



*The world is a very unstable place and likely will be so for a long time in the future."*

~ Defense Secretary Robert Gates ~

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## WASHINGTON REPORT

### **NDAAs for 2012**

On May 11, the House Armed Services Committee approved its version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 2012.

This legislation would provide \$553 billion for the Department of Defense base budget, \$119 billion for overseas contingency programs and additional money to support atomic energy defense programs at the Department of Energy for the next fiscal year.

Under other provisions of the bill (HR 1540), troops would see an across-the-board pay increase of 1.6 percent, equal to the amount recommended in the President's budget, and survivors would see an increase in the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) through 2021.

As you know NAUS has been working for years to eliminate the Survivor Benefit Plan offset by the amount of the VA Dependents Indemnity Compensation, which is currently \$1,154 dollars a month.

Several years ago Congress came up with a band-aid solution to give a minimal payment to those affected by the offset. The payment started at \$50 a month and is now up to \$70 a month and, under current law, would increase by \$10 a month until 2017 when it goes away entirely.

This year's HASC bill would increase SSIA even more and extend its life out to Oct. 1, 2021. Under the revised incremental growth plan, SSIA would be raised to \$163 by fiscal 2013, \$200 in 2014, \$215 in 2015, \$282 in 2016 and \$314 for fiscal 2017. These amounts could change in coming years.

In addition, the Committee also approved an amendment to require all four service chiefs to certify that the repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy won't hurt combat troops' ability to fight.

Due to a recent issuance of an official Navy Guidance to its chaplains about

administering homosexual marriage and the storm of protest that resulted, the Committee also approved a provision to prohibit use of military facilities for homosexual marriage ceremonies and barred Defense Department employees from conducting such ceremonies. The Navy has revoked the misguidance for “further review.”

### **TRICARE Enrollment Fee Increase Update**

While urging restraint against recommendations to reduce the \$1.1 billion in counterinsurgency aid to Pakistan, House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Chairman Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA) and Ranking Member Adam Smith (D-WA) demonstrated no similar hesitancy in asking certain military retirees to pay more for benefits earned through a career in uniformed service.

During mark-up of the House Committee’s version of the fiscal year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (HR 1540), the committee voted to allow the Pentagon to increase TRICARE Prime annually starting October 2012 at a level no greater than the rate of any yearly COLA in retirement pay. Also by not voting on the DoD proposal to increase TRICARE Prime fees by 13 percent, the committee gave tacit approval for that plan to proceed and increase payments on October 1, 2011.

An amendment offered by Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) to prohibit TRICARE rate increases was ruled out of order and left unconsidered on the cutting room floor.

The bill, HR 1540, is scheduled for consideration in the House during the week of May 23. The Senate is expected to begin development of its fiscal year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act in mid-June. Once completed, differences between the two versions will be sorted out in a House-Senate conference later this year.

The argument could be made by some and we think rightly so, that one portion of the retiree community, working age under age 65 will now have to pay more for their TRICARE and the additional funding is being used to pay the SSIA increase for survivors. NAUS believes in totally eliminating the SBP/DIC offset and not continuing to insult survivors by the token amounts being given back to them.

### **“Wilson Amendment #276” to Stop TRICARE Fee Increase, Ruled “Not In Order”**

In a marathon session, the House Armed Services Committee completed its markup of the fiscal year 2012 National Defense Authorization Act (HR 1540) early Thursday morning.

The Committee worked sequentially through each of the six subcommittee marks considering numerous amendments. Around 2:00 am, the Committee turned to issues in the Military Personnel Subcommittee.

A package of approximately 16 individual amendments, presented en bloc, found quick approval. It offered non-controversial programs on employment for Wounded Warriors, on sexual assault, training of returning servicemembers, and \$3 million to respond to

troubling suicide rates.

Then the Committee approved a second en bloc, containing 15 amendments dealing with PTSD studies, the Yellow ribbon program, Selective Service, autism, online school programs and related personnel issues.

Following an intense discussion on a scholarship program for special needs children and repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the Chairman announced the Armed Services Committee would begin consideration of "Wilson Amendment #276," an amendment offered by Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) to prohibit the Pentagon plan to raise TRICARE Prime fees.

But before the discussion, Chairman McKeon (R-CA) looked to Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) for comment and the Texas Republican did not disappoint.

Thornberry informed the Chairman and the Committee members that the Wilson amendment contained "mandatory" funds and as such would be subject to a "point of order" or objection on the House floor should it become part of the National Defense Authorization bill (HR 1540).

