mental health care through modernization and better accountability.

"No more long drives, no more waiting backlogs, no more excessive red tape," the plan states. "Just the care and support they earned with their service to our country."

Trump wants to appoint a new VA secretary whose "sole purpose will be to serve veterans." He said he will remove and discipline federal employees who've violated the public's trust and will ask Congress to pass legislation that will allow the VA secretary to "terminate any employee who has jeopardized the health, safety, or well-being of a veteran."

Trump's White House will also have a 24-hour hotline, according to the plan, that will be "answered by a real person" that veterans can call if they have complaints about their VA care. He plans to increase the number of mental health care professionals and will allow veterans to seek care outside the VA system.

"Under a Trump administration, no veteran will die waiting for service," the plan states.

#### Changes on the Hill - Vets in Congress

Servicemembers and their families are already asking how the election results are likely to affect MOAA's efforts on Capitol Hill.

President-elect Donald Trump surprised pundits by winning the White House; Republicans defied expectations of some and managed to hold on to both the House and the Senate.

The latest election results, combined with a number of legislator retirements, mean the military and veterans community will be losing some legislators who have been among the strongest supporters of military personnel issues in the past, including:

Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) retires after 34 years in office.

MOAA's 2016 Marix Award winner, Rep. Joe Heck (R-Nev.).

MOAA's 2015 Marix Award winner and Senate Armed Services Committee member Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), who led the successful fight to repeal unfair cuts to military retiree benefits, lost her re-election bid to Maggie Hassan.

The number of veterans serving on Capitol Hill will continue its long decline when the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress convenes next year.

#### Comrades in Arms

While the overall number of veterans in office continues to decline, 26 OEF/OIF veterans will head to Washington in 2017:

Army 11; Navy 6; USMC 5; Air Force 4

#### Are Vets Healthier Than Non-Vets?

On Nov. 10, America's Health Rankings, in partnership with MOAA and United Health Foundation, released the 2016 Health of Those Who Have Served Report. The timing was tied to Veterans Day.

The report compares selected health measures of veterans with those of non-veteran civilians in the same age and demographic groups.

The report focused on those who have served on active duty in the U.S. armed forces in Regular, National Guard, or Reserve status.

The study reviewed data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), the world's largest annual population-based telephone survey system, which has been tracking behaviors in America since 1984. The sample included nearly half a million people, of whom nearly 60,000 self-identified as veterans. The analysis addressed 24 indicators of health behaviors, health outcomes, and utilization of key health care services.

#### Key findings include:

People who have served report better overall health, but face higher rates of chronic health challenges

Veterans are more likely to report being in very good or excellent health compared with civilians.

However, men and women vets report higher rates of several chronic diseases and unhealthy behaviors compared with their civilian counterparts.

For example, veterans have a 13-percent higher rate of cancer, 62-percent higher rate of coronary heart disease, and 67-percent higher rate of heart attacks. Veterans 18-39 years of age have lower rates of chronic conditions such as diabetes, but they sleep less and smoke more than non-vets.

Men and women vets are more active at all ages

This is the second time MOAA has partnered with the United Health Foundation to identify specific areas to improve care for the men and women who have served.

#### **MOAA Legislative Update, 18 November 2016:**

##### 2017 Part B Premiums Announced

Medicare finally announced the 2017 Part B premiums.

70 percent of Medicare beneficiaries won't see much of a Medicare Part B premium increase next year. If you're paying \$104.90 a month in 2016, you'll likely pay around \$109 monthly next year. If you're paying more than that now, you'll probably see about another 10-percent hike for 2017.

The majority of beneficiaries won't see a large fee hike because of a "hold-harmless" law that caps most people's Part B premium increase at the dollar amount of the Social Security check cost-of-living adjustment (COLA).

But that protection doesn't apply for the following groups:

new Medicare enrollees in 2017 (who aren't "held harmless" because they never paid the lower premium);

Medicare enrollees with incomes above \$85,000 a year (\$170,000 for a married couple), who already pay premiums higher than the basic \$104.90; and

people who are paying Medicare premiums but don't receive a Social Security check.

Not only are these groups not "held harmless," but the law actually requires their premiums to be raised an extra amount to cover whatever total premium amount the held-harmless groups would have been paying if they hadn't been protected.

In other words, when a small or zero COLA triggers the hold-harmless provision, the three groups listed above end up having to pay their own premium hikes...and part of their neighbors', too.

Last year, the zero-COLA meant a 52-percent increase for beneficiaries not held harmless. MOAA members sent over 24,000 messages to the Hill, and Congress intervened to protect these groups from having to pay any share of other people's premiums.

This year, because there was at least a .3 percent COLA, the penalty for the non-held-harmless groups isn't quite as severe. Further, Medicare officials already announced they will use Medicare reserves to partially ease the extra premiums imposed on these groups.

The 2017 monthly premium rates just announced by Medicare. Premiums for individuals with incomes less than \$85K/\$170K (single/married) may vary a dollar or two, because your individual

premium will be based on the size of the COLA in your personal Social Security check.

