





THE MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF CHAPTERS

www.pa-coc.org









NEWS AND VIEWS June 2015

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

June turned out to be a busy month at the capitol for the MOAA PA Council lobby team. In early June Senator John Yudichack released a co-sponsorship memorandum to introduce a bill that looked like a payday lending bill in sheep's clothing. The Stop Payday Lending in PA Coalition spotted it and alerted its members, including MOAA. Special thanks to lobby team member Nate Kline, from the Lehigh Valley Chapter, for his continued support against payday lending. I cover this later in the newsletter. Then on June 10th the Council legislative team participated in Veterans Day at the Capitol that brought attention to veterans and their organizations. See the article and photos on the next page.

Members of the Legislative Team hit the halls again in the Senate later in the month in a successful effort to move SB 652 out of the Senate Finance Committee, which happened on June 26th. The bill will restore the local tax exemption for active duty pay earned in the state. This will benefit both active and reserve soldiers. Another area that I have become involved in is working with the state AARP office in looking at legislation for veterans over the age of 65, which is 68 percent of Pennsylvania's 900,000 veterans. I have been attending committee hearings for the Aging and Adult Services Committee to learn more about pending legislation and how it would help older veterans.

Respectfully,

Bob Gray

Visit the Council web site: www.pa-coc.org.

COUNCIL 2015 MEETING DATES

Council meetings will be held at the Carlisle Country Club in Carlisle, near Carlisle Barracks, south of Harrisburg off I-81 on Saturdays at 11:00 AM. Legislative meetings will start at 10:00 AM for spring through fall meetings.

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

MOAA Director of Council and Chapter Affairs, COL Barry Wright USA Ret. will attend the July 25th council meeting for our three year visit. All MOAA members are welcome to attend this and any meeting.

Veteran's Day at the Capitol - June 10th

Bob Gray Legislative Chairman



Bill Harris, Bob Gray and Keith Beebe man the table during Veteran's Day at the Capitol

The PA Department of Veterans Affairs coordinated a legislative breakfast, paid for by the PA War Veterans Council, to include a ceremony at 8:00 am with key speakers. It was the largest turn out of legislators at any recent legislative breakfast.



All of Pennsylvania's veteran's groups set up a table and talked to legislators and the public to educate them on what they do for veterans and our work at the capitol. Members of the MOAA Council lobby team took turns manning the table for the four hour tour.



Wanted posters were displayed compliments of the PA Attorney General's office warning veterans that they do not have to pay someone to apply for their VA benefits.



PENNSYLVNAIA LEGISLATURE

Bob Gray Legislative Chairman

In May the full Senate voted to confirm MG James Joseph as the 52nd Adjutant General of

Pennsylvania. He has testified to support his budget and requested an increase in the Veterans Affairs budget to better support existing programs for veterans. He was able to obtain an increase in staffing to catch up on the backlog of applications for the Disabled Veterans Property Tax Exemption for severely disabled veterans. The backlog should be eliminated in the next few months and then will be able to keep up with current applications.

Payday Lending Lurking at the Capitol

Bob Gray Legislative Chairman

In June a co-sponsorship memo was released by Senator Yudichack describing proposed legislation that looked like another attempt to bring payday lending to the halls of the capitol. The co-sponorship memorandum was spotted by a leader of the Stop Payday Lending in PA Coalition who alerted all of its members, including MOAA. A plan was developed to put together a one page flyer against payday lending and reference Senator Yudicack's memorandum. Members of the Coalition went to the capitol on a Tuesday and delivered the flyer to every senator's office. On Wednesday the MOAA lobbying team meet with a fellow veteran and AARP advocate to take a MOAA PA Council one page letter against payday lending to every senator's office telling them that we oppose any payday lending bill and that the PA War Veterans Council goals lists opposing any change to the small dollar loan laws in the state. All of the senators we spoke to are against any payday lending bill. We will keep vigil in case they actually introduce the bill in future months.

