



TREA WASHINGTON UPDATE FOR FEBRUARY 5, 2010

While I am writing this a massive snow storm is aiming at Washington DC. Everything is quiet as people are trying to flee. However, I would not go before I could give you several pieces of good news.

- [1\) President Rolls Out Proposed Budget for FY2011: NO Proposed TRICARE or VA Healthcare Fee Increases](#)
- [2\) FY2011 Proposed VA Budget](#)
- [3\) Medicare Doc Fix Not Yet Achieved](#)
- [4\) TREA Attends DoD's Military Medicine Conference](#)
- [5\) Office of Personnel Management \(OPM\) Releases Its 2010-2012 Plan For Veterans Employment in the Federal Government](#)

1) President Rolls Out Proposed Budget for FY2011: NO Proposed TRICARE or VA Healthcare Fee Increases-On Monday the White House rolled out its proposed budget for the federal government for FY2011. Happily, I can tell you that there are NO proposals to increase TRICARE enrollment fees or co-payments in it. The MHS (Military Health Systems which is both the direct care system and the TRICARE programs) proposed budget is 5.8% higher than it was last year and it is **fully funded**. There is no hole in the funding that would need to be filled by increases in TRICARE enrollment fees, deductibles or co-pays. This is very good news. The Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee Rep. Ike Skelton (D-MO) reached the same conclusion TREA did when reading the budget. In his statement he said: "Our nation is protected by the finest military the world has ever seen, but we must support our service members and their families because the strength of the U.S. military is in our people. This budget proposal invests in our people by providing a military pay raise, a housing allowance increase, a funding boost for family support programs, **and by preventing any increases in health care fees or copayments.**" (Emphasis added)

The VA's healthcare budget also was fully funded and had no proposed co-pay, deductibles or enrollment fee increases. Of course this does not mean that the

Administration cannot request increases throughout the year- indeed Secretary of Defense Gates said, again, that he wishes to have a dialogue on the subject with Congress. And we are being constantly told by Congressional staffers that we have to accept that this is coming. However, ***they have not budgeted for it.*** So it seems clear that they don't expect to be successful this election year.

2) FY2011 Proposed VA Budget-The Administration's proposed VA budget held other pieces of good news. The phrase you will hear again and again is transforming the VA **"into a 21st Century organization."** This phrase was repeated numerous times during both the VA's roll out of its budget that both TREA's Executive Director Deirdre Parke Holleman and National Legislative Director Larry Madison attended, and during a White House teleconference that TREA participated in. What does it mean? One thing is that they pledge once again to improve both the speed and accuracy of claims processing. The budget included \$2.149 billion (up 27% from last year or \$460 million) to improve claims processing "through a combination of additional staff, improved business practices, and expanded technology." For the past several years TREA has lobbied both the VA and Congress to focus on this tremendous problem. And with over 1,000,000 pending cases we will continue to push this issue until it is corrected.

The budget also funds an increase of 500,000 veterans who will be able to enroll in Categories 7 and 8 by 2013. It also means \$3.3 billion to support a reliable and accessible IT infrastructure, more money to focus on the needs of women Vets and much more. Overall, the proposed budget (both entitlement and discretionary) increases funding by \$11 billion from last year. (Please note some of this money is to pay disability payments to veterans suffering from several illnesses that have recently been made presumptive service related disabilities due to exposure to Agent Orange. If you are concerned about Agent Orange please call our Washington office and we can go over the new list with you.)

3) Medicare Doc Fix Not Yet Achieved-Yesterday many of you may have seen that the House of Representatives passed the Senate's legislative version of the debt limit increase which also included PAYGO rules and a **5 year exemption for PAYGO offsets for a potential Medicare Doc Fix.** (That means they could stop the payment cut for Medicare Doctors mandated by present law without finding offsets.) **However, this does not mean that they HAVE passed a bill ending or delaying this pay cut.** Again, please realize how important this is for BOTH TRICARE for Life (TFL) Beneficiaries and beneficiaries of other TRICARE programs that this cut be stopped.

Remember, if you are a TFL beneficiary, Medicare is first payer to TRICARE. Such a cut is likely to make it much harder to find a doctor willing to take new Medicare/TFL patients. And if you are a beneficiary of another TRICARE program your payment schedules are based on the TRICARE rates so it could make it much harder to find a doctor willing to take new TRICARE patients. Congress only has until the end of this month to either craft a permanent solution or another temporary correction of this problem. Otherwise this crippling cut will immediately go into effect. It is important for our members of Congress to focus on this critical issue immediately. Please go to our website, and click on Capwiz. Send the message about this issue to your Senators and House Representative.

4) TREA Attends DoD's Military Medicine Conference-Last week TREA's Washington Office Executive Director Deirdre Parke Holleman attended the 4-day 2010 Military Health System's medical conference at the Gaylord National Harbor across from DC. The Conference had over 3,000 military and civilian medical personnel in attendance along with numerous representatives from medical contractors and 12 invited VSO representatives. The conference focused on health care, research, education and training as well as the various TRICARE contracts. ALL 5 civilian TRICARE network contractors were there. This fact was rather dramatic since only TRI-West of the West region does not have a contractual opposition. For the South Region Humana, the present contractor and United the company awarded the T-3 contract by DoD were both there. For the North region both the present contractor, HealthNet and the new awardee Aetna, were there. And in both T-3 awards the GAO ruled that the contracts were awarded improperly. So everything is up in the air until at least March 2011 and while everyone was gracious it was more than a bit tense.

While going to numerous break-out sessions Ms Holleman had to find a quiet place to participate in a White House teleconference concerning some of the proposals President Obama was planning to make in his State of the Union address to help the middle class. Throughout the conference we met numerous professionals who help our members in a host of medical problems, concerns, and programs.

5) Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Releases its 2010-2012 Plan for Veterans Employment in the Federal Government-The OPM has released its 20 page report "Governmentwide Veterans' Recruitment and Employment Strategic Plan FY 2010-2010." You can find it at:

http://www.fedshirevets.gov/pdf/Vets_Initiative_Strategic_Plan.pdf. This is a government wide project to both recruit and hire new veterans for the federal government *and* to help veterans who are already working in the federal government. The OPM plan developed the plan with senior leaders from the Departments of Defense, Labor, Veterans Affairs, Commerce, Homeland Security, Treasury, and Transportation. OPM Director John Berry said: "This is America's first strategic blueprint to increase and support the hiring of Veterans throughout the Federal workforce. This plan aggressively dismantles barriers for Veterans seeking Federal employment. Additionally, it provides ongoing career support to Veterans working within the Federal workforce and specifically looks to support new veterans as they adjust to civilian work life." At the end of FY2008 there were 480,000 vets working in the Federal Government. Hopefully, with a push from the Administration this number will grow.



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