Because Medicare is using its reserves to ease increases on those not held-harmless, some think there won't be as much pressure on Congress to step in with more relief.

As a matter of principle, MOAA thinks it's wrong to make the groups already being asked to pay a larger share of their own Part B premiums to shoulder a share of someone else's, too.

That's why MOAA will be supporting relief legislation again this year. If successful, we estimate that would save the affected groups \$8 to \$15 per month (\$16 to \$30 for a married couple).

#### Keep Your Government Hands Off My (Blank)

*By: Col. Steve Strobbridge, USAF (Ret)  
Vice President, Government Relations*

Coming off one of the most contentious elections in memory, feelings are running high among just about everybody.

In newspapers, on TV, and on social media, speculation — positive and negative — is everywhere about what the election results mean and where the new president and Congress might or might not take us.

Will America become more confrontational in the world or withdraw from some international responsibilities?

Will the defense budget get bigger?

Will there be a move to privatize Medicare, Social Security, VA health care, or TRICARE?

Will funding or support for programs we like (or don't like) be cut?

Before anybody goes off the deep end with worry or joy, we should remember a major change in philosophical leadership is nothing new for our country.

The elections of Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama all represented major changes of course from their predecessors'.

In retrospect, none solved all our national problems and none sent the country careening off the rails.

The reason is we don't give up our power to influence our national leaders just because an election is over.

There have been proposals from every administration of either party we (the public) haven't liked.

At various times, MOAA members have barraged their legislators with postcards, letters, emails, and tweets to support or oppose initiatives on Medicare, Social Security, COLAs, TRICARE, concurrent receipt, survivor benefits, pay raises, commissaries, and more.

Legislators haven't listened in every case, but they have more often than not.

With 535 individual senators and representatives, the only certain bet is some seemingly crazy ideas will be proposed in the coming Congress.

But it's also a certain bet the proposals that don't make sense will generate a barrage of grassroots input to rebalance our national sanity meter.

Just because a person or political party gets 47 percent or 51 percent or 55 percent of the vote on a given day definitely does not mean that person or party is going to enjoy majority support for whatever they might propose.

Every proposal must be vetted in the court of public opinion. And every elected official ignores public opinion at his or her peril.

There's a reason the pendulum of our national direction swings back and forth. Usually, it's because the public thinks their elected officials have overreached their limited "mandate."

No elected official is, or ever will be, the savior or the sinking of the nation.

The savior of our nation is you — an informed and actively involved electorate.

If you think you won or lost anything Nov. 8, you are mistaken.

The nation can only go down the tubes if you start thinking Election Day is the only time your voice matters.

Your willingness to express your opinion on an issue-by-issue and day-by-day basis is the counterweight of national conscience that remains essential to keep our elected officials on the right track.

Don't ever be shy about exercising it.

#### COLA Bubbles – Up

The November CPI is 0.1 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline.

The CPI for December 2016 is scheduled to be released on January 18, 2016.

*Note: Military retiree COLA is calculated based on the CPI for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-*

*W), not the overall CPI. Monthly changes in the index may differ from national figures reported elsewhere.*

#### TRICARE Contracts Won't Be Changed

This week, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a statement denying all bid protests of TRICARE's next round of contracts, known as "T-2017." Although the full report is not out yet, this announcement allows the DoD to move ahead with its plan to consolidate its existing three TRICARE regions into two.

These will consist of the East and the West regions, with the East region the most heavily populated by beneficiaries.

The two new 2017 TRICARE contracts will be administered over five years, and are worth an estimated \$58 billion. The original winners of the bids, HealthNet Federal Services for the West, and Humana for the East, are now able to move forward with their transition plans.

The new contractors will be aiming for implementation in late summer or early fall of 2017. But DoD is planning for a longer transition period, designed to be more seamless for beneficiaries.

The new contracts include several new changes to improve beneficiary access, quality, and safety of care.

For example, in large TRICARE market areas there will now be case management liaisons between military treatment facilities and civilian purchased care. Also, there will be electronic notification of referrals which beneficiaries can track online - a huge improvement over paper and faxed referrals.

Many new quality improvement measures should result in better care for TRICARE's 9.2 million beneficiaries.

MOAA will keep you informed of further developments.

#### **MOAA Legislative Update, 22 November 2016:**

##### What's Happening on Pay, Manpower, TRICARE, and SBP?

Congressional leaders have decided to kick the can to next year on most major funding issues.

Instead of passing a year-end omnibus appropriations bill to fully fund government operations for FY17, the new plan is to pass a continuing resolution (CR) to carry the funding only through sometime in March.

That would give the new Administration and Congress a stronger hand in funding negotiations.

##### Arlington National Cemetery: Closure is Preferable to Restricting Retirees

After the completion of two current expansion projects, Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) will reach maximum capacity around 2050.

And what's being done to address this?

Over the last several months, the Advisory Committee on Arlington National Cemetery (ACANC), an independent federal advisory committee, has been meeting to discuss ways to extend the active life of the cemetery. The committee developed a letter for Congress discussing [several options moving forward](#).

