

SOUND OFF!



BULLETIN

#19

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

"VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER"

9 DECEMBER 2007

THANKS TO [MOAA](#) FOR THIS EXCELLENT RECAP

HILL OKS CONCURRENT RECEIPT, SBP, RESERVE RETIRED PAY UPGRADES

On Dec. 6, House and Senate leaders agreed to drop the last contentious item from the FY2008 Defense Authorization Act - a Senate-proposed provision that would have stiffened penalties for discrimination against homosexuals.

Yesterday's agreement clears the way for what is expected to be rapid passage and presidential signature of the Act, which includes a substantial number of improvements for virtually all segments of the military community. Key provisions include:

Concurrent Receipt: Authorizes full, immediate concurrent receipt for disabled retirees with at least 20 years of service deemed "unemployable" by the VA, with payment retroactive to Jan. 1, 2005. Payments will begin October 1, 2008. Another provision extends eligibility for Combat-Related Special Compensation to all military disability (chapter 61) retirees with less than 20 years of service who suffer from combat- or operations-caused conditions.

TRICARE Fees: Prohibits increases in TRICARE fees, including pharmacy copays, for FY2008.

Military Pay Raise: Authorizes a 3.5% raise in January 2008 for active duty, Guard and Reserve personnel.

Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP): Authorizes a special payment of \$50 per month to survivors of members entitled to retired pay (or of Guard/Reserve retirees who died before age 60) whose SBP annuities are reduced by VA survivor benefits, effective Oct. 1, 2008. That amount will increase by \$10 each year for 5 years. Another provision adopted was a MOAA recommendation to direct the Defense Accounting and Finance Center to implement simplified and more sympathetic recoupment processes to assist affected survivors. Unfortunately, the bill does not include a provision to accelerate SBP paid-up status from Oct. 1, 2008 to Oct. 1, 2007.

Guard/Reserve Retirement: Reduces the retirement age by 3 months for each cumulative 90 days spent on active duty since Oct. 7, 2001. Increases the maximum annual drill points creditable for retirement (from 90 to 130), effective for 2007.

Guard/Reserve GI Bill: Authorizes Selected Reserve members 10 years after separation to use GI Bill benefits earned from active duty service. Selected Reserve members who spend at least 3 years on active duty can earn up to 80% of the active duty GI Bill benefit.

Wounded Warrior Care: Requires comprehensive plan for care, management and transition of wounded servicemembers by July 1, 2008. Requires recovery, medical and non-medical care case managers for recuperating servicemembers and establishes maximum caseloads for each.

Wounded Warrior Family Support: Authorizes medical care, training, and job placement service for family members of recovering servicemembers and authorizes respite care for primary caregivers of servicemembers with a serious injury or illness. Authorizes leave (from civilian employers) for family members of injured personnel.

DoD/VA Electronic Records: Implements a fully interoperable electronic DoD/VA health record and a joint interagency office to serve as a single authority for the development and administration of the system. Requires the development of a process to send electronic records necessary to support eligibility for VA benefits, including the DD Form 214, from DoD to VA.

Deployment of Single Parents and Dual Military Couples: Requires procedures to ensure parents with minor dependents have adequate plans for family care upon deployment. Authorizes request for deployment deferment in certain circumstances.

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Military Family Readiness Council: Establishes council of servicemembers, spouses, and representatives of military family organizations to make recommendations for DoD policy on military family readiness and to evaluate programs and services that prepare and support military families.

Follow-On TRICARE Eligibility: Authorizes active-duty-level TRