



# THE EAGLE



## THE MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF CHAPTERS

[www.pa-coc.org](http://www.pa-coc.org)

*STILL SERVING*



### NEWS AND VIEWS December 2014

#### PRESIDENT'S CORNER

December brings the year to a close and makes you wonder what is coming in the 2015. With both the state and federal legislatures being led by a Republican majority there is an assumption that something will get done. The concern in both the state and federal legislatures is will veterans and active, Guard and Reserve members be spared from further budget cuts and will efforts to introduce legislation to assist veterans and survivors be able to move to passage. More information on the state legislature will be available after their January 6<sup>th</sup> return and committee chairman are announced.

I would like to thank the Philadelphia Chapter for inviting me to speak at their December luncheon. I hope I was able to express the importance of being active in

contacting your legislators on veterans issues in the state and nationally.

Respectively,

Bob Gray

[www.pa-coc.org](http://www.pa-coc.org) .

#### COUNCIL 2015 MEETING DATES

Council meetings will be held at the Carlisle Country Club in Carlisle, near Carlisle Barracks, in the Harrisburg area on Saturdays at 11:30 AM. Legislative meetings will start at 11:00 AM for spring through fall meetings.

**January 17, April 25, July 25, and October 24.**

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## PENNSYLVANIA LEGISLATURE

**Bob Gray Legislative Chairman**

The Pennsylvania Legislature is solidly in control of the Republican majority in January 2015 and the swearing in of a Democratic Governor with some different ideas on how to run Pennsylvania. However, the senate leadership is changing from the moderates to the conservatives, with Senator Scarnati of Indiana County remaining the President Pro Temporal, Senator Corman of Center County becoming the majority leader (determines which bills will move in the Senate) and Senior White from Northampton County becoming the Appropriations Committee chairman. Why that might be a reason for concern to veterans and the over 65 populations is the pay day lending bills they have sponsored in the last two years. Senator White sponsored SB 975 to legalize 300 percent two week pay day loans in 2013 and Senator Corman had put out a sponsorship letter for a possible bill on pay day lending late July 2014 that didn't get introduced due to pressure from veterans groups and AARP. In late October Senator Corman introduced a resolution to conduct a study on the need for short term loans and the best way to provide them to Pennsylvanians. The language in the proposed study was reviewed by consumer attorneys working with the Stop Pay Day Loans in PA Coalition and

found that all of the information and guidance in the resolution would lead to the study favoring pay day lending as the best answer. The Coalition notified its MOAA partners who contacted the PA War Veterans Council secretary to schedule a briefing to the 17 veteran's organizations that comprise the War Veterans Council at the October 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting. After being briefed on the pro pay day lending study the War Council voted to oppose passage of the resolution. A letter was jointly drafted and sent to all of the legislators in both the House and Senate. Then on Monday veterans and other coalition members personally delivered the letter to each Senate office. They continued to visit Senator's offices on Tuesday morning prior to the Banking and Insurance Committee vote. Representatives from the major veterans groups joined MOAA for a show of force in the hearing room. Once the Senators entered the room and sat down, Senator Pat Vance turned to MOAA Rep Keith Beebe and American Legion Secretary Kit Watson and said "it's finished". The committee did not have enough yes votes to pass the study so it died in committee without coming to a vote. It was assumed then that the battle wasn't over but now the legislators behind the bills are in leadership positions to move the bills. The Governor elect is not in favor of pay day lending and would hopefully veto any passed legislation. There are allot more pressing issues for the legislature to work on come January but there have been pressing issues before when they have introduced pay day lending bills. We

will remain vigilant to stop any future attempts to legalize pay day lending.

Veteran's legislation that was not passed by the end of the legislative session in 2013 may be reintroduced in January. Some of those bills need to be revised and hopefully the War Veterans Council Legislative Committee will be able to make suggestions to improve them. MOAA is still a member of the War Veteran's Council Legislative Committee. The Committee is working to determine the real needs of the state's veterans and advising legislators on areas where legislation can help veterans. In some cases it may only require making policy changes in a department or an executive order by the governor to accomplish a goal. We are trying to educate legislators that legislation is a last resort to remedy a problem.

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## Federal Legislation

### SPENDING BILL INCLUDES MAJOR WIN

December 12, 2014 MOAA Legislative Update

In a bit of high tension on Thursday night, the House of Representatives narrowly avoided derailing a \$1 trillion funding measure to keep the government open. With only hours before the government was set to shut down, Congressional leaders cleared a major hurdle before finalizing the agreement.

Part continuing resolution (CR) and part omnibus appropriation bill, the funding measure has been dubbed a "cromnibus" by Washington insiders.

The CR will keep the government running for a few days while Congress finishes an omnibus appropriations package funding 11 out of 12 federal agencies until October 1, 2015.

In a major win, the omnibus proposal includes two year advanced appropriations for VA benefit programs through FY 2016. These accounts include VA compensation and pensions, readjustment benefits such as the GI bill, and insurance and indemnities for survivors.

This comes in addition to advance funding for VA health care, which MOAA helped secure in FY 2010.

