

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATES AND NEWS

Legislative Platform, Open Letter and Resolution Ratified AFSA members attending the 2011 Professional Airmen's Conference and AFSA International Convention in San Antonio, Texas, ratified the 2011-2012 Legislative Platform, a basic list of legislative targets AFSA lobbyists will pursue in testimony and face-to-face visits with congressional representatives during the coming year. These targets will be available on the AFSA Home Page and detailed in future AFSA publications. The delegates also unanimously passed an "Open Letter to Congress and the President" urging them to maintain earned military benefits. The letter reminds our national leaders that we are a nation at war; that they need to make certain that funding for national defense is sufficient for our national security; and calls on them to oppose any reduction in pay and benefits provided to America's service members. It concludes by stating the Association belief that any plan reducing the value of benefits for those who fight and die for this nation is wrong, and inconsistent with the actions expected of a grateful nation. Delegates also unanimously passed a resolution charging Congress to protect military exchanges and commissaries. The resolution urges Congress to reject legislative efforts that would eliminate the federal subsidy for commissaries and direct the consolidation of the individual service retail systems. As previously noted in On Call, eliminating the commissary appropriation and consolidating programs establishes an unsustainable military resale system, ultimately resulting in the demise of the benefit. During the Legislative Forum, the AFSA Legislative Committee also urged participation in POW/MIA Recognition activities, observance of AFSA Legislative Awareness Week activities, and a strong military voter turnout in this year's general elections.

### Budget Deal Impact on Defense

The budget deficit deal reached by Congress and signed into law this week by the President establishes procedures for increasing the current \$14.3 trillion debt ceiling by as much as \$2.4 trillion and calls for \$350 billion in security cuts over the next 10 years. A special bipartisan commission appointed by the top four leaders in Congress (House Speaker John Boehner, Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell) will then be responsible for finding before Thanksgiving, additional government spending cuts totaling \$1.5 trillion dollars. In the event no agreement on additional budget cuts is reached, a binding mechanism is in place that automatically imposes a number of additional cuts in defense and other government programs. While the full impact of this legislation won't be realized for quite some time, it is clear America's Armed Forces, which have been stretched thin for nearly a decade, will likely be asked in the years ahead to do the same or more with even less. The concern at hand is whether future funding will be adequate enough to prevent the return of a "hollow force."

Over the past several months there have been an increasing number of proposals that would increase TRICARE premiums for military beneficiaries; eliminate presumptive service-connected conditions for disabled and ill veterans; reduce annual cost-of-living allowances; freeze military pay; end

government subsidies to military commissaries; eliminate DoD elementary schools stateside; and reduce Tuition Assistance payments to active duty service members. By far, the most damaging proposals we have seen would significantly reduce the value of military retirement offered to individuals who voluntarily serve 20 or more years in uniform--including those now serving. Although none of these proposals have been offered in the form of actionable legislation, in the future some will. Rest assured that AFSA will actively oppose any change that adversely affects military readiness or reduces the value of service made by the men and women in uniform. Members must be proactive and reach out to their elected officials--Now, and remind them that maintaining our Armed Forces is its constitutional duty. Anything less than giving our military the wherewithal to take on the challenges to our national security is unacceptable and dangerous. Congress will be in recess over the next five weeks and lawmakers will be working out of their local district offices.

Make it a point during this period to contact them. Tell them if they want to honor service members, then they should not be cutting their pay and benefits--they should be providing them with what they deserve and need.

#### Defense Bills Stalled

Deadlock in Congress over the budget deficit contributed to the lack of any further action on the FY

2012 Defense Authorization Bill. The House passed its version in May and the Senate never got back to theirs before adjourning for the summer recess. When lawmakers return in the fall, FY 2012 appropriations will be their first priority. None of the 12 spending bills for the new fiscal year have yet to clear the Congress and when lawmakers eventually return to Washington only three legislative weeks will remain before the start of the new fiscal year on October 1. With that in mind, don't expect final action on the defense authorization measure to occur until later in the fall. We do hope however that agreement can be quickly reached in Congress on defense funding so our troops will have the resources they need to perform their missions here and abroad.