##### New Report Knocks DoD's Effort to Achieve Commissary Budget Neutrality

Last week, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report evaluating DoD's congressionally mandated plan to make the commissary and exchange system "budget neutral" by October 1, 2018<sup>[1]</sup>.

DoD's comprehensive plan was submitted to Congress in May and outlined challenges and methods to reduce appropriations, ultimately concluding that budget neutrality was not achievable without reducing the patron benefit.

[In congressional testimony last January](#), MOAA also voiced concerns about "reinventing what the patron benefit actually is," as well as how any changes would affect product quality, savings, and customer satisfaction levels.

[1] U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *Report on Plan to Obtain Budget Neutrality for the Defense Commissary System and the Military Exchange System, May 2016.*

#### **MOAA Legislative Update, 02 December 2016:**

##### Defense Bill: Pay, SBP, TRICARE, and Housing Wins

House and Senate leaders resolved hundreds of differences between their respective versions of the FY 2017 Defense Authorization Bill, and followed MOAA's and The Military Coalition's recommendations on most of them.

Here's a summary of selected outcomes.

Currently Serving Issues

- Pay raise: Approves a 2.1 percent 2017 military raise (matching the average American's), rather than the 1.6 percent proposed by DoD.
- Force levels: increases for all services significantly above the Pentagon proposals.
- Housing Allowance: Rejects a Senate-proposed plan that would have cut allowances by tens of thousands of dollars a year for dual-servicemember couples and other military members who share housing.
- Spouse Employment: Eliminates 2-year eligibility limitation (after PCS) for noncompetitive appointment of military spouses to federal civilian positions.
- Parental Leave: Authorizes up to 12 weeks of paid leave (including 6 weeks medical recuperation leave) for primary caregiver after childbirth; 21 days authorized for servicemember who is the secondary caregiver.

Survivor Benefits

- Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance: Extends this allowance for SBP-DIC widows through May 2018 at the current \$310 monthly rate (this will give us an opportunity to push Congress next year to increase and further extend the allowance, or eliminate the offset in its entirety).
- SBP for Reserve Components: Upgrades Survivor Benefit Plan formula for Reserve Component members who die while on inactive duty for training to equal SBP benefits for those who die on active duty.

TRICARE Benefits and Fees

- There will be no changes to TFL. The bill rejects the Pentagon proposal to impose an annual TFL enrollment fee of up to 2 percent of military retired pay.
- Grandfathers currently serving and currently retired members and families against most increases.

Military Health Care Reform

- Places all military hospitals and clinics under the authority of the Defense Health Agency for purposes of budgeting, health care policy, and health care administration.
- Requires pilot program of value-based care, which would reimburse providers at higher rate for providing top-quality care and reduce or eliminate copays for high-value medications and medical services.
- Requires new TRICARE contracts to improve beneficiary access, improve medical outcomes, improve quality of care, enhance beneficiary experiences, and reduce DoD health care costs.
- By mid-2017, incorporate into annual performance review of all military and civilian health care leaders' measures of accountability for patient access to care, quality of care, improvement in health care outcomes, and patient safety.
- By January 2018, implement productivity standards (e.g., patients seen per day) for all providers in military treatment facilities (this is intended to improve patient access to timely care).

Trump Says It's Time For A General To Run The Pentagon. Is He Right?

*By Gina Harkins, Senior Staff Writer*

Gen. James Mattis, USMC (Ret), has been tapped to serve as the next defense secretary - a move that bucks tradition, as he only retired from the military about three years ago.

"We've always had a civilian in that job ... because we really believe that it is policy makers who ought to control the military, and not have the military control the military," Panetta said.

Richard Kohn, a defense history expert who has studied and written about civilian-military relations, says that rule - which stems back to the National Security Act of 1947 - helps protect the civilian control of the U.S. military. But Mattis, who co-edited a book titled "[Warriors and Citizens: American Views of Our Military](#)," understands the issue well, he adds.

"He's very thoughtful, very driven, very well-read, and he comes across that way that certainly is his persona, the 'warrior monk,' and that's how he was in private, too," Cancian says. "He put his actions into a broader context, you had the feeling that he really had thought about war and what he was doing."

MOAA and SecDef Discuss Sequestration, Force Needs

On Nov. 30, MOAA President Lt Gen Dana Atkins, USAF (Ret) and a number of other association leaders met with Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter and a group of senior Defense and Joint Staff leaders.

Lt Gen Atkins took the opportunity to ask what the fiscal impact would be on the defense budget if sequestration were to return in FY18.

Secretary Carter said sequestration would require defense budget cuts totaling about \$100 billion over the next five years. This is why MOAA intends to make sequestration relief a top priority in the next Congress.

Defense leaders went on to articulate the conundrum that current forces are too big for the current budget and too small for the missions being assigned to them. They cited recent surveys in which 72 percent of troops said operational stress levels are too high.

Even so, a senior Defense official said there is a better than 50-percent chance the Pentagon will recommend a presidential veto of the FY 2017 Defense Authorization Bill that is coming up for imminent congressional passage. The reason? It includes pay and force increases that are funded by operational contingency funds that are only good for one year.

