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"MOA-CV"

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Vets Leadership Coalition

{VT-MBA; MOACV; VT-ROA}

POC = Mr. Scott Lobdell

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ROA - Department of Vermont

Serving Vermont's "Reserve Community" since 1922

POC: VT-ROA
 % F. Gilman
 P.O. Box 611
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VT-MBA (Military Beneficiaries Association)

Serving Vermont's entire "Uniformed Services" Retiree Community since 1995

POC:
 VT-MBA
 % Bernie Roque
 P.O. Box 662
 Essex Junction, VT. 05453

\$10.00 annual VT-MBA dues may be submitted to the Treasurer anytime before the next annual meeting upcoming in October, 2015.

(see sheet of upcoming events - for event details)

VT-MBA Treasurer

c/o Bernie Roque

PO Box 662

Essex Junction, Vt. 05453

Vt-MBA Commander's update:

Vt-MBA has continued the legislative effort to exempt "Military Retirement" payments from Vermont State Income tax. Our representative on the GVAC (Vt. Governor's Advisory Committee), Scott Lobdell (who hails from the Rutland area), was recently appointed to the legislative sub-committee on the GVAC. The news from Essex Junction School is not good, as it appears their very successful Air Force-JROTC program will cease at school years end due to "Sequestration" driven budget cuts. Not for lack of interest by either the school and student body, or by the community, rather simply lack of funding. Also, one of UVM's Army ROTC satellite programs has ceased operation because of an instructor shortage, due to the same "Sequestration" budget cuts. Vt-MBA met with all three members of the Vermont legislative delegation in Apr (see legislative report) in an effort to save these programs, but, unfortunately, the "Sequestration" cuts remain in effect for this year, with even more draconian cuts upcoming to the DOD budget mandated for next year.

Curt Brown, Acting President, Vt-MBA

Vt-MBA Health Services Committee report:

Good news: the so-called "Doc-Fix" has finally been signed into law as of 16 April 2016. After several years of emergency/contingency funding Congress finally compromised and agreed on a settlement. This step was necessary to prevent significant cuts in reimbursement rates to Doctors for treating Medicare patients (hence, this is a fix for TriCare also - as TriCare rates are tied directly to Medicare reimbursement rates). The fear was that reduced reimbursement rates would cause most doctors to stop accepting Medicare/TriCare patients. That danger is now alleviated. TriCare continues more or less intact this year.

However, there has been a serious proposal floated to "privatize" Tricare, which would essentially do away with Tricare in its current form, and be replaced with commercial insurance plans similar to those available federal civilian employees. It remains to be seen whether or not the administration will succeed in these cut hopefully, Congress will stand fast, preserving essential features of Tricare as we now know it.

Mike Goldstein, Health Services Chair, VT-MBA

Legislative Committee report:

April was a busy month legislatively for VT-MBA. The "Doc-Fix", for which VT-MBA has lobbied for years finally was accomplished. VT-MBA had face to face meetings with key staffers of both Vermont Senators; & with both Congressman Peter Welch - and his Veteran's Legislative Aide - Kelly Allen, at his D.C. office. Meetings with the Senator's staff were with Steve Robertson (former American Legion National Lobbyist), representing Bernie Sanders, & Patrick Sherman, for Senator Leahy. While Congressman Welch promised to make inquires as to saving, or at least reinstating, Vermont's only AF-JROTC program (Essex Junction neither Sander's nor Leahy's staff felt that there was much point pushing for AF-JROTC in Vermont, unless and until Sequestration is ended by Congress. All three of Vermont's National Legislators state they are committed to preserving TriCare for the state's military population - and without excessive increases in co-pays and deductibles. Likewise, all three insist they are committed to relieving the cut driving excesses of "Sequestration", if not able to end it entirely; but all agree, "Sequestration" will likely continue to "run its course"

See below interesting story about locating downed WWII aircraft in the Pacific Theatre, specifically B-24's: For a related story with a Vermont connection, also about a missing aircrew and B-24 Liberator, named "The Big Stoop", see/read the recently published book entitled "Vanished".

Yes, the lead-investigator/diver leader (for aircraft remains located underwater) is a Vermonter & UVM graduate - in the 2013 book by W.S. Hylton ""Vanished-The 60 Year Search for the Missing Men of WWII". For, true to life, Eric B. Emery, now a recognized diver/searcher for MIAs, learned to dive in the waters of Vermont's own Lake Champlain- - - and much more... (however, you will have to read it yourself in "Vanished")

Returned at Last

More than 70 years after their plane was shot down, eight crew members of a World War II-era B-24 Liberator are honored with burial services at Arlington National Cemetery.

On April 10, 1944, a B-24 Liberator nicknamed "Hot Garters" took off from Nadzab airfield in New Guinea to attack a Japanese anti-aircraft site in Madang province. The plane was shot down by enemy fire, and its crew of 12 was lost. Four airmen parachuted from the plane and are believed to have died in captivity; the others were reported missing.