Bills of Interest

HB 601 Veterans Lottery Ticket

Rep Barrar introduced his bill for the veteran lottery ticket. HB 601 for Veterans Day Care funding. There is opposition from the Committee on Aging and Adult services because it would cut into lottery money for existing programs for the elderly. The bill was assigned to the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committee. **Status:** This bill is not moving. A joint committee hearing is still in the works with the budget taking priority now. PA veterans age 65 and older are now 68 percent of the state's 900,000 veterans.

http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/bill1 nfo.cfm?sYear=2015&sInd=0&body=h&type=b &bn=601

HB 131 An act conferring limited residency status on military personnel, their dependants and civilian personnel assigned to a active duty station in Pennsylvania. (1 July 2015 VA law requires states to only charge In-state tuition rates to veterans attending state sponsored schools. Rep. Steven Barrar. Passed the House Feb. 3rd, in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. Status: <u>The bill was passed by</u> the Senate on June 25th and signed by the Governor on June 29th, now Act 11.

HB 157 Requires state agencies to allow returning veterans that held a state issued license to be able to renew that license as though they has not been away. It also requires state agencies to look at military training and experience to meet license requirements. Rep. Doyle Heffley. Passed the House Feb. 4th and is in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. **Status:** <u>The</u> bill was passed in the Senate June 30th and sent to the governor.

SB 42 Penalties for falsely claiming you are a veteran. Senator Lisa Baker. The bill passed in the Senate. It was assigned to the House Transportation Committee March 6th. **Status:** The bill was passed in the House June 25th and sent to the Governor June 29th.

SB 23 Provides special license plate for WWII, Korea & Vietnam veterans. Senator Greenleaf. The bill was assigned to the Transportation Committee Jan. 14th. **Status:** The bill is still in committee.

SB 284 Senator Baker introduced a bill amending Title 75 (Vehicles) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, further providing for special motorcycle plates for veterans. Status: <u>Passed by the legislature</u> <u>and sent to the governor June 29th.</u> SB 285 Senator Baker also introduced this bill to direct the fee from the motorcycle license plate to go to the Veterans Trust Fund to assist other veterans. Status: <u>Passed by the</u> <u>legislature and sent to the governor.</u>



Federal Bills of Interest

Several important veterans' bills have been introduced in the 114th Congress. Click on the bill numbers below to send your legislators a MOAA-suggested message in support. Updated June 30.

H.R. 333 and S. 271: Full concurrent

receipt. MOAA's ultimate concurrent receipt bills. These bills authorize full concurrent receipt for retirees with a service-connected disability rated less than 50 percent, including Chapter 61 disability retirees with less than 20 years of service.

Status: Both bills are still in committee. <u>**H.R. 303:**</u> Concurrent receipt. This bill authorizes full concurrent receipt of military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation for retirees with regular or Guard/Reserve retirements, regardless of disability rating. **Status:** June 24th, Armed <u>Services Subcommittee hearing held.</u>

H.R. 969 and S. 681: Blue water Navy

veterans. This bill authorizes potential veterans' benefits to Navy veterans who served onboard ships in the territorial waters of Vietnam, facing possible exposure to Agent Orange.

Status: <u>HR 969 March 6 referred to</u> <u>Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and</u> <u>Memorial Affairs. S. 681 Committee on</u> <u>Veterans Affairs hearing held May 13th.</u> H.R. 216: Develop a long-term veterans strategy. This bill requires the Secretary of the VA to establish a Chief Strategy Office to advise the Secretary on long-range VA planning. Status: <u>Referred to the Committee</u> on Veterans Affairs on March 25th. (no change)

S. 172: Access to appropriate

immunizations. This bill establishes quality measures and metrics to ensure veterans receive immunizations at appropriate times as set forth by the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS). Status: <u>Veterans Affairs committee hearing held June 3rd.</u>