MOAA believes strongly a veto would not be appropriate and is urging against it. The reality is nothing is certain beyond the next year, and our Nation faces ongoing threats from ISIS, China, Russia, Iran, North Korea, and more.

CVS to Leave TRICARE Pharmacy Network

On September 30<sup>th</sup>, TRICARE pharmacy contractor Express Scripts, Inc., announced that CVS pharmacies, including those in Target stores, will no longer process prescriptions for TRICARE as of Dec. 1, 2016.

The good news is that Walgreens pharmacies will return to the TRICARE network on Dec. 1.

MOAA Legislative Update, 09 December 2016:Are Your Benefits Veto Bait?

On Thursday, the FY 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) cleared the Senate and now awaits the president's signature.

The \$618.7 billion defense policy bill passed the Senate with a veto-proof majority of 92-7. The House passed the legislation the previous week by a similarly huge majority of 375-34.

Earlier, defense leaders told MOAA they likely would recommend the president veto the defense bill over the way it funds force and pay increases. That would be a serious problem, because the bill includes a number of positive pay and benefit changes, as well as much-needed force increases.

MOAA worked closely with Congress to prevent harmful allowance and health benefit cuts and we are [pleased with this year's successful outcome](#).

Our view is the president is very unlikely to veto the bill over what now amounts to a technicality. And in that unlikely event, it appears the House and Senate have the votes to override a veto.

The House passed the proposed CR on Thursday afternoon by a vote of 326-96 and the Senate was set to take up the legislation Friday.

Gates: Congress should "absolutely" approve Mattis to be SecDef

*By Gina Harkins, Senior Staff Writer*

Q. What will be some of his top challenges inside the Pentagon?

A. One of the biggest he's going to face is the budget - particularly the implications of sequestration and the ongoing problems caused by continuing resolutions.

We've got challenges relating to China, Russia, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela, North Africa, the consequences of what's going to happen in Europe after Brexit, and so on.

He won't ever have to worry about having an empty inbox.

Q. President-elect Trump has laid out big plans for the military: more troops, more planes, more ships. What role will General Mattis play in carrying out that kind of buildup if it comes to fruition?

A. I think it's going to be tough to get the money out of Congress to do all of that.

Q. What about more senior leaders, combatant commanders for example? How do you think they'll respond to a Secretary Mattis?

A. My suspicion is that a Secretary Mattis will be a pretty demanding boss. He'll have an advantage that President Dwight Eisenhower had in that it'll be pretty tough for anybody to B.S. him.

### National Guard chief: No indication of systemic bonus problems outside California

*By Gina Harkins, senior staff writer*

Pentagon officials assured members of Congress on Wednesday they will go about fixing the California National Guard bonus repayment issue in a way that is "fair to everybody."

### House OKs Improvements for Vets, Survivors

On December 6, the House of Representatives voted unanimously to pass HR 6416, the "Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016."

This is a bipartisan bill sponsored in the House by Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) and in the Senate by Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), the senior Democrat on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee.

This omnibus legislation includes a long list of changes, including provisions to:

- expedite payment of survivor benefits,
- require a GAO review of VA regional offices' claims processing performance,
- award veteran status for all Guard and Reserve retirees,
- expand Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship coverage for survivors of members who died in service between 2001 and 2005,
- authority to modify hours of work for VA physicians,
- improve assistance for homeless vets; and
- require studies of potential effects of veterans' toxic exposures on their children.

The Senate followed the House and passed this bill on December 9. MOAA strongly supports this legislation, and thanks Congress for its quick actions before the Holiday recess.

### Video Warriors Face Unique Moral Stress

Thousands of Air Force personnel in units called Distributed Common Ground Systems (DCGS) daily gather video and audio intelligence on Islamic State fighters in Iraq, Syria, and Libya. Identifying and tracking a barbaric enemy can mean witnessing, on occasion, rape or torture or murder of captives or civilians of any age.

DCGS data are rapidly collated with other intel to produce targets for pilots flying remotely piloted aircraft (RPAs) armed with Hellfire missiles and GPU-12 laser-guided bombs. Operating around the clock from select commands, pilots and support teams watch in high-definition as enemy targets are destroyed, and the number of deaths and damage assessed.

These warriors fighting through computer consoles in air-conditioned spaces are arguably the most lethal in the Air Force. The Army, Navy, and Marine Corps are pressing to acquire similarly effective capabilities.

But, number of strikes by Air Force drone pilots and DCGS units has exploded in recent years. In 2010, remotely piloted aircraft fired on 243 targets. This year, just through October, strikes totaled 2,473. The final 2016 number will be 12 times the strike total of seven years ago.

The growth, in part, reflects U.S. resolve to help Iraq's military and local militias wipe out ISIL, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, without committing a large U.S. ground force again to the region. But reliance on remote warriors and high-tech sensors also reflects an ongoing revolution.

"It's the most rapidly evolving, fastest-growing mission-set in the entire" Department of Defense, said Col. James McEachen, assistant to the surgeon general for the 25<sup>th</sup> Air National Guard. The "amazing" pairing of RPAs with DCGS intelligence has "redefined our approach to warfare in ways that are going to be with us for decades to come."