The Army Graves Registration Service recovered the remains of three of the airmen in 1949, but it wasn't until 2001 that a U.S.-led team located the wreckage of the lost bomber and, over a period of years, recovered and identified the others who went down with it.

Earlier this year, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency announced the identification of the crew members was complete and their remains had been returned to their families. A group service honoring the lost crew members was held March 18 at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

The recovered airmen are

- 1st Lt. William D. Bernier, Augusta, Mont.;
- 1st Lt. Bryant E. Poulsen, Salt Lake City;
- 1st Lt. Herbert V. Young Jr., Clarkdale, Ariz.;
- Tech Sgt. Charles L. Johnston, Pittsburgh;
- Tech Sgt. Hugh F. Moore, Elkton, Md.;
- Staff Sgt. John E. Copeland, Dearing, Kan.;
- Staff Sgt. Charles J. Jones, Athens, Ga.;
- and
- Sgt. Charles A. Gardner, San Francisco.

More than 83,000 American servicemembers around the world remain unaccounted for, including 73,000 from World War II, reports the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency.

Star-Studded Ship Retires

The carrier USS *Ranger* (CV-61) saw a lot of action over the years, including service during the Vietnam War, for which it received 13 Battle Stars, and Operation Desert Shield. Movie buffs might recognize the ship from its appearances in films such as *Top Gun*, *Flight of the Intruder*, and *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* and TV series such as *The Six Million Dollar Man*.

The Forrestal-class carrier was commissioned in 1957 and decommissioned in 1993. The Navy kept it in storage, and when efforts to turn the ship into a museum never materialized, it headed in March from Bremerton, Wash., to its final resting place — a scrap yard in Texas. **no**

— Don Vaughan, a North Carolina-based freelance writer, authors this monthly column.



Airmen conduct funeral honors in December 2014 for one of several recently identified World War II-era airmen who had gone missing.

2015 Report on Governor's Veterans Advisory Council

Legislative Initiatives

Greetings,

The CVAC has been reorganized this year. We now have an Executive Committee that meets regularly with the chairpersons of the Legislative, Education, and Outreach subcommittees. The entire GVAC will convene at least twice a year. Membership in GVAC has been expanded to 30 members. This expansion in membership will allow for more veteran representation than was available in the past. So far, I think the reorganization has been a positive action. Time will tell.

I was reappointed this summer to another two year term. I was also appointed to the Legislative Committee. Previously, I was on the Education Committee. Representation William Canfield is chair of this committee. We have discussed some initiatives that I think should receive some legislative attention:

A House bill that would require a discounted or free tuition through the Vermont State College System for members of Vermont Army/Air National Guard.

H – 147 A bill which calls for the removal of VA compensation from line/box 12 on the Vermont income tax return.

✓ H – 22 A bill that exempts the first \$5,000 of military retirement income from Vermont income tax.

H – 246 Unifies the definition of "Veteran" throughout Vermont statutes.

✓ H – 137 (not introduced through GVAC) calls for the exemption of all military pay from Vermont income tax.

In the past two years, I have learned a great deal about how the "real" legislative process works. The more veterans communicate with our Representatives and Senators, the more likely they are to listen to the issues. If there are concerns that the GVAC needs to address, please feel free to contact me: scott210@myfairpoint Home 802 – 468 – 2949.

Sincerely,

Scott Lobdell

GVAC Legislative Committee

Getting It Right

Amid calls for urgent action and ill-advised proposals, MOAA counsels against a rush to judgment. We must learn from past mistakes and ensure reforms support a strong all-volunteer force.



We hear the talk from some on Capitol Hill about the urgent need to reform military pay and benefits. It makes me more determined than ever to get this right for future generations. I'm worried both the president's 2016 budget proposal and retirement and health care proposals from the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC)* fail to adequately consider long-term effects on the all-volunteer force.

The 2016 budget is a rehash of last year's DoD proposal: caps on currently serving pay, reduction of the housing allowance, and cuts to commissary savings. History shows the Pentagon will cut until retention and readiness suffer.

Consider the impact: The president's budget will reduce the annual purchasing power of a sergeant (E-5) with 10 years in service, married with a family of four, by \$5,200. A captain (O-3) with similar time and family status stands to lose \$6,400 in purchasing power annually.

Like last year, it appears MOAA's Storming the Hill efforts will help fend off several of these ill-advised proposals. Although Congress might change the current retirement system, key congressional leaders have promised to critically analyze the MCRMC's proposals to ensure the future of the all-volunteer force is not jeopardized.

We support a portable 401(k) for service-members separating with less than 20 years of service but worry it might not entice the right troops to commit to a full career. Con-

gress and defense leaders need to add modifications to the current proposal that will retain the top mid-grade NCOs and officers we will need to defend our nation.

The MCRMC's retirement recommendations would be the most complex reforms in decades. Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger warned Congress 30 years ago they would "rue the day" they approved the REDUX retirement plan. It proved to be inadequate, compromised retention, and was repealed 10 years later.