The VA advanced appropriation effort was championed by Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), who worked closely with MOAA and other service groups on the measure. The provision will ensure veterans and survivors benefit checks would continue in the event of a future government shutdown, and allow important VA research programs to continue unhindered by annual budget negotiations.

With House passage late Thursday, the bill is expected to clear the Senate in the next few days.

The measure includes \$554 billion for DoD, slightly less than what President Obama originally requested.

In another win for the military community the deal protects the commissary benefit. It restores \$90 out of the \$100 million in commissary funding originally cut by the defense authorization bill. This will help commissaries maintain adequate staff levels and operating hours.

Failure to pass a funding measure would have resulted in another short term CR, or worse, a government shutdown. CRs significantly reduce the ability of the services to provide necessary training, and place considerable stress and uncertainty on the active duty force.

On the budget deal, MOAA's Director of Government Relations, Col. Mike Hayden, USAF (Ret) praised the inclusion of VA advanced appropriations, "We applaud Congress and especially Senator Mikulski for looking out for the best interests of our [http://www.moaa.org/Main\\_Menu/Take\\_Action/Top\\_Issues/Retired\\_Still\\_Working/Veterans\\_Issues/Spending\\_Bill\\_Includes\\_Major\\_Win.html#sthash.9r3IU9lq.dpuf](http://www.moaa.org/Main_Menu/Take_Action/Top_Issues/Retired_Still_Working/Veterans_Issues/Spending_Bill_Includes_Major_Win.html#sthash.9r3IU9lq.dpuf)

## VADM Ryan's Wall Street Journal Op-ed

<http://on.wsj.com/1BfQABY>

### Opinion

#### Blunt-Force Military Cuts Need Revisiting

Making benefits a target, not wasteful acquisition programs, is unfair to those who serve.

By Norbert R. Ryan Jr.

With new congressional leadership stepping into key defense oversight committees and subcommittees, this is the right time for Congress to address budget sequestration and its effects on military personnel. Balancing the nation's budget on the backs of those in the uniformed services is unacceptable.

The National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal 2015, signed into law by President Obama on Dec. 19, caps military pay, cuts military housing allowances, and disproportionately shifts military health-care costs to beneficiaries. Meanwhile, the Defense Department has proposed still more cuts for fiscal 2016 and beyond.

Such measures are terribly shortsighted. From 2000 to 2010, Congress worked hard to restore the pay and benefits of military personnel, closing a 13.5% private-sector pay gap, eliminating out-of-pocket housing

nation's veterans. VA advanced appropriations will ensure veterans' health care and compensation programs are not held hostage by future partisan budget debates." - See more at:

expenses, and re-establishing health care for retired military personnel.

Yet even after these needed reforms the numbers show that military pay and benefits are far from being unsustainable and are essential to retaining a capable, dedicated force. Moreover, since 2011 the growth in military pay and benefits has declined by an average of 1.5% a year.

Congress has already authorized several changes to curb personnel costs in recent years. First, cuts of more than 100,000 active-duty troops will dramatically lower personnel costs. Pay-raise caps will further reduce costs.

Second, Congress has implemented several reforms to the military health-care system. Most of these cost savings have come at the expense of those who serve.

Military retirees have seen their Tricare enrollment and pharmacy fees increase over the past three years, bending the health-care cost curve. They have absorbed a 13% increase in Tricare Prime enrollment fees in fiscal 2012, felt the sting of significant pharmacy copayment increases in fiscal 2013 and fiscal 2015, and will soon be forced to refill all maintenance medications through mail order or at military treatment facilities.

Retirees will continue to pay higher fees each year as future increases are tied to annual cost-of-living adjustments.

Finally, the Pentagon forced many beneficiaries from Tricare Prime into the cheaper Tricare Standard alternative, which provides fewer benefits. The Pentagon also created the Defense Health Agency to consolidate health-care oversight. The Defense Department

estimates that these changes could yield \$2.9 billion in savings over six years.

The organization I head, the Military Officers Association of America, is asking Congress to sustain, not erode, the pay and benefits needed to recruit and retain a high-quality all-volunteer force—one that has shouldered the burden of security for this nation and that has given so much over the past 13 years of war.

We recognize that the Pentagon is in a difficult position, attempting to balance the readiness and personnel costs required to sustain the all-volunteer force amid the blunt-force cuts of budget sequestration. But the Pentagon's proposed solutions take a myopic approach by cutting needed people programs to solve budget woes. Continuing down this path will threaten the viability of an all-volunteer force, the bedrock of national defense.

Instead, Congress should take a critical look at waste in the Pentagon's acquisition programs. In 2013 alone, the Government Accountability Office reported that the Pentagon's top 85 major defense-acquisition programs experienced overruns of nearly \$411 billion. Reporter Andrew Tilghman of the Military Times observed that this amount in itself is almost enough to cover the entire cost of sequestration for the Defense Department.

The Ford-class aircraft carrier has seen cost overruns of \$2 billion. The price tag of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter has topped out at \$1.5 trillion and is now \$160 billion over budget. Raiding military health-care plans for \$2.6 billion in savings over six years suggests that Congress is looking in the wrong places to rein in spending.