While demand for the systems is "insatiable" given their "decisive advantage," McEachen said, pilots and intel airmen face "unique stresses -- occupationally, operationally, behaviorally, even combat-related."

War can still be a deeply personal experience from thousands of miles away, said Thurman.

### Family PCS Flexibility Loses In Defense Bill

One provision we hoped would be retained in the defense bill was a Senate provision supporting flexibility to address family stability needs for families facing PCS moves.

MOAA wrote about the original bill, the [Military Family Stability Act](#), last fall. It provided a uniform policy for all of the Armed Forces to let families move up to six months before or after a servicemember to the next duty station. Such flexibility would have been granted for circumstances pertaining to education, employment, and caregiving of dependents.

Unfortunately, the proposal wasn't retained in the final bill.

Disruptions are an accepted part of military life, but families should have those disruptions mitigated to the greatest extent possible. Too often families have made the difficult choice to provide that stability on their own, living apart at significant financial cost. Where a few months of stability in one location can mean the difference between achievement and struggle, families should have some flexibility.

### **MOAA Legislative Update, 16 December 2016:**

#### **On Watch — What Coming TRICARE Changes Will Affect You? (Important)**

*By: Col. Dan Merry, USAF (Ret)  
Vice President, Government Relations*

MOAA was successful in working with Congress to avoid the vast majority of TRICARE fee hikes for current beneficiaries. That means we/you dodged the bullet on proposals to:

- impose an annual TRICARE For Life enrollment fee of up to 2 percent of retired pay;
- raise annual fees by 50 to 100 percent for TRICARE Prime and TRICARE Standard over several years; and
- double pharmacy copayments over the next 10 years.

In the end, Congress opted to (mostly) grandfather currently serving and retired military beneficiaries against these hikes.

But while you can breathe a sigh of relief on that score, some lesser changes are coming over the next few years that will affect roughly 1.5 million retired military and survivor beneficiaries who get their health care under TRICARE Standard. Those changes include:

As of Jan. 1, 2018, TRICARE Standard will be renamed TRICARE Select.

Also starting in 2018, you will need to go through a formal enrollment process (signing an enrollment form) to participate in TRICARE Select. Currently, you have to enroll to get care under TRICARE Prime, but your ID card is all you need under TRICARE Standard. That will change in fall 2017, when Standard users will get a notice about needing to enroll in TRICARE Select if they want coverage in 2018.

MOAA successfully lobbied for a grace period for that first year of enrollment, recognizing there always will be people who don't get the word about big changes like this. During that first year, if you haven't enrolled and have to go to a doctor or hospital, you will be charged the out-of-network fee for that first incident of care but then must enroll in TRICARE Select to get further care.

For 2018 and 2019, there won't be any enrollment fee for TRICARE Select.

But beginning Jan. 1, 2020, there will be an annual TRICARE Select enrollment fee of \$150 (individual) or \$300 (family). Currently serving families, Chapter 61 (medical) retirees, and military survivors whose sponsors died on active duty will be exempt from paying the fee. For subsequent years after 2020, the enrollment fee will be increased by the same annual percentage as the annual retired pay COLA.

At the same time the TRICARE Select enrollment fee is established in 2020, the annual catastrophic cap on out-of-pocket expenses for retired families will be raised to \$3,500 (versus the current \$3,000). In subsequent years, the cap will be increased by the same percentage as the annual retired-pay COLA. The cap will remain at \$1,000 a year for currently serving families.

Though we avoided many threats earlier this year that would have affected TRICARE beneficiaries, these TRICARE Standard changes still represent administrative and fiscal changes for current users who have never been subjected to any enrollment requirements.

MOAA has worked hard to protect retired Standard beneficiaries from inadvertent adverse experiences during the transition to the new enrollment system. We particularly were concerned about those who might have been threatened with loss of coverage simply because they didn't get the word about the new enrollment requirement — thus the first-year grace period.

We'll be working throughout the coming year to educate MOAA members about the transition in 2018. You can help by spreading the word to your retired military and survivor friends who use TRICARE Standard.

### COLA Fizzles

The November CPI is 0.1 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline.

The CPI for December 2016 is scheduled to be released on January 18, 2016.

*Note: Military retiree COLA is calculated based on the CPI for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), not the overall CPI. Monthly changes in the index may differ from national figures reported elsewhere.*

### Congress Passes Vet Bill before Leaving for the Holidays

This week, Congress sent a package of important veterans bills to the president. Although Congress failed to act on major VA reform bills introduced earlier in the year, it did manage to pass a bill with a variety of other needed measures.

For one thing, the Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016 (H.R. 6416) contained a provision MOAA has pushed for many years - veteran status for all retired Guard and Reserve members, including those not called to federal service during their careers. Current law limits the "veteran" designation to those who have performed federal active duty.

The change, which doesn't authorize any additional pay or benefits for the group, simply acknowledges the contributions of the Guard and Reserve retirees to our country.

Selected other provisions of the bill include:

**Survivor Benefits** - Streamlines the delivery of survivor benefits from the VA, making it unnecessary for a survivor to apply separately to DoD and the

**VA Veterans Court Judges** - Extends the temporary increase in the number of judges on the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. Absent this extension, the Court would have only seven judges to hear veterans' appeals. The extension adds two more judges for another four years to handle the appeal workload, which already has an extreme backlog.

**GySgt Fry Scholarship** - Expands the eligibility for Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarships to include members of the military who died beginning on Sept. 11, 2001. The previous eligibility date was for deaths that occurred on or after Jan. 1, 2006.

**Immunizations** - Aligns the VA's definition of preventive health services with the current adult immunization schedule used by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The VA would be required to establish quality measures and metrics to ensure veterans receiving medical care in the VA are notified on a regular schedule for immunizations should they choose to use the preventive service.

**Mental Health Counselors** - Expands the qualification requirements for individuals the VA hires as licensed professional mental health counselors to include providers with doctoral degrees in mental health counseling.

**Physician Work Hours** - Allows greater work hour flexibility by allowing physicians to work more or less than 80 hours in a biweekly period as is currently done in the private sector. VA leaders say this is essential to attract new hires. **Graduate Medical Education** - Increases the number of graduate medical education residency positions at VA medical facilities to 1,500 over the next 10 years.

**Toxic Exposure Research** - Requires the VA to conduct an assessment on scientific research related to descendants of veterans with toxic exposure and recommend to Congress the feasibility of conducting further research regarding health conditions of descendants of exposed veterans. If further research is deemed feasible, the VA would establish an advisory board to help the Secretary of VA in carrying out further research going forward.

The bill is now on its way to the president, who is expected to sign it into law.

MOAA will continue to advocate in the next Congress for improvements not included in this bill - appeals reform, the VA's Choice program, and the consolidation of community care programs, to name a few.

### U. S. Housing Allowance Rise Averages 2.4 Percent

Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) paid to a million servicemembers living off base in the U.S. will climb an average of 2.4 percent Jan. 1, or about \$41 a month. Actual increases for individual BAH recipients will vary by Military Housing Area, pay grade, and dependency status.

For a third straight year, BAH adjustments will not quite keep pace with the average rise in rent and utility costs, as the Department of Defense sticks to a five-year plan to trim the cost of stateside housing allowances gradually. The dampening of rates will continue until 2019, when recipients will be paying 5 percent of their off-base rental expenses out of pocket.

With the 2011 Budget Control Act and its mindless sequestration formula holding down military spending, however, Defense leaders began to press Congress to approve tighter controls on personnel spending, including a slowdown in BAH increases. Current law allows a

dampening of BAH rate increases by a percentage point a year until the allowance covers only 95 percent of rental costs, leaving members to cover the rest with their basic pay or other family income, or to rent less expensive housing.

Beyond the special dampening, rates are reset annually based on median market rents and average utility costs (electricity, heat, water, and sewer) for six housing profiles, which is a combination of dwelling type (apartments, townhouses, or single family homes) and number of bedrooms.

The BAH program in 2017 will cost \$21 billion. Members can [find their individual rate online](#).

In 2017, rates will fall in 82 housing area, or 27 percent of the total. But those newly assigned to areas with falling rental costs in 2017 will receive a lower housing allowance than that currently paid to settled peers. Of course, their rental costs also should be lower, officials noted.

When recalculating rates, Defense officials gather fresh rental cost data from across the United States, but local military housing offices direct such data collection away from apartment complexes and individual housing units deemed unsuitable for the military.

### Top 10 Military Family Issues in Defense Bill

Now that the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) is on its way to the president's desk for signing, we can talk about the provisions important to military families. Here are 10 provisions you should know about.

**Family Leave** Servicemembers will now receive six weeks of non-chargeable parental leave for the birth of a child if they are the primary parent, and three weeks if they are the secondary parent (and in the case of adoption and foster of a child). This is in addition to six weeks of non-chargeable convalescent leave for a servicemember giving birth. Previously, parental leave (for those not giving birth) was 10 days of non-chargeable leave at the discretion of the commander, and foster parents would have to use accrued leave.

**Impact Aid** Authorizes \$35 million in assistance for public schools with significant populations of military connected children. Impact Aid bridges the gap in tax revenues lost because the area includes a significant amount of tax-exempt federal property (military installations). This matches the amount authorized for 2016. Reports on allegations of child abuse

Requires anyone in the chain of command or in certain job fields must report credible allegations of child abuse to the Family Advocacy Program (FAP). Camps for military kids Authorizes funding or non-monetary support for military children in a camp-like setting for qualified non-profits without any predetermined preference. Many non-profits have great programs that serve military kids both close to and remote from military installations.

**Exceptional Family Member Program** Requires an assessment and report on the effectiveness of the EFMP by the end of 2017, identifying program differences between the services and progress in implementing previous GAO recommendations for program improvements and consistency.

**Commissary** Provides the Secretary of Defense substantial flexibility in funding the commissaries, including converting them to a Non-Appropriated Fund (NAF) system, using a commissary private label and beginning variable pricing (both already being piloted). The new legislation requires the Secretary of Defense to make regular reports to the Armed Services Committees about any changes being made, while complying with statutory requirements to sustain patron savings and satisfaction levels. MOAA will be watching these changes and reports closely.

