



“Our heroes are all around us. They’re our men and women in uniform who through a decade of war have earned their place among the greatest of generations.”

~ President Obama, at the Medal of Honor presentation to Sgt 1st Class Leroy Petry ~

WASHINGTON REPORT

Defense Appropriations

Last Friday the House passed, by a vote of 336 – 87, HR 2219 the Defense Department Appropriations Act, 2012. It was then delivered to the Senate on Monday the 11th for its consideration.

As you can imagine it is a huge bill to look through. So far your NAUS staff has not found any “surprises.” The bill contains the measures we have previously noted such as the 1.6 percent pay raise for active duty troops and the movement of over \$300 million in DoD medical funds, mostly TRICARE, to fund other medical research projects not related to combat or military medicine. Also there are no provisions to eliminate the SBP/DIC offset and the increase in TRICARE premiums and co-pays remain in place.

Army Ranger Awarded Medal of Honor

President Obama awarded Sgt. 1st Class Leroy Petry the Medal of Honor on Tuesday in an emotional ceremony at the White House. It’s the second time since the Vietnam War that a living service member was awarded the honor for an ongoing conflict.

Petry received the award for his action in combat in Paktia, Afghanistan, in May 2008. Petry was shot through both legs and lost his right hand after throwing aside a live grenade, saving the lives of fellow Army Rangers. **NAUS salutes Sgt. 1st Class Petry. Well done!**

Senator Burr Re-Thinking Funding

As we reported several weeks ago, the funding source for bill S. 277, the Caring for Camp Lejeune Veterans Act, could be the proposal by Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC), who introduced the bill, to combine all military exchange systems and the commissary system into one unit. The “supposed” savings would be used to fund the bill.

NAUS has learned, and it has been confirmed by Military Update columnist Tom Philpott, that Sen. Burr is taking another look at the funding source in light of massive negative reactions from most military and veterans groups.

We support S. 277 and hope that an alternate funding source can be identified so the bill can move forward and give the aid needed by the military members and their families who have been affected by the contaminated water sources at Camp Lejeune.

Debt Limit Negotiations Threaten Many Programs

Stars&Stripes Newspaper

For the second time this year, a budget showdown between the White House and Republicans in Congress threatens to halt military paychecks, veterans' benefits and base services, all while the wars overseas continue unabated.

Treasury officials have said that Congress must approve an extension in the federal debt limit by Aug. 2 or risk potentially crippling shortfalls in money available to cover government obligations.

The country hit the current debt ceiling of \$14.3 trillion in May, but creative bookkeeping and funding transfers have allowed federal operations to continue as leaders of the two political parties spar over how to move ahead.

White House officials have not outlined exactly which bills will go unpaid, but White House Press Secretary Jay Carney has repeatedly included military paychecks and veterans benefits in his list of threatened items.

Earlier this year, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said that a failure to reach an agreement will mean that "a broad range of government payments would have to be stopped, limited or delayed, including military salaries and retirement benefits."

But critics and outside experts remain skeptical that the White House will target military paychecks for cuts. Pamela Villarreal, senior fellow at the National Center for Policy Analysis, said officials will have some flexibility in deciding which bills to pay, "and a lot of what we're hearing right now is just political."

According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, a think tank in Washington, the government will have about \$173 billion in revenue for August. But it will also have nearly \$307 billion in payment obligations, leaving a massive shortfall of about \$134 billion.

Payments to cover Social Security benefits, Medicare and Medicaid, and debt owed on Treasury securities like bonds would total about \$128 billion, forcing the administration's hand on most of the fiscal decisions. Experts agree that defaulting on those obligations could have serious long-term effects on the country's credit rating and public reputation, potentially plunging the economy into an unprecedented financial nightmare.

That leaves about \$44 billion to cover more than \$178 billion in other bills. Villarreal notes that military paychecks for August will total \$2.9 billion, and veterans benefits roughly the same -- only a small fraction of the available cash.

“Nobody wants to disenfranchise the troops, so I think it’s highly unlikely we’ll see anything happen to military pay,” she said. “I think some of this talk is designed just to scare people.”

Still, the cuts will have to come from somewhere. If military and veterans payouts are protected, the Treasury might have to stop payments for unemployment benefits, defense vendor obligations or federal salaries. That last item, Villarreal said, would undoubtedly cause a partial government shutdown, similar to the situation threatened in April.

HEALTH CARE NEWS

Walgreens to Drop TRICARE

Walgreens pharmacy recently announced that it has broken off negotiations to renew a contract with TRICARE Retail Pharmacy’s contractor, Express Scripts, Inc.

Walgreens is the nation's largest retail drugstore chain, and the largest TRICARE network pharmacy. Walgreens will continue to fill prescriptions for TRICARE patients at least until January 1, 2012. At that point, if both sides are unable to come to an agreement TRICARE Pharmacy benefits will no longer be available at Walgreens.

Several years ago Walgreens and Express Scripts had a similar falling out in negotiations, but a compromise was reached in time for no harm to anyone filling prescriptions. NAUS will continue to watch this and hope that calmer times will return shortly and Walgreens and Express Scripts can come to an agreement.

TRICARE Standard

TRICARE Standard is a fee-for-service plan available worldwide to all eligible, non-active duty subscribers that is sometimes overlooked when deciding on which plan to join. If you are an active duty family member, retired military, survivor, qualified former spouse or Medal of Honor recipient, you qualify for TRICARE Standard.

TRICARE Standard enrollees have the freedom to choose any TRICARE-authorized provider, including those outside of the network. It is an ideal plan for families who are already receiving care from a non-network provider and do not want to change providers.