Hopefully Congress and the administration will not rush to judgment, or it will be REDUX all over again. You can rest assured MOAA will continue to advocate for the nation to do the right thing.

Next January, I will transition from my position as president, in which I have been privileged to serve for more than 13 years. It is never easy to leave a position, a team, and a mission that you love, but it is time to make the change. MOAA has a tremendous staff and board of directors who will ensure my successor has the tools to continue the fight for our mission and our members. We have more to accomplish this year, so I assure you: I look forward to working with each of you for the remaining eight-plus months of my tenure and intend to make every day count and never stop serving!

— Vice Adm. Norbert R. Ryan Jr., USN (Ret)

online: Find MOAA's analysis of the MCRMC's proposals at www.moaa.org/mcrmc.

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Changes Coming to TRICARE Pharmacy Benefit

9/1/2015

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Starting October 1, 2015, a new law requires all TRICARE beneficiaries, except active duty service members, to get select brand name maintenance drugs through either TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery or from a military pharmacy. Beneficiaries who keep using a retail pharmacy for these drugs will have to pay the full cost.

Maintenance drugs are those you take regularly for a long time, such as drugs to control blood pressure or cholesterol. The law does not apply to drugs you take for a short time, like antibiotics, or generic drugs. Beneficiaries living overseas, or with other prescription drug coverage, are not affected.

The TRICARE pharmacy contractor, Express Scripts, is sending a letter to beneficiaries taking an affected drug, explaining their options. Beneficiaries can contact Express Scripts at 1-877-363-1303 to see if they are affected.

After October 1, beneficiaries still filling an affected drug at a retail pharmacy will receive another letter informing them of the change to the benefit. After that, beneficiaries have one final "courtesy" fill at a retail pharmacy. If they fill at a retail pharmacy again, they have to pay 100 percent of the cost of their medication.

TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery is a safe, convenient and low cost option to get maintenance drugs. You can get up to a 90-day supply, as opposed to a 30-day supply from a retail pharmacy. You save up to \$176 a year for every brand name drug you switch to Home Delivery. Military pharmacies offer up to a 90-day supply of drugs at zero copay, but not all drugs are available. You can check with your local military pharmacy to see if they carry your prescription.

For more information about this change to TRICARE's pharmacy benefit, visit www.tricare.mil/RxNewRules.

Last Updated 9/1/2015

Medical Leaders Sound Off

Surgeons general rebuke proposed health care changes.

In testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee March 25, the military's top medical officials said recommendations to privatize TRICARE would negatively affect military readiness.

One of the recommendations of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) is to eliminate TRICARE for military families and working-age retirees. TRICARE would be replaced with a selection of commercial insurance plans similar to those available for federal civilian employees.

Army Surgeon General Lt. Gen. Patricia Horoho said, "Our hospitals are our health readiness platforms, [and] this crucial link to readiness sets us apart from the civilian health system." Horoho emphasized comparisons between military medicine and civilian health programs represent some of the "biggest threats to the system" because of their drastically different purposes.

Permanent Doc Fix Passes

Legislation replaces flawed payment formula.

By a vote of 92-8, the Senate overwhelmingly approved legislation that permanently replaces the formula used to pay providers treating Medicare patients. The House passed its version of the bill by a vote of 392-27 before adjourning for recess.

Because TRICARE reimbursement rates are tied to Medicare's, this legislation affects TRICARE beneficiaries of all ages.

Providers technically had payments cut by 21 percent April 1, while Congress was in

recess. Since then, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services has relied on administrative lag times from when Medicare receives claims to when it actually makes payments to avoid imposing the pay cuts.

The legislation is part of an effort to move away from a fee-for-service payment model and shift toward a value-based payment system.

The fix changes the sustainable growth rate formula, a flawed legislative mechanism used to pay medical providers who see Medicare and TRICARE patients. The formula was designed to incentivize providers to control medical spending by rewarding physicians when the rate of spending on physician services fell below the growth in gross domestic product. However, medical inflation consistently outpaced overall inflation, leading to scheduled cuts.

Cuts to reimbursement rates led to many providers dropping TRICARE and Medicare patients. Fearing a dramatic disruption in access to care for millions of Americans, Congress prevented the cuts 17 times between 2003 and 2015. However, each time Congress delayed action, the amount of scheduled cuts and cost of a permanent fix grew.

Throughout it all, MOAA members sent nearly 1 million messages to their elected officials urging a permanent resolution.

A permanent deal helps sustain Medicare and TRICARE For Life benefits.

"MOAA members can be proud that they did their part to help millions of Americans keep their health providers," says Capt. Kathy Beasley, USN (Ret), a MOAA deputy director of Government Relations. "With over 1 million messages sent to Congress, one thing is certain, MOAA members represent a powerful voting bloc."

MOAA thanks Congress for coming up with a bipartisan solution to prevent cuts to reimbursement rates.