**Military Star Card** Requires acceptance of the Military Star Card for payment at commissaries. This will generate value for the entire military community via reduced credit card clearance fees for the government, with low-risk low-interest credit for military customers. Previously, the card could not be used to make purchases at the commissary.

**Per Diem for Long Term Temporary Duty** Authorizes the Secretary of Defense to provide full per diem during long-term TDYs. In an effort to reduce costs, per diem rates were reduced in 2014 for TDYs longer than 31 days (55-75 percent of full rate depending on length). Reducing the allowances caused undue financial burdens on servicemembers on some long-term TDYs.

**Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** Authorizes Service Secretaries to

allot space and services on installations to local agencies that administer WIC programs for servicemembers and their families.

WIC remains an important lifeline for young and vulnerable families.

*Assessment of public schools on installations* Requires the Secretary of Defense to submit a report on the condition and capacity of elementary and secondary schools on military installations. With sequestration cutting budgets in every department, ensuring children's schools on military installations are safe should remain a top priority.

#### **MOAA Legislative Update, 23 December 2016:**

##### Combat Wounded Vets May Recoup Withheld Severance Taxes

The president recently signed Combat-Injured Veterans Fairness Act (Public Law 114-292), which allows veterans to collect severance taxes erroneously withheld by DoD.

A servicemember who suffers a combat-related injury and who is medically separated is entitled to a lump-sum disability severance payment, based on rank and years of service.

That payout is supposed to be tax-free.

The National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) has been arguing for several years that the Pentagon has wrongfully deducted taxes out of the severance pay in spite of the law and the advice from several veteran legal advisory organizations.

NVLSP estimates the new law will benefit almost 14,000 individuals. For some, it will mean a windfall of thousands of dollars they should have received years ago.

The bill passed both the House and Senate without opposition.

The law requires the Secretary of Defense to issue a report to Congress on those who have been affected by the improper withhold of taxes, to include the amounts withheld, and provides those affected with the authority to file a claim for the wrongfully withheld taxes.

MOAA thanks Congress and the president for passing this important bill during the lame duck session.

##### Military Update: Costs Kill Big Veteran Gains; Reserve Retirees Win Veteran Status

For a while, it seemed 2016 would be the year Congress phased in a \$3 billion plan to give older generations of severely injured veterans the same caregiver benefits enacted six years ago for post-9/11 injured veterans.

It also seemed like Congress would modernize the VA's archaic appeals process for veteran claims, and would impose stiff new accountability requirements on incompetent or misbehaving VA employees.

It even seemed possible this year lawmakers would strengthen the Veterans Choice program by establishing prompt payment standards and streamlining requirements for community medical care providers to enter into service agreements with the VA.

Early election-year cheers of real progress on these issues by leaders of the House and Senate veteran affairs committees became mere whispers by year's end, due to fiscal realities and disagreements over reform priorities.

The major veterans' bill passed in the 114th Congress, the Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016 (H.R. 6416), is named as such to honor the retiring chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee and the ranking Democrat on the Senate committee who will step from that position in the next Congress.

Signed into law Dec. 16, it is long on ordering more studies of VA issues and on tweaking current programs, but fails to make truly significant - and costly - program improvements. For proof, follow the money.

The Congressional Budget Office projects H.R. 6416 will raise VA appropriations by only \$33 million over the next five years. A third of spending is for "reports, studies, and surveys." Over the next decade, the new law is projected to lower VA direct spending by \$40 million.

From the perspective of major veteran service organizations, the roadblock to critical reforms of benefits and services are budget controls the veteran committees must operate under.

"Either the House or the Senate passed nearly everything that we, as an organization, felt needed to be accomplished in the 114th Congress," says Raymond C. Kelley, director of National Legislative Service for Veterans of Foreign Wars. "Except they couldn't get it to the finish line - passed by both chambers and onto the president - because of the inability to fund it."

VFW and other vet groups "continue to beat the drum for ending [budget] sequestration, realigning budget caps to meet need, and [lifting] most other budgetary triggers pressing on Congress. The authorizers know what needs to be done," continues Kelley. But until caps are

removed, Congress can only approve major new benefits by making cuts to existing programs.

The Senate committee's much-touted Veterans First Act, which a bipartisan majority approved in May, had a host of substantive initiatives. The centerpiece was expanding the VA caregiver benefit to families of older generations of severely injured veterans from conflicts as far back as World War II.

The price tag was \$3 billion, which the committee proposed to cover by raising interest rates on veterans reusing their home-loan benefit, rounding down disability compensation payments, and dampening the housing allowance stipend for the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit. Lawmakers know those are hard tradeoffs for veteran groups to accept.

"As a veteran service organization, we cannot allow Congress to pay for one benefit with another benefit," says Kelley. "We just can't go down that road" even though VFW eagerly supports expanding caregiver eligibility.

Another Senate initiative - to consolidate outside provider payments to improve access to community health care - would cost \$34 billion over 10 years, an impossible expense to absorb with existing budget caps.