Although beneficiaries will incur a higher cost share, TRICARE Standard is a preferable option for people who want to pick from a larger provider pool. Non-network participating providers accept TRICARE’s allowable charge as payment in full for services rendered. But, non-network, non-participating providers do not accept the TRICARE allowable charge and can bill beneficiaries for anything over the allowable

charge. By law, beneficiaries are not held accountable for charges billed in excess of 15 percent above the TRICARE allowable charge.

TRICARE Standard is also helpful to subscribers who do not live in an area where TRICARE Prime is available. The best part is there is no sign up for TRICARE Standard. If the subscriber's information stays up-to-date in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) they do not have to enroll in TRICARE Standard. They are automatically covered under the plan. For more information on DEERS, go to this [website](#). Although beneficiaries do not need referrals to receive care under TRICARE Standard, some services may require prior authorization. Beneficiaries can receive care at a military treatment facility, but only on a space-available basis.

ACTIVE DUTY NEWS

Navy/Red Cross Call Center

The Navy and the American Red Cross (ARC) recently unveiled a new emergency call center located at the Red Cross San Diego headquarters. The ARC previously operated 18 different call centers across the United States to assist military members and dependents in case of emergency, but organization recently consolidated the call centers into one virtual call center with four locations. The other branches of the virtual call center are in Louisville, Ky., Fort Sill, Okla., and Springfield, Mass. The Red Cross is the only organization that has the authority for the validation and verification of emergencies within the armed forces.

Support Networks for Army Reserve Soldiers

Starting July 1, Army Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) Soldiers and their families began to tap into local military networks of support through the new IRR Affiliation Program. IRR Soldiers will be affiliated with Army Reserve units.

While several Army National Guard units will also participate in this initial program, the Guard intends to include all its units in the program later this year. No action is needed on the part of IRR Soldiers other than meeting their statutory and regulatory requirement of notifying U.S. Army Human Resources Command (HRC) of any changes to their contact information and personal status. HRC will notify each IRR Soldier of the unit to which he or she is being affiliated.

Free Admission to Museums This Summer

This summer, anyone serving on active duty will be given free access to more than 1,400 museums nationwide through the Blue Star Museums Program. The program runs to Labor Day. For a complete listing of Blue Star Museums nationwide, and information on eligibility, visit the Blue Star Museums [webpage](#).

Post 9/11 GI Bill Transferability

As you know, one of the NAUS legislative goals for the year was to have Post 9/11 GI Bill transferability to family members, extended to members of both the US Public

Health Service (USPHS) and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

NAUS received notice that the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel signed a memorandum on June 24 for USPHS. NAUS welcomes this development and hopes that another agreement can be worked out to allow NOAA members to transfer their benefits as well.

VETERANS NEWS

VA Electronic Health Records

The VA has begun the implementation of an open source computer programming community based on its electronic health record (EHR) by selecting The Informatics Applications Group (TIAG) to create the Custodial Agent that will serve as the community's central governing body. VA will contribute its current EHR, known as VistA (Veterans Integrated System Technology Architecture), to begin the open source effort. VA expects the initial Custodial Agent to launch in August and to commence full operation in the Fall. For more information, see the June 30, 2011 entry on the VA's [VAntage Point blog](#), and visit the Open Source EHR Custodial Agent [website](#).

Veterans' Caregivers Program Issues First Payments

The VA is sending out more than \$430,000 this month in stipend payments to nearly 200 family caregivers nationwide who were in the first group to complete their caregiver training under the Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers Program. Family caregivers will usually receive an average of \$1,600 in monthly stipend payments, but the initial payments will average \$2,500 because the first stipend checks are retroactive to the date of application." The stipend amount is based on the veteran's health condition and the amount of care he or she requires, as well as where the veteran resides.

NAUS NEWS

New RVP in Northeast Region

NAUS President Jack Klimp has selected Paul Dillon as the new Regional Vice President (RVP) for the Northeast Region. Paul has been a NAUS member for many years and is also Chapter President of Groton, Connecticut, Chapter CT-1. Paul is currently serving as an Advisor to the Board of Directors. He is a top NAUS recruiter and has always been an active member of NAUS. Paul joins Chuck Murphy, RVP Southwest, and Dennis Freytes, RVP Southeast, as our newest RVPs. President Klimp said he was very happy to fill the vacancies in the Regions and expects good things from our newest RVPs.

Florida Chapters Organizing

NAUS Southeast Regional Vice President Dennis Freytes is asking all NAUS members in Florida to help him start or reestablish a chapter. He would like all current Chapter

Presidents to call him at [407-298-1151](tel:407-298-1151) or [email him](#) and give your thoughts on revitalizing NAUS chapters in Florida. With over 9,000 NAUS members, Florida should be a NAUS stronghold and with your help, it will be.

Upper East Tennessee Chapter Meeting

Andy Higginbotham, Upper East Tennessee Chapter, TN-1, announced that the next chapter meeting will be on July 19, at 11:30 in the McGhee -Tyson ANG Base dining Facility, Bldg 420. The keynote speaker will be John Dyess, who is currently serving as one of two Army Reserve Ambassadors from Tennessee and is president of East Tennessee Military Affairs Council, headquartered in Knoxville. For his services in 2008, he was awarded the President's Volunteer Service Award. Come out and bring a friend and hear this excellent speaker. For more information or directions call Andy Higginbotham at [865-693-5343](tel:865-693-5343) or [email him](#).

Colorado Chapter, CO-1

Frank Whiteman reports that the chapter will have a table at the Buckley AFB Retiree Appreciation Day on July 23. Central Regional Vice President Tom Paolillo and his wife, Rosemary, will also be there. Frank and Tom invite all NAUS members to stop by and find out about the chapter activities.