S. 170 and H.R. 218: CHAMPVA

children's protection. This bill increases the maximum age for children eligible for medical care under the CHAMPVA program to age 26, similar to other TRICARE and insurance provided under the Affordable Care Act. Status: <u>S. 170 Referred to Veterans Affairs</u> <u>Committee January 13th, no change.</u> <u>HR 218: February 6th referred to</u> <u>Subcommittee on Health, no change</u>

S. 210: Military spouse job

continuity. This bill provides a \$500 tax credit to military spouses who must pursue new licensing or certification in a different state due to their servicemember's military ordered relocation. Status<u>: January 21st</u> <u>referred to Senate Finance Committee, no</u> <u>change.</u>

- See more at:

http://www.moaa.org/Main Menu/Take Actio n/Top Issues/Retired Still Working/Benefits/ Bills_of_Interest.html#sthash.vzQrTBXV.dpuf

H.R.1384 Honor America's Guard-Reserve Retirees Act

Introduced in House (03/16/2015) Honors as a veteran any person who is entitled to retired pay for nonregular (reserve) service or who, but for age, would be so entitled. It provides that such person shall not be entitled to any benefit by reason of such recognition. Status: <u>March 16th assigned to House</u> <u>Veterans Affairs Committee, no change.</u>

Click on the link: http://www.military.com/benefits/2013/02/07/r eserve-retirees-may-soon-get-veteranstatus.html

The Affordable Care Act, your Taxes and You

Defense Finance and Accounting Service Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), all Americans including all military members (active duty, retired, Selected Reserve, or Retired Reserve) and their eligible family members must have health care coverage that meets a minimum standard called minimum essential coverage or pay a fee. Your TRICARE coverage meets the minimum essential coverage requirement under the ACA.

"The term "active duty" means full-time duty in the active service of a uniformed service for more than 30 consecutive days".

Beginning in January 2016, DFAS will be providing IRS Form 1095-C to all U.S. military members, and IRS Form 1095-B to all Retirees, Annuitants, former spouses and all other individuals having TRICARE coverage during all or any portion of tax year 2015. An IRS Form 1095 documents you (and your family members, if applicable) have the minimum essential coverage. More information will be forthcoming about the delivery method of these forms.

These forms will document the information that DFAS will provide to the IRS on yourself and your authorized family members. The forms will be required to be reported with your 2015 federal tax return. DFAS will provide you with IRS Form 1095 series forms no later than Jan. 31, 2016

You can find more information about the impact of the Affordable Care Act on your federal income tax

at:<u>http://www.irs.gov/Affordable-Care-Act</u>, or <u>http://www.dfas.mil/taxes/aca.html</u>.

You can act now to make sure your forms remain secure once they are available using myPay. Just look for the link to "Turn On/Off Hard Coy of IRS Form 1095" in your account and select Electronic Delivery Only. Your information will remain safe until you need it.

Please do not respond to this message. Replies to this message are routed to an unmonitored mailbox.

Data Breach Notifications Sent

MOAA Weekly Legislative Update June 26, 2015

A cyberattack on the Office of Personnel Management exposed sensitive information of millions of Americans.

It is currently unclear exactly how many are affected by the data breach; some reports speculate as many as 32 million people have been victimized by the attack. So far, officials at OPM have confirmed at least 4 million government workers had their personal information compromised.

The ongoing investigation has revealed military records were not involved in the breach; however, the personnel records of current, former, and prospective federal employees' and some contractors' background investigations may have been compromised.

OPM's investigation continues with the help of the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

OPM is offering free credit-monitoring services, similar to <u>MOAA's Identity Guard</u>, to affected employees. So far, the services have cost the government \$20 million. DoD is the largest federal employer of military veterans. About forty percent of all DoD civilians are veterans.

MOAA remains very concerned over the OPM data breach. "It's not only a violation of federal employee information," said MOAA's Director of Government Relations, Col. Mike Hayden, USAF (Ret), "but also an incursion into the privacy of many of our members who transitioned to the federal workforce."

