



AFSA International Legislative Committee Bulletin 2011-008
CMSgt (Ret.) James E. Lokovic
Vice-Chair International Legislative Committee
Division 12 Trustee, Legislative and Retiree Affairs
jlokovic@gmail.com



September 13, 2011

1. Legislation to Provide Mental Health Services for Members of Guard. According to a recent article in the *Providence Journal*, “Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., has authored a bipartisan bill, co-sponsored by Sen. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., that would provide mental-health services to National Guard members. Unlike full-time enlisted military personnel, Guard volunteers don’t always have access to mental-health services, or aren’t aware the services exist. The burden is borne not just by the personnel, but their family,” said Reed at a news conference Monday at the National Guard Armory in Providence. The ‘Joining Forces for Military Mental Health Act’ would provide outreach and support services to Guard members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.” To read more, go to: http://www.projo.com/news/content/Mental_Health_Bill_09-13-11_0SQACDA_v13.697cb.html

To view the bill, S. 1465, go to: <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=s112-1465>

2. Contrasting Retirements of Federal Government Employees and Members of Congress. Some supporters of military retirement ask for details on the retirement program enjoyed by members of Congress. In many cases, individuals take what they read on the Internet and form their opinions without verifying the facts. As a result, there are many misconceptions about congressional benefits, Social Security status, retirement, etc. A recent article in the *Federal Times* contrasts the retirements of federal *civilian* retirees with federal elected officials by pointing out details as to how members of Congress accrue and are paid their retirement. While the article deals with federal civilians in contrast to elected officials, it does provide some insight into the congressional benefit system. The article, for example, says, “Lawmakers, like federal employees, fall under either the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) or the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS). Like federal employees, they receive a defined benefit pension and participate in the 401(k)-like Thrift Savings Plan. Both FERS employees and lawmakers receive an automatic 1 percent agency contribution and matching contributions up to 5 percent in their TSP accounts. (All lawmakers, whether under FERS or CSRS, also pay into Social Security and are in turn eligible for Social Security benefits. Federal employees under FERS also pay into and earn Social Security benefits; rank-and-file CSRS employees do not.) But the differences start to emerge when one digs into the numbers. [For example,] Lawmakers contribute more toward their defined benefit pensions than everyday feds--for FERS lawmakers, half a percentage point more, and a full percentage point more for CSRS. But when they retire, lawmakers' pensions are calculated at

much more generous rates. . . Federal pensions are derived by multiplying the average of a retiree's three highest annual salaries by his years of service and by a variable pension accrual rate. For FERS lawmakers, the accrual rate is 1.7 percent for their first 20 years of service-- far more than the 1 percent or 1.1 percent regular FERS employees receive. CSRS lawmakers' pensions are calculated at 2.5 percent, whereas regular CSRS employees' accrual rates vary from 1.5 to 2 percent depending on years of service. And lawmakers can often retire far earlier than federal employees-- sometimes with as little as five years of service." To read the entire article, go to:

<http://www.federaltimes.com/article/20110912/BENEFITS02/109120304/>

3. Chairman of HASC Speech: “Defending America and the Quest for Peace: 10 Years after 9/11.” House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Howard P. “Buck” McKeon, R-Calif., spoke yesterday to the American Enterprise Institute. In his speech, he echoed the sentiments of Defense Secretary Panetta in claiming that any Defense cuts in excess of those mandated by the August debt ceiling legislation (\$350 billion over 10 years) would cripple our nation’s military and seriously jeopardize the ability of our Armed Forces to carry out their various missions. During his speech, McKeon highlighted the states of each of our Armed Forces, the deteriorating readiness postures, and the declining budgets to replace outdated systems. He contends that further cuts would harm our ability to counter ever-growing threats from nation states and non-nation entities. To read Chairman McKeon’s entire speech, go to:

http://armedservices.house.gov/index.cfm/files/serve?File_id=e756b63c-3324-467c-a829-0ef758b67d35

An article in *The Hill* analyzing Rep. McKeon’s speech points out, “Pro-defense Democrats like Rep Adam Smith (D-Wash.), HASC ranking member [and AFSA L. Mendel Rivers Award recipient], and Rep. Robert Andrews (D-N.J.) say the Pentagon budget must be on the table, as long as additional cuts are informed by a new national security strategy. During a speech on Friday, Smith argued that the lone way for the supercommittee to reach the \$1.2 trillion target is by proposing entitlement program cuts, new federal revenues and some additional national security spending reductions. If the supercommittee opts against pursuing a mixed bag of cuts, the portion of the federal budget that includes the Pentagon would be "devastated," Smith said. To read the entire article in *The Hill*, go to: <http://thehill.com/news-by-subject/defense-homeland-security/180911-rep-mckeon-would-support-tax-hike-to-stave-off-more-pentagon-cuts>

4. Bills of Interest Introduced September 12.

H.R. 2886, by Rep. Michael G. Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., would prioritize the payment of pay and allowances to members of the Armed Forces and Federal law enforcement officers in the event the debt ceiling is reached or there is a funding gap.

H.R. 2888 and S. 1540 (companion bills), by Rep. Aaron Schock, R-Ill., and Sen. Robert P. Casey, Jr., respectively, to allow tax credits for the establishment of franchises with veterans. (end)