Insisting, as some observers in and out of the military do, that weapons systems must be

immune to cutbacks inevitably means that the money must be taken out of personnel. That's akin to forcing soldiers to pay for their own bullets.

America's national security than protecting the one weapon system that has never failed—the men and women of the uniformed services.

Mr. Ryan, a retired U.S. Navy vice admiral, is president of the Military Officers Association of America.

## December 13<sup>th</sup> was Wreaths Across America Day



Photo from Wreaths Across America

Remembering those that served and educating the youth about the sacrifice of those that went before them to keep America free.

# CHAPTERS

## New Opportunities for Auxiliary Members

By Kathy Prout, vice chair, MOAA Auxiliary Member Advisory Committee

MOAA's auxiliary members are the survivors of deceased MOAA members or the survivors of deceased individuals who, if living, would be eligible for MOAA membership. As of a vote by MOAA members in August 2012, auxiliary members now have voting rights.

This year, for the first time, an auxiliary member will hold an elected position on the MOAA board of directors for a six-year term of office. His or her job will be to act as a spokesperson for all auxiliary members and to represent the interests and issues of surviving spouses on the board.

Auxiliary members also are eligible for leadership roles in councils and chapters. Some chapters already have begun using the talents of their auxiliary members on their boards, not just as auxiliary liaisons but also as chapter presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, newsletter editors, and more.

Auxiliary members add value to chapters and councils. As military spouses, they have many experiences unique to the military lifestyle. They have left their hometowns and established new homes at every duty station, moved often and usually alone, and served the role of single parents

during deployments before Skype and email existed. In addition, they have been chauffeurs, team parents, scout leaders, PTA officers and members, event planners, hosts, fundraisers for military officers' spouses' clubs and other organizations, and committee chairs — sometimes all while holding jobs of their own. Auxiliary members can be sources of untapped talent.

Auxiliary members should consider volunteering for leadership positions within local chapters, and chapter leaders should consider inviting their auxiliary members to participate in their chapters. Chapters with active auxiliary members tend to be more successful. Think about including your auxiliary members when considering new board positions. They will increase your official chapter membership while providing new ideas and leadership opportunities for your chapter or council.

- See more at:

[http://www.moaa.org/main\\_article.aspx?id=14910#sthash.J9ByQ8NT.dpuf](http://www.moaa.org/main_article.aspx?id=14910#sthash.J9ByQ8NT.dpuf)





# VOICES FOR AMERICA'S TROOPS

Voices for America's Troops (Voices) is a 501(c)(4) nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization whose purpose is to support a strong national defense and sustain a top-quality all-volunteer force by ensuring fair treatment of all who serve in uniform – past, present and future – and their families and survivors.

Voices is a subsidiary of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) — the largest military officers organization and the fourth-largest veterans association. MOAA has been recognized by *The Hill* (the largest-circulation newspaper on Capitol Hill) for six years in a row as the “Top Lobbyist” on behalf of the military and veterans’ communities.

The primary purpose of *Voices* is to educate the public on legislative and policy challenges affecting the military and veterans community and to seek the broadest possible base of grass-roots advocacy to support the needs of those who serve and sacrifice – or have served and sacrificed – in hot and cold wars around the globe.

America's Troops are the only military weapons system that has never let our country down. *Voices* is dedicated to ensuring America continues to provide them the same level of reciprocal support and commitment

that they have consistently demonstrated for America. Lend your support to *Voices*, today. Membership in *Voices* is open to members of the public, age 18 or older, who share our interest in maintaining a strong national defense and sustaining essential support systems for our military members, families and survivors.

Membership in *Voices* costs \$14 a year. Or, join *Voices* as a Premium Member and get 3 years of membership for \$30 — that's just \$10 a year. *Voices* is an electronic membership with access to the Officer magazine and offers benefits.

Stay up to date on [current events](#) affecting legislation. [Write your Congressional representatives](#) and ask them to protect our military. Legislative advocacy plays a key role in addressing the vital needs of the military community. Check out the VOICES web site to learn more and tell your friends. *Voices* members can be invited to chapter functions as guests.

Check out the web site:

<http://www.voicesfortroops.org>

*Voices* members could not be MOAA chapter members unless they meet MOAA membership requirements but chapters could invite them to attend chapter meetings and invite them to become involved in your community projects. There is not a membership list for *Voices* but you can recruit those you know to become members and work with the chapter on legislative actions.



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## *GLORIOUS INSULTS*

"I feel so miserable without you; it's almost like having you here." - Stephen Bishop



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### **PA COUNCIL OFFICERS 2014-2015 Term**

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PA MOAA chapters have 1,894 members and another 10,591 MOAA national members live in PA and are not in chapters. That means our total PA membership is 12,485 and climbing. Thank you for staying involved!

*The Eagle* is published monthly by the Pennsylvania Council of Chapters, Military Officers Association of America. Its content does not reflect the official position of the DoD, any branch of the US Armed Forces, NOAA, USPHS, nor MOAA National. Please send articles and audio-visual submissions to the Editor, Bob Gray, at [pacocnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:pacocnewsletter@gmail.com).