We appeal to Congress and the administration to complete a thorough investigation and implement actions to prevent further breaches.

- See more at:

http://www.moaa.org/Main Menu/Take Actio n/Top Issues/Retired Still Working/Veterans Issues/Data Breach Notifications_Sent.html #sthash.Bo2MzBzy.dpuf

Supreme Court Rules on Health Care

MOAA Weekly Legislative Update June 26, 2015

In a 6-3 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the Affordable Care Act (ACA) can continue to provide subsidies for health insurance to qualifying individuals. The decision upheld a centerpiece of the ACA and national health care reform.

The issue before the Court was whether individuals purchasing health care insurance through federally run exchange systems, rather than state run exchanges, are eligible to receive subsidies. Thirty-four states currently rely on the federal marketplace for health insurance plans.

TRICARE beneficiaries are unaffected by the decision. At the urging of MOAA and other military and veterans organizations, Congress passed the TRICARE Affirmation Act in April 2010, providing a statutory regulation saying that TRICARE satisfies the minimum essential coverage requirements of the ACA. Congress passed subsequent legislation a month later to exempt VA and CHAMPVA beneficiaries from the coverage requirements. These plans are also excluded from so-called "Cadillac taxes" on high-value plans.

Importantly, the ACA will not affect TRICARE or the VA's health administration, eligibility, or cost to beneficiaries.

MOAA's focus remains on safeguarding military and VA beneficiaries' health care benefits, protecting against taxation of those benefits, improving access to providers, and ensuring long-term sustainability of Medicare and TRICARE. Our mission is to make sure government leaders in both the executive and legislative branches understand the important distinction between social insurance programs like Medicare and Social Security and earned compensation for a career of military service and sacrifice.

MOAA will continue to track the ACA and ensure that military and VA beneficiaries are not negatively impacted.

- See more at:

http://www.moaa.org/Main Menu/Take Actio n/Top Issues/Serving in Uniform/Health Car e/Supreme Court Rules on_Health_Care.ht ml#sthash.SU5ZeCNs.dpuf

Budget Shortfall Threatens Veterans Health Care

MOAA Weekly Legislative Update June 26, 2015

The VA is facing a \$2.6 billion budget deficit this year, according to VA officials. Sloan Gibson, Deputy Secretary of the VA, told lawmakers the department needs the money to bridge the gap of the projected shortfall.

According to Gibson, the budget deficit is largely a result of increased demand for care outside of VA facilities and the rising costs of expensive hepatitis C treatments. A full round of hepatitis C treatments can run upwards of \$100,000.

But Congress may not be so quick to hand over the money. Citing a "startling lack of transparency and accountability," House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) told Gibson he was frustrated with cost overruns and delays with other VA projects, notably construction projects at medical facilities in Colorado.

VA officials also discussed their efforts to improve Community Care Programs. Including the Veterans Choice Program, seven different programs provide non-VA care. Each program comes with a different authorization process and a different set of authorities.

Gibson stressed that the outside care programs need to be reconciled and streamlined. He also asked the committee to remove some of the congressionally placed restrictions on how the VA can spend money on Community Care Programs. Without the budget flexibility, Gibson said the VA "will have to deny care to veterans, a position we don't want to be in."

MOAA believes Congress must work with the VA to ensure the department has the necessary resources to meet veterans' health care needs.

- See more at:

http://www.moaa.org/Main Menu/Take Actio n/Top Issues/Retired Still Working/Veterans Issues/Budget Shortfall Threatens Veterans Health_Care.html#sthash.IXpVwMWX.dpuf

After SCOTUS Ruling, VA Revises Benefits Policy

July 2, 2015 MOA Legislative Update

The VA will now provide benefits to same-sex couples, following the Supreme Court's decision on same-sex marriage. For the first time, same-sex couples will become eligible to receive survivors' benefits, home loans, and other benefits from the VA.

DoD began providing benefits to active duty same-sex couples in 2013. The VA's rule change now provides a continuum of benefits for all military families.

Prior to the Court's ruling, the VA only provided benefits to same-sex couples who both married and resided in a state where same-sex marriage was legal. This resulted in vast discrepancies in the delivery of benefits to veterans.

In one case, an Iraq war veteran was denied the dependent rate for VA benefits because she traveled to Washington, where her spouse's parents reside, to be married. However, the VA did not acknowledge the marriage because she resided in Texas, a state that did not recognize same-sex marriages.

Earlier this year, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) introduced legislation to force the VA to provide benefits to same-sex couples living in states that did not recognize same-sex unions. The Senate ultimately rejected her proposal.

In a letter to VA Secretary Robert McDonald, Shaheen wrote, "this clear inequity has not only been an affront to thousands of men and women who have served our nation faithfully in uniform, it has also offended the basic principles of equality and fairness that are the foundation of our legal system."

"It makes little sense that a couple could be eligible for benefits on active duty, only to be denied earned benefits after taking off the uniform," said MOAA's Director of Government Relations, Col. Mike Hayden, USAF (Ret). "The VA's ruling helps standardize the delivery of benefits for veterans and their families across the country."

- See more at:

http://www.moaa.org/Main Menu/Take Actio n/Top Issues/Retired Still Working/Veterans Issues/After SCOTUS Ruling, VA Revises_ Benefits_Policy.html#sthash.8zCifibz.dpuf

Space-A Travel on Military Flights

For service members and their families, traveling Space Available — or Space-A — on military flights can be a great benefit, but you have to be flexible. Military flights are unpredictable and subject to delays and cancellations. You'll need to be ready both financially and emotionally to change your plans at a moment's notice. But for many Space-A passengers, traveling to places like Hawaii, Alaska, Germany, Italy or Japan at no or very low cost is worth the effort. The following information will help you understand how the system works.

Understanding Space-A travel

Military planes (and planes contracted by the military) have mission assignments throughout the world and often offer empty seats to eligible passengers. Space-A passengers can't reserve seats; available seats are offered to registered passengers before the flight. Here are some things you should know before you try to find a Space-A flight:

- Eligibility. Available seats are offered to service members, retirees, certain DoD employees and their eligible family members. Guard and reserve members may also travel Space-A but with restrictions. Eligible family members can travel without their active duty sponsor under certain circumstances, such as Environmental and Morale Leave or when their service member is deployed for more than 120 days.
- Military terminals. Space-A flights leave from military passenger terminals on installations throughout the United States and around the world. You must sign up for flights on a register maintained at each passenger terminal. Policies and procedures for Space-A travelers vary by installation, so make sure you understand the rules for registration at each terminal from which you are trying to fly. You can find contact information for military terminals at <u>Air</u> <u>Mobility Command</u>.
- Flights. For security reasons, military flight information is not generally published online. The best way to find out about Space-A flights is to call the passenger terminal and ask. The busiest terminals often have regularly scheduled flights and offer the best opportunity for Space-A seats.

Costs. In general, flying Space-A is at no cost to eligible passengers. However, some contracted flights charge Space-A passengers a small fee, and you may be required to pay a departure tax if you are traveling internationally. On many flights, meal service isn't provided, but you may have an opportunity to buy a boxed meal before the flight.

Signing up for a Space-A flight

In order to fly Space-A, eligible passengers must register (sign up) at the military passenger terminal from which they want to depart. Uniformed service members must be on leave or pass status when they sign up. Registration can be very competitive at some busy terminals, so be sure to sign up as early as you can.

