

UPDATE FOR SPOUSES AND SURVIVING SPOUSES - APRIL 2017

MOAA Conference - Matters of importance to Spouses and Surviving Spouses were high on the list of key subjects highlighted at MOAA's annual "Storming Week" conference this year. When the 150 or so leaders of the MOAA Councils from across our country met the week of April 3rd in Alexandria, two subjects were spotlighted and discussed: (1) Ending Sequestration and (2) Eliminating the SBP-DIC Offset. After attending sessions about the two, members of MOAA who attended the meeting and planning sessions boarded buses which took us (I was there, too) to both the House and the Senate buildings. We then proceeded to see our individual Senators and Representatives to inform them about the issues and to ask them to cosponsor H.R. 846 (Joe Wilson's Bill) and S. 339 (Bill Nelson's Bill)--and to vote for legislation to prevent new losses for military widows. Partial rebate (\$310 per month in SSIA) for those receiving SBP payments expires May of 2018. SBP (Survivor Benefit Plan) is automatic and is like a paid insurance plan. DIC (Dependency and Indemnity Compensation) is very different in intent; it is paid to survivors of service members who die of a service-connected disability (either on or after active duty). Right now DIC is still being subtracted from SBP each month for survivors entitled to both; a widow/widower cannot receive the full amount of both. Congress must act this year to prevent the SSIA (Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance) from expiring. That would increase the effect of the SBP-DIC offset. Of course, MOAA is recommending that Congress increase SSIA next year to decrease the effect of the offset. We'd really like to see payment of 100% of both SBP and DIC to eligible survivors! These are two totally different programs, and MOAA has many survivors who are entitled to both. Our Congress truly needs to fix this now!

We also asked our representatives and senators to vote to eliminate sequestration (i.e., cuts to the Federal budget across all departments) entirely for 2018; continuation of the concept would put our national security at risk and places unfair extra burdens on our troops and their families.

Visits to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) - The three long escalators from the street level at the Medical Center (Metro Red Line) station will be replaced one at a time and the station may be closed during certain service disruptions temporarily. The work for each escalator is estimated to take 38 weeks as progress can be made only when the station is closed to customers and the adjacent escalators are not in service. This project should take around 2.5 years to complete. The largely Federally funded BRAC-related project to install high-speed elevators and a pedestrian underpass (beneath Wisconsin Avenue - MD 355) also will cause intermittent traffic problems for outpatients, visitors, staff, and local residents. Work already has started in preparation for elevator installation. Harvey and I now are using the Jones Bridge Road entrance near Connecticut Avenue (MD 185) and USUHS (Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences) to access the Naval Support Activity Bethesda. It is easy to get to all parking areas on Base, including the hospital, with minimal traffic via that gate.

New Website for Department of Veterans Affairs VA - A new VA website for the Department for getting information and obtaining care at VA facilities should be available this month. Veterans will simply have to type in their address or where they want to get their care within the VA system--and the answers will pop up automatically. A map will be included. Also, Veterans will be allowed to rate their care at the facilities, as well as see how fellow Veterans have rated the facilities. (Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin announced this news to MOAA's Board of Directors, Council leaders, and guests on April 4th, the day before the actual "Storming of the Hill." He also shared his 10-point plan to modernize VA care. The specific address of the new website is expected to be available very soon.)

VA's Choice Program - The House and Senate already have passed legislation to allow many Veterans to get care outside the VA at government expense. Leaders at the MOAA conference expressed concern that this program be continued into the future. Secretary Shulkin promised to remove rules that prohibit Veterans from using a facility outside of the VA even if they live within 40 miles of a VA facility or have a projected wait time of under 30 days.

[National Healthcare Decisions Day](#) was celebrated on Tuesday, April 18th. Many military medical facilities conducted training related to Wills, Medical Powers of Attorney, and Advance Medical Directives. You may already have these important documents on file in paper form--in a safe place. I am writing to remind spouses of these key documents--and to urge you and your adult family members to complete them if you have not--and for everyone who needs access to them to know where they are kept. Amy O'Connor, of WRNMMC's Healthcare Resolutions Program, emphasized that "We want to encourage our patients and staff to do their advance care planning." MOAA members getting their primary medical care from a military hospital or clinic now can incorporate these documents into a patient's electronic file. [Military hospitals are rapidly moving away from paper records for most purposes.] It's currently possible to complete the document scanning at many military medical facilities, regardless of which military facility provides your primary care. For example, at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, relevant documents (those for potential use by medical personnel providing services to you) can be scanned into your electronic file in the Outpatient Medical Record Department, Building 3 (First Floor)--near the America Building parking garage entrance. You'll need to bring your Uniformed Services photo ID or retired military/USPHS/NOAA ID plus a legible photocopy of a paper document (e.g., an Advance Medical Directive) to leave with the staff for scanning. If you do not use Walter Reed and have another military medical facility closer to you, verify precisely where you'll need to bring your documents. Also, you can check with your VA facility or the Johns Hopkins site you use under TRICARE to see if they are prepared to accept these documents for scanning. Important Point: Medical Powers of Attorney and Advance Medical Directives are of no value unless they can be accessed by the medical personnel treating or assisting you when they need to refer to such information. Do check them to make certain they still are current!

[Capitol Hill Update](#) - *A Quick Look at New Bills in a New Congress*

- **H.R. 303** (Retired Pay Restoration Act) permits additional retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability to receive both disability compensation from the VA for their disability and either (1) retired pay by reason of their years in the military or (2) Combat-Related Special Compensation. This bill was introduced by Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL).

- **H.R. 333** (Disabled Veterans' Termination Act) permits retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability rated less than 50% to receive concurrent payment of both retired pay and veterans' disability compensation, and extends eligibility for concurrent receipt to Chapter 61 disability retirees with less than 20 years of service. This bill was introduced by Rep. Sanford Bishop (D-GA).

- **H.R. 578** (Military Residency Choice Act) amends the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to authorize spouses of servicemembers to elect to use the same residences as the servicemembers. This bill was introduced by Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA). The implications of this, if passed, are significant in regard to taxation of all types, voting in local elections by spouses, state benefits for which spouses may be eligible, etc.

I hope that you and your family had a lovely holiday and are looking forward to more beautiful spring-like days.

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