

# Air Force Sergeants Association Chapter 1556

## April 2011 Legislative Report

AFSA will continue to voice our concerns toward enhancing and improving the quality of enlisted lives. This platform reflects the association's legislative emphasis during the coming year, which our chapter will mirror. Issues from compensation, to prevention of benefits erosion, to solidifying health care options will be addressed and reported to our membership. <http://www.hqafsa.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Legislative>

**Capitol Hill Updates:** The following updates of interest are provided from the AFSA website at: <http://www.afsahq.org/> AFSA publishes these updates every Tuesday and Friday and they are an excellent source of the latest legislative actions that impact our enlisted force, AFSA's position on issues, and actions that our organization is taking to influence legislation. Also look at <http://thomas.gov> for the latest legislative information.

### April 7, 2011

**H.R. 1417:** the "Battlefield Excellence through Superior Training Practices (BEST Practices) Act," would require the Secretary of Defense to use only human-based methods for training members of the Armed Forces in the treatment of severe combat injuries. Introduced by Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif. (**Read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services**)

### April 08, 2011

**H.R. 1441:** would codify the prohibition against the reservation of gravesites at Arlington National Cemetery. Introduced by Rep. Jon Runyan, R-N.J. (**Referred to the Committee on Veterans` Affairs**)

**H.R. 1442:** would make appropriations for fiscal year 2011 to ensure that members of the Armed Forces, including reserve components thereof, continue to receive pay and allowances for active service performed during a Government shutdown. Introduced by Rep. Justin Amash, R-Mich. (**Referred to the House Committee of Appropriations**)

**H.R. 1451:** would repeal a modification of authority to make certain interval payments of educational assistance under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs'. Introduced by Rep. Susan A. Davis, D-Calif. (**Referred to the Committee on Veterans` Affairs**)

**H.R. 1469:** the "Honor Our Fallen Heroes Act," would make appropriations to ensure the prompt payment by the Department of Defense (and the Department of Homeland Security in the case of the Coast Guard) of the death gratuity paid upon the death of members of the Armed Forces and certain other eligible persons despite the failure to enact interim or full-year appropriations for the Armed Forces. Introduced by Rep. Larry Kissell, D-N.C. (and 89 co-sponsors). (**Referred to the House Committee of Appropriations**)

**S. 769:** would prevent the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from prohibiting the use of service dogs on Department of Veterans Affairs property. Introduced by Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa. (**Referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans` Affairs**)

**S. 774:** the "Enduring Support for Defenders of Freedom and Their Families Act," would appropriate funds for pay and allowances and support for members of the Armed Forces, their families, and other personnel critical to

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national security during a funding gap. Introduced by Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont. (**Referred to the Senate Committee of Appropriations**)

**S. 777:** would clarify the authority of the Secretary of Defense to provide for the pay of the military of the United States under the Feed and Forage Act of 1861. Note: Those interested can read an April 5, 2011, *Army Times* article about how the “Feed and Forage Act” could be applied during a government shutdown by going to: <http://www.armytimes.com/news/2011/04/defense-army-considers-feed-and-forage-act-040511army/>. Introduced by Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas. (**Referred to the Senate Committee on Armed Services**)

**S. 780:** would exempt reimbursements of expenses related to accident, theft, loss, or casualty loss from determinations of annual income with respect to pensions for veterans and surviving spouses and children of veterans. Introduced by Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont. (**Referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans` Affairs**)

#### **April 11, 2011**

**H.R. 1473:** (Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee), would make appropriations for the Department of Defense and the other departments and agencies of the Government for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2011. Introduced by Rep. Harold “Hal” Rogers, R-Ky. (**Referred to House Committee on Ways and Means**)

#### **April 12, 2011**

**H.R. 1484:** would improve the appeals process of the Department of Veterans Affairs and to establish a commission to study judicial review of the determination of veterans' benefits. Introduced by Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif. (**Referred to the House Committee on Veterans` Affairs**)

#### **April 14, 2011**

**H.R. 1517:** would provide for military sexual assault and domestic violence accountability. Introduced by Rep. Bruce L. Braley, D-Iowa. (**Referred to the House Committee on Armed Services**)

**H.R. 1529:** would provide for implementation of additional recommendations of the Defense Task Force on Sexual Assault in the Military Services. Introduced by Rep. Niki Tsongas, D-Mass. (**Referred to the House Committee on Armed Services**)

#### **April 21, 2011**

**H.R.1383:** “Restoring GI Bill Fairness Act of 2011” to temporarily preserve higher rates for tuition and fees for programs of education at non-public institutions of higher learning pursued by individuals enrolled in the Post-9/11 Educational Assistance Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs before the enactment of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Improvements Act of 2010. Introduced by Rep. Jeff Miller, R-FL. (**Referred to the House Committee on Veterans` Affairs**)

**S. 745:** the senate version of this bill on April 6th as well. This bill will protect certain veterans who would otherwise be subject to a reduction in educational assistance benefits. Introduced by Sen. Schumer, D-NY. (**Referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans` Affairs**)