#### VETERANS NEWS

##### VA Ends Special Claims Processing Rules

In November 2008, VA announced special procedures for processing claims for certain veterans, family members, and survivors after an audit by the department's Inspector General discovered documents waiting to be shredded at some of VA's regional offices that could have affected the award of benefits to the affected veterans and survivors.

<<http://www.cafepress.com/vawatchdog4>> The special procedures applied to claims submitted during an 18-month period between April 14, 2007 and Oct. 14, 2008.

VA recently announced in the Federal Register

(<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-07-18/html/2011-17959.htm>) these special rules are no longer needed. The department believes it has addressed allegations from claimants who may have been affected by improper document handling and control during the affected period, and that the VA is unlikely to receive any additional claims of

document irregularities from that time period. A VA general policy that claimants may assert, at any time, that the department misplaced or inadvertently destroyed documents remains in effect. VA pledges to take appropriate action for these cases using existing procedures.

#### VA Assistance to Survivors

VA is committed to caring for the loved ones of fallen service members through the Department's Office of Survivor's Assistance. If you've lost someone or you know someone who has, you can learn what the office offers by watching this video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyWbUPqqzEY>) and listening to the personal experiences it includes.

#### HEALTH CARE

TRICARE Covers Skilled Nursing Facility Care A skilled nursing facility (SNF) is designed to provide short-term care for people who no longer need acute care in the hospital but are not well enough to go home. Under TRICARE, a SNF must have the staff and equipment to provide skilled nursing, skilled rehabilitation or other medically necessary health care services, including prescription medications. The TRICARE Management Activity recently published an article on SNF care so beneficiaries can better understand this benefit. You will find that article here [http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/press\\_article.aspx?fid=554](http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/press_article.aspx?fid=554) .

#### Immunization Information

The start of a brand new school year is just around the corner! TRICARE encourages parents to help students get off on the right foot by making sure they get their annual immunizations. To learn what immunizations are covered under TRICARE, click here <http://tricare.mil/mybenefit/jsp/Medical/IsItCovered.do?kw=Immunizations> .

#### TRICARE for the Guard and Reserve

Multiple health care options are available to Guard and Reserve members and their families. Learn how the sponsor's military status affects eligibility for TRICARE programs by visiting this page [http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/press\\_article.aspx?fid=557](http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/press_article.aspx?fid=557) .

WANT INSTANT UPDATES? - AFSA IS NOW ON TWITTER Be the first in getting the latest updates and follow AFSA ON CALL. We are now posting daily and weekly updates on Twitter. As you may already know, Twitter allows for instant updates and happenings around the world, either on computers or your portable devices.

Sign up for your AFSA Twitter updates at - <http://twitter.com/#!/afsahq>  
<<http://twitter.com/#!/afsahq>>

#### AFSA MEMBER BENEFITS

VACATION & TRAVEL: AFSA CRUISES AND TOURS If you're thinking about a cruise or other vacation tour, check out our AFSA Vacations HERE  
<<http://www.afsatravel.com/>> .

Administered by Brenncoco Travel, a leader in the travel industry.

COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY (CSU) LEARNING PARTNERSHIP The AFSA/CSU partnership provides AFSA members a 10% discount on all of CSU's tuition rates, along with the waived \$25 application fee. This discount is available for all AFSA members, employees, and their immediate family members (spouse and children). Go to CSU's website HERE <<http://www.columbiasouthern.edu/>> and select "Air Force Sergeants Association" as the Partner Benefit provider.

AFSA INSURANCE: LIFE AND HEALTH

For information and applications on any of these insurance plans please contact Marsh Affinity Group Services toll-free at (800) 882-5541, or online HERE <<http://www.afsainsurance.com/>> . Coverage may vary or not be issued in all states.

- Accidental Death & Dismemberment Insurance Plan
- Cancer Expense Insurance
- Group Dental Insurance
- Long-Term Care Insurance
- Short-Term Recovery Insurance Plan
- Tricare Supplement Insurance
- Life Line Health Screenings

"Because you are busy defending our Nation, let AFSA defend your benefits"

<<http://www.hqafsa.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=About>>

We want to hear your thoughts and opinions. Complete the sentence below!  
What's your top 10 list for  
AFSA? Go ahead. Don't be bashful. Send it.

"I THINK AFSA SHOULD \_\_\_\_\_."

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