

News Flash

From The Retired Enlisted Assn

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TREA WASHINGTON UPDATE FOR OCTOBER 30, 2009

This was another week in Washington of health care, health care, health care. However, while all the focus was on the new 1990 page House care bill, several bills important to military families and veterans moved down the hill.

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1. President Signs National Defense Authorization Act-On Wednesday, President Obama signed the 2010 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The bill authorizes spending on the thousands of DoD programs including personnel and retiree issue. It includes a 3.4% pay increase for the active duty, allows Grey Area retirees to purchase TRICARE Standard until they reach 60 years old and qualify for retired health care and once again stops DoD from imposing any increases in TRICARE enrollment fee, deductibles or co-payments for military retirees and their families or survivors. But it unfortunately does not include many of our legislative goals including allowing any medical retirees with less than 20 years to qualify for Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP), or moving to end the SBP/DIC offset. We need to continue to push the stand alone bills that would accomplish these and other important goals

Additionally, the bill does end the National Security Personnel System in DoD. That was the new DoD pay-for-performance for civilian employees. 220,000 civilian employees will be moved back under the "General Schedule system. The law requires the transition to be completed by January 1, 2012.

2. Congress Passes New Continuing Resolution (CR)-Last night both the House and Senate passed the \$32.3 billion Interior-Environment Appropriations (Spending) bill and sent it on to the President for his signature. Its particular significance to us is that it includes a Continuing Resolution (CR) that will keep the entire federal government running until December 18. This is the 2nd continuing resolution of the year. It extends the provisions of the first CR which included carry over of the 2009 Department and Agency budgets to 2010- with the important exception that the increased funding was immediately budgeted to the VA for their ongoing programs.

3. Next Week Congress May Move on Military Construction-VA and Defense Approps- We are still waiting for the Appropriation bills for DoD and the VA to be completed. The House of Representatives has passed their versions of all 12 Appropriation Bills; the Senate has only passed 7. Next week the Senate may take up its version of the Military Construction/VA Appropriations Bill (HR3082). It includes a 15% increase in VA funding from last year. Both the House and Senate have passed versions of the DoD Appropriations Act but the bill has been bogged down in negotiations while members are trying to include unrelated matters that could go through in a bill that shall be passed by the end of the year. The leadership is considering attaching a rider to raise the statutory debt limit of the U.S. and to attaching a District of Columbia Voting Rights bill to the NDAA. The Chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI), however, is opposed to the idea and says: "Forget it. Is that clear enough?"

4. TREA Participates in VA/DoD Mental Health Summit-All this week there has been a joint VA/DoD Summit in Washington DC working on improving the services it provides for the mental health needs of Service members, veterans and their families and survivors. The Summit was opened by keynote addresses by Secretary of the VA Shinseki and Secretary of Defense Gates. On Tuesday TREA's Executive Director Deirdre Parke Holleman, along with representatives from 4 other VSO/MSOs, presented a 2-1/2 hour panel discussing what was needed to help our warriors and their families. The focus of the Summit was both what services were needed and how the 2 Departments can coordinate their efforts.

After the Summit, 12 employees from the VA and DoD will draft a report to both Secretaries on what they suggest the next steps forward should be.

5. The Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act Included in Signed NDAA- Along with numerous other provisions (please see Paragraph 1 above) the MOVE Act was included in the 2010 NDAA. The law goes a long way towards fixing the election system for military and overseas voters. TREA's Washington Executive Director Deirdre Parke Holleman is a member the Alliance for Military and Overseas Voting Rights (AMOVR) a coalition of over 30 military associations, overseas advocacy groups and other concerned members that joined together to urge improvements of the overseas voting system.

AMOVR strongly supported the bill which ensures that military service members and overseas Americans will have enough time to vote by requiring election officials to send absentee ballots at least 45 days before an election and allowing for the electronic transmittal of blank ballots and registration materials. The bill also expands the use of

the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot to primaries, special elections and run-offs, and expands and accelerates research and pilot projects to find technological solutions that provide a secure, efficient and convenient means for military and overseas voters to cast their ballots.

The Act (which had strong bi-partisan support) was originally introduced by Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Senator Robert Bennett (R-UT). With the active support and help of Senators John Cornyn (R-TX), Saxby Chambliss (R-GA), Ben Nelson (D-FL), Carl Levin (D-MI) and John McCain (R-AZ) and Representatives Robert Brady (D-PA), Joe Courtney (D-CT), Michael Coffman (R-CO), Susan Davis (D-CA), Dan Lungren (R-CA), Ike Skelton (D-MO) and Buck McKeon (R-CA) and passed in less than one year.



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