On the House side, Miller, a champion for forcing the VA to punish wrongdoers among its workforce, linked reform of the VA claims appeal process to tougher employee accountability rules, which federal employee unions vehemently opposed and senators rejected. So ultimately, the final catchall Miller-Blumenthal package had no truly major reforms to tout.

Arguably the most welcomed provision bestows honorary "veteran" status on many Reserve and National Guard retirees who, until now, have not been recognized as such. The new law specifically states no added benefits will flow from the recognition, so there's no budgetary impact.

Affected retirees spent careers in reserve components, attending monthly and annual drills, but had never completed a qualifying period of active duty service under Title 10 to meet the legal definition of "veteran" and receive a DD-214 "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty." Today, however, they are able to be called - and call themselves - veterans.

Other provisions take steps to narrowly improve access to health care, disability, and education benefits and assistance to the homeless. Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.), chairman of the Senate committee, called H.R. 6416 a "down payment on the debt" owe to veterans.

"Though H.R. 6416 reflects just a fraction of our collaborative efforts, it nonetheless contains many important provisions," Miller told colleagues.

Blumenthal noted that among the 76 separate provisions passed, some allow hiring of more mental health counselors and emergency room doctors, while others expand eligibility for homelessness-prevention programs and extend some education benefits. The latter refers to a provision extending the deadline for using the full 36-month Fry Scholarship for surviving spouses who lost servicemembers early in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. They will have until Jan. 1, 2021 (instead of April 1, 2017) to obtain their educations using the benefit. The Congressional Budget Office estimates the added cost at \$16 million.

The original Fry Scholarship program gave full Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to the children of servicemembers who died in the line of duty after September 10, 2001. Congress extended it to surviving spouses in 2014.

Other highlights of H.R. 6416 will:

Require the VA to enter into an agreement with the National Academy of Medicine to conduct an assessment on scientific research relating to the descendants of individuals exposed to toxins including Agent Orange. The estimated cost is \$16 million over five years.

Relax a rule that VA staff physicians can't work more than 80 hours in any two-week period, which has handcuffed the department in using its full-time doctors more efficiently.

Direct the VA to provide, in lieu of a headstone or marker, a medallion to be affixed to a privately purchased headstone or marker of an individual, signifying their status as a veteran, if they served in the armed forces on or after April 6, 1917. The estimated cost is \$5 million over the next decade.

Require the VA to arrange for an independent assessment of the exams it gives individuals seeking disability compensation for traumatic brain injury. The estimated cost is \$2 million over five years.

Authorize contract physicians to conduct compensation and pension examinations at any location in any state as long as exams are within the scope of the authorized duties under the contract.

Expand the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims from seven judges to nine through 2020 to help address a backlog of claim appeals. The estimated cost is \$3 million.



# JAYHAWK CHAPTER MOAA



A membership meeting will be held **Tuesday, 17 January 2017**,  
at Lawrence Country Club.

Dinner cost is \$24.00/meal.

**The Program:** Our speaker will be Sarah Hill-Nelson.  
Her focus will be on the construction of the North Powerhouse and  
how it can serve as an example of a public/private partnership that  
shares costs for improving and maintaining critical water infrastructure.

**Social Hour:** 1800 hours      **Dinner:** 1845 hours

**The Menu:** Chef's choice on salad, rustic rolls with olive oil & parmesan cheese,  
Bistro steak filet with Au Poivre sauce, Rosemary whipped potatoes, seasonal vegetables, Chef's choice dessert  
Butternut squash ravioli available for any vegetarians

**Send your reservation and check payable to Jayhawk Chapter MOAA  
to arrive no later than *Wednesday, 12 January*, to:  
CAPT Jim Cooper, 1115 Stone Meadows Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049**

*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 Cooper 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 \$24.00 per meal. I am enclosing a check for \$\_\_\_\_\_ for meal(s).

Chapter Dues (\$20.00), due 01 January 2017 \$\_\_\_\_\_

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 Jim Cooper, 1115 Stone Meadows Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049**

MOAA WEBSITE: [www.moaa.org](http://www.moaa.org)  
KANSAS COUNCIL WEBSITE: [www.kansasmooa.org](http://www.kansasmooa.org)  
JAYHAWK CHAPTER WEBSITE:  
[www.jayhawkmoaa.org](http://www.jayhawkmoaa.org)

**Thank you for receiving  
the newsletter via e-mail !!  
It saves the Chapter for both  
printing and postage.**

**Tentative 2017 Meeting Schedule:**

Tuesday	17 January	Tuesday	18 July
Tuesday	21 March	Tuesday	19 September
Tuesday	16 May	Tuesday	21 November

**Kansas Council of Chapters Dates/Locations:**

11 February	hosted by Sunflower Chapter in Overland Park
29 April	hosted by Wichita Chapter (w/NGAKS Conference)
12 August	hosted by Jayhawk Chapter in Lawrence
4 November	hosted by Flint Hills Chapter in Manhattan

***WE WISH EACH OF YOU A  
SAFE & HEALTHY 2017 !!***



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***IN GOD WE TRUST***