- **Passenger registration.** You can sign up on the terminal's register up to 60 days in advance. You may sign up for more than one destination and at more than one terminal. When you sign up, make sure you have your military ID and leave papers (if necessary). Some terminals accept fax or email sign up, but procedures vary by terminal. For contact information on military passenger terminals, visit <u>AMC</u>. When you get to your destination, be sure to register for a return flight.
- **Categories.** Once registered, you are assigned a passenger category. These categories determine how seats are assigned. Within each category, passengers are prioritized based on the date and time they registered. Available seats are assigned first to Category I passengers, continuing through the categories until all empty seats are filled.
 - **Category I.** Active duty service members and their accompanying families traveling on emergency leave.
 - Category II. Service members and their accompanying family members traveling on EML. This includes command-sponsored family members who are stationed outside the continental United States.
 - **Category III.** Service members and their accompanying families traveling on

ordinary leave or reenlistment leave status, and unaccompanied family members of service members deployed 365 consecutive days or more. This category also includes service members and their families on house-hunting leave.

- Category IV. Unaccompanied family members on EML orders and eligible family members of service members deployed 120 days or more.
- Category V. Students whose sponsor is stationed in Alaska or Hawaii and students enrolled in a trade school within the continental United States when the sponsor is stationed overseas.
- Category VI. Retirees and their accompanying family members. This category also includes Guard and reserve members who are traveling within CONUS, Alaska, Hawaii and U.S. territories.

For more detailed descriptions, go to <u>DoD</u> <u>Air Transportation Eligibility regulation</u>.

- Documentation. Make sure you understand what documentation you will need to travel, including:
 - Your military ID
 - A copy of your leave orders, if applicable (for emergency leave, EML or ordinary leave passengers)
 - Unaccompanied family members of service members who are deployed for 120 days or more need a letter verifying eligibility from the service member's commanding officer
 - A passport and appropriate visas (if traveling overseas)
 - DD Form 1853: <u>Verification of Reserve</u> <u>Status for Travel Eligibility</u> (for eligible Guard and reserve members)
- At the terminal. Plan to arrive at the terminal early. Space-A seats can be released two or three hours before a scheduled flight. Check with the passenger counter to be sure you are registered for the flight and your documents are in order.

Traveling Space-A

Space-A travel can be trying — especially if you're traveling with young children. Planning ahead will help things go a little more smoothly.

- **Research where to go.** The busiest military passenger terminals will have the most available Space-A seating.
- Figure out when to go. Try to fly when schools are in session. The busiest times to fly — which means fewer available seats are during holidays and summer vacation. Visit <u>DoD Education Activity</u> for the Department of Defense school calendar.
- **Prepare for long delays.** Flights can be delayed for hours or even days. Sometimes flights make unscheduled stops or are rerouted. Be sure to carry plenty of snacks and reading materials. If you are traveling with children, pack extra food and toys.
- Bring cash or credit cards. You'll want to have enough money to buy a commercial plane ticket home or pay for a hotel room, if necessary. Many passenger terminals close at night, so you will need to find lodging if you are still waiting for a flight.
- **Pack lightly.** Luggage allowance will depend on the type of aircraft. By limiting your luggage, you'll be able to board any available flight to your destination.
- **Be flexible.** As a Space-A passenger, you could fly on a comfortable passenger plane or in the cargo hold of a C-130. To get the most out of your trip, you'll need a good attitude and a sense of adventure.

Commissary and Exchange locations in and around Pennsylvania -

Tobyhanna Army Depot (Northeastern PA) Fort Hamilton (Brooklyn, NY) Picatinny Arsenal (Northern NJ) McGuire Air Force Base (NJ east of Philadelphia) Aberdeen Proving Grounds (North East Maryland) Fort Detrick (Frederick, MD on RT-15) Carlisle Barracks (S. Central PA RT-11 & 1-81) Pittsburgh (Next to the International Airport)



GLORIOUS INSULTS

"I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it,"-Mark Twain."



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PA COUNCIL OFFICERS 2014-2015 Term

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Immediate Past President – Bill Harris <u>wthiii3@rcn.com</u> (610) 217-3511 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!

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