The Chairman, who had previously overwritten Wilson's legislative language to prohibit TRICARE increases next year with a stroke of a pen, heard Thornberry, sounded the gavel, and announced "Wilson Amendment #276" was "not in order." It would not be considered. And with the Amendment scuttled, the Committee moved on to the next issue without discussion, recorded vote or an uttered word about TRICARE fee increases.

How 'bout that for representative democracy. Despite debate and recorded votes on multiple-amendments, requiring more than 16 hours of process, the Committee took near-zero-time to dispatch military retiree interest in their most important non-cash earned benefit, health care.

### **HAC Begins Markup of Funding Bills**

While the HASC was in Committee markup, the House Appropriations Committee was also meeting and making its recommended allocations for spending for FY 2012.

In allocating resources from a budget of \$1.019 billion for fiscal year 2012, the Appropriations Committee proposed \$530 billion for Defense. The panel's allocation for Defense is \$8 billion below the amount requested in the President's budget and is \$23 billion below the amount in the draft authorization bill (HR 1540) approved this week by the House Armed Services Committee. Obviously compromises will have to be made. It promises to be a very interesting summer in Washington as NAUS works to improve quality of life provisions for those who serve and have served in the uniformed services.

The House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs

completes its draft fiscal 2012 spending bill today. Funding for the Subcommittee is likely to set at \$72.5 billion, \$615 million below last year's appropriation and \$1.2 billion less than the President's request. Within that allocation, veterans' discretionary funding would measure \$58 billion, slightly above current year funding but \$476 million below the President's request. Military Construction would be reduced \$2.6 billion to \$14 billion.

The bill also would increase spending for Arlington National Cemetery by \$700,000 for additional people to help improve cemetery management. The increases are partially offset by more than \$2 billion in savings from the BRAC process.

### **Slight Increase**

NAUS is confused at the terminology being used by various spokespeople for DoD and what some of the reporters are using when referring to the amount of increase in the TRICARE.

Most commonly we see the terms "slight increase" or "modest increase." What is DoD's definition of "slight?" Obviously it includes up to 13 percent, which is what the increase on TRICARE Prime enrollment fees is heading toward.

We question this because any measure of increase we can find is nowhere near 13 percent. Medical inflation, which DoD wants to base future increases on, is around 6 percent. There has been no COLA for two years with the CPI in negative territory.

A slight increase would be to immediately use the HASC proposal, which would link any future TRICARE cost increases to COLA as soon as possible to include FY 2012. Yet the HASC abrogated their responsibilities and said nothing about the DoD proposal, which opens the way for the increase to occur. With efforts by Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC), to restore the one-year moratorium on TRICARE increases being shutdown by parliamentary procedures, we wonder how far in advance this whole process has been scripted. We will be watching the full House debate on the bill (HR 1540), which is scheduled for the week of May 23. Meanwhile contact your elected officials and let them know how you feel about TRICARE increases for those who have earned the benefit by clicking [here](#).

## **HEALTH CARE NEWS**

### **TRICARE Relays FDA Warning**

The TRICARE Management Authority is relaying a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued warning about the use of over-the-counter (OTC) products containing benzocaine, a local anesthetic often given to babies that are teething. Benzocaine products, which come in the form of gels, sprays, liquids and lozenges, are also used to relieve pain in the mouth and gums from a variety of other conditions, like canker sores.

Benzocaine has been associated with a rare but serious condition called

methemoglobinemia, which reduces the amount of oxygen carried in the bloodstream and can result in death in the most severe cases.

Parents and caregivers should not use OTC benzocaine products on children under 2 years of age, except under the advice and supervision of a healthcare professional. If benzocaine products are used, it should be used sparingly and only when needed, but not more than four times a day.

If TRICARE beneficiaries or their children have any of these symptoms after receiving benzocaine, they should seek medical attention immediately. Report side effects or medication errors from the use of benzocaine to the FDA MedWatch program, call [1-800-332-1088](tel:1-800-332-1088) or fax 1-800-FDA-0178.

## **ACTIVE DUTY NEWS**

### **Gates Discusses Marine Corps Troop Levels**

Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told a group of Marines at Camp Lejeune Thursday he will fight to ensure their ranks don't suffer severe cuts when the conflict in Afghanistan winds down.

The "MarineCorpsTimes.com" reports Secretary Gates told the Marines, they can expect some reduction in numbers by 2015 or 2016, when the U.S. military role in Afghanistan is expected to diminish. "But I am determined that we will not repeat across-the-board cuts that will wind up hollowing out the Corps," as seen after Vietnam.

While good to hear the support, Gates has scheduled his departure from office in June. President Obama plans a drawdown of U.S. troops in Afghanistan in July. And Congress is scheduled to complete its work on future troop levels in October.

### **Help for Children During Deployments**

Making sure that children know that they can talk about their fears and worries when preparing for a deployment helps them prepare for stressful situations in the future. Children can learn from that open dialogue because it sets up a problem-solving model, says Dr. Kristy Hagar, a child psychologist. Children can pick up on their parent's emotions and stress, even when the parent is saying "everything is going to be fine," she said. For more information on helping children deal with deployments, contact your base Family Readiness Center, visit the [Military OneSource](#), and the [Sesame Street Talk, Listen, Connect webpage](#).

## **VETERANS NEWS**

### **Caregiver Training Agreement**

This week the VA and Easter Seals formally announced a partnership to provide comprehensive caregiver training to family caregivers of eligible post-9/11 veterans as authorized by the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010.

Starting May 11, family caregivers and veterans can apply for services authorized under a VA interim final rule that was published on May 5. Eligible family caregivers of eligible post-9/11 veterans will receive comprehensive training developed by Easter Seals in collaboration with VA clinical experts. It is part of a package of new services that also include a monthly stipend, mental health services and access to medical care under the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA), if the primary family caregiver is not entitled to care or services under a health plan contract.

Family caregivers of eligible post-9/11 veterans will have a choice of how to receive their training. Options will include traditional classroom training, online learning or a correspondence course. All family caregivers will be expected to complete training as part of the preparation to start receiving other services under the new program. The first training courses are expected to start in June, and monthly stipends, which are backdated to the day applications are formally submitted, could begin as early as July.

Veterans may download a copy of the Family Caregiver program application [here](#).

### **VA's Crisis Line for Veterans**

If you are finding that things after military service are more difficult than you planned for or if you know you are veteran in crisis or know of some else who is, please call the VA Crisis line

Dial 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and push '1' for veterans to speak with trained counselors. The line is open 24 hours every day. Use it for your well being.

### **Pets to Vets**

The organization P2V in Arlington, VA, pairs rescued companion animals with returning veterans. P2V has received many calls from veterans suffering from PTSD, TBI and other psychological stresses who are in need of a companion animal from a shelter. P2V will be expanding its services to the New York City, San Antonio and San Diego areas within the next two months. For more information, visit the [P2V website](#) or call P2V at (877) 311-4P2V (4728), extension 2.

## **NAUS NEWS**

### **New NAUS President Selected**

On Thursday, NAUS Board of Directors Co-Chair VADM Jim Zimble, MC, USN, (Ret) made the following announcement:

“As you know, our President, Bill Matz, is retiring this summer. While we are saddened to say goodbye to Bill, we are pleased to report to you that LtGen Jack W. Klimp, USMC (Ret) of Arlington, VA, has graciously accepted the Association's offer to be Bill's successor. General Klimp will report for duty on June 7<sup>th</sup>, and will be engaged in a short but intense two-week overlap period before Bill's final day at NAUS.

General Klimp is a 1968 graduate of the Naval Academy, served with distinction for 33 years as a Marine Corps officer, including Commanding General, Marine Corps Recruiting Command, and Deputy Commandant, Manpower and Reserve Affairs. Since retiring from active duty in 2001, he has held senior executive positions with several nonprofit organizations. We look forward to welcoming General Klimp aboard as our new President to continue the effective advocacy efforts of NAUS.”

### **NAUS on the Road**

Everett Naval Station: Veterans Benefits Advisor Mike Plumer will present a Legislative Update at the Everett Naval Station, WA, 2011 Military Retiree Seminar on May 21. The seminar starts at 8:00 a.m. at the base Commons Club. Come by and bring a friend to join.

Coast Guard Academy: NAUS Marketing Director Steve Hein, LCDR, USCG (Ret) a USCGA alum, along with Paul Dillon, MCPO, USN (Ret), President of the Groton, CT Chapter, will be presenting the annual NAUS Selfless Service Award to Cadet 1/c Andrew W. Corwell in a ceremony at the Academy on Tuesday, May 17<sup>th</sup>. Steve will also be speaking at the Chapter’s annual recruiter recognition luncheon on May 16<sup>th</sup>.

Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences: NAUS President Bill Matz, and Co-Chairman of the NAUS Board of Directors Jim Zimble, VADM, USN (Ret), a former President of the University, will be presenting the inaugural NAUS Selfless Service Award to Maj. Tina Betancourt, USAF, during an awards ceremony at the University’s Graduate School of Nursing on Monday, May 16<sup>th</sup>.

Not a NAUS Member yet? [Join online.](#)

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*Our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen stand in harm's way around the globe to defend our nation and our cherished liberties. NAUS asks you to please pray for their continued strength and protection—and pray as well for their families, who daily stand in support of their spouses, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters.*

**GODBLESSAMERICA**

[1-800-842-3451](tel:1-800-842-3451)