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**H.R. 1407:** the “Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2011” to increase, effective as of December 1, 2011, the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans. Introduced by Rep. Jon Runyan, R-N.J. (Referred to the House Committee on Veterans` Affairs)

**H.R.1570:** is a very important piece of legislation at this time of economic crisis. It`s a bill to provide a tax credit to employers for the value of the service not performed during the period employees are performing service as members of the Ready Reserve or the National Guard. Introduced by Rep. Bilirakis, R-FL. (Referred to House Committee on Ways and Means)

**April 29, 2011**

**S. 815:** a new bill last week to guarantee that military funerals are conducted with dignity and respect. AFSA, and the Military Coalition (TMC) see eye to eye on this. We have written letters of support to Congress in the hope our service members can come home and rest peacefully without the public media standing in their way. Introduced by Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine. (Referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans` Affairs)

#### **Other Issues of Interest**

**Shutdown Averted for Now--Congress Working on Details of FY 2011 Budget.** On Friday, April 8, the Obama Administration and congressional leaders reached a tentative budget deal that would reduce spending by \$38 billion for the remaining months of FY 2011—thus heading off a government shutdown. They also agreed to a one-week budget extension (to the end of this week) to work out the details of this funding agreement. House and Senate leaders will work to get the deal crafted this week before the short-term continuing resolution expires and Congress leaves Washington for its Spring Recess which is scheduled to run from April 18 to 29.

**PCSing Active Duty Families May Transfer TRICARE Prime by Phone.** According to the TRICARE Management Authority, “Active duty service members (ADSMs) and active duty family members (ADFMs) who are moving to a new location can now transfer their TRICARE Prime enrollment with a simple phone call. In most transfers, this means no more filling out enrollment forms. This new telephone option adds convenience for ADSMs and their families. Moving ADSMs simply call their current regional health care contractor to transfer their family’s enrollment, and include a cell number and email address. The new regional contractor will contact them within five business days after the relocation date to finalize their TRICARE transfer.”

To read more, go to: [www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/news.aspx?fid=702](http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/news.aspx?fid=702)

For more information on transferring TRICARE Prime enrollment, go to: [www.tricare.mil/moving](http://www.tricare.mil/moving)

**President Generally Outlines his Budget Deficit Reduction Approach.** Although he released his FY 2012 Budget Plan two months ago, in a speech delivered today at George Washington University President Obama generally outlined a further approach to budget deficit reduction. He does this greatly in response to a deficit reduction plan blueprint already offered by House Republicans which you can read about at:

<http://www.npr.org/2011/04/10/135275350/paul-ryans-2012-budget-good-bad-and-ugly>

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**Bill Would Restore Full Post-9/11 GI Bill Coverage.** As reported earlier, on April 6, House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., introduced H.R. 1383, the “Restoring GI Bill Fairness Act of 2011. This bill would ensure that students attending college under the new Post-9/11 GI Bill would have their full tuition covered, even if the cost exceeds the \$17,500 cap put in place under recent changes to the program. In a statement, Miller said he hopes to act on the legislation before the new changes go into effect, potentially costing some student veterans thousands of dollars. H.R.1383 would provide temporary relief for those veteran-students who were already enrolled in a private institution of higher learning before the “Post-9/11 GI Bill Veterans Educational Assistance Act” was signed into law on 4 January 2011 and created the new nationwide tuition limit. In December, Congress passed changes to the new GI Bill rules, including a flat rate of \$17,500 per year for tuition and fees for private and out-of-state public universities. That move will give many students thousands more in tuition funding. However, for students whose current tuition costs exceed \$17,500, the move could leave them deep in debt.

**A New Way To Serve Our Veterans.** Veterans dealing with symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can turn to their smart phones for help anytime with the PTSD Coach application created by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense. PTSD Coach lets users track their PTSD symptoms, links them with local sources of support, provides accurate information about PTSD, and teaches helpful individualized strategies for managing PTSD symptoms at any moment. The free PTSD Coach app is now available for download from the iTunes store and will be available for Android devices by the end of the spring. The application is one of the first in a series of jointly designed resources by the VA National Center for PTSD and the Defense Department's National Center for Telehealth and Technology to help Servicemembers, Veterans, their families and friends manage their readjustment challenges and get anonymous assistance. Given the current popularity of mobile devices, VA and the Defense Department hope to reach tens of thousands of Veterans, Servicemembers, and their family members with the new suite of apps.

Information on the PTSD Coach app is on the VA’s National Center for PTSD Website:

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/PTSDCoach.asp> <<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/pages/PTSDCoach.asp>>

**AFSA Member Benefits.** AFSA wireless center saves on phones and accessories at the AFSA Wireless Center. Shop and compare from a vast selection of carriers and products. You’ll get the same great rate from the carrier you choose, plus a better phone at a better price. Click HERE <<http://www.afsamobile.org/>> or call (866) 416-3060.

To view current status of present and past Bill`s from AFSA reports, use the website below:

<http://www.opencongress.org/>

...type in the Bill you are looking for in the search block or go to Bills (tab), to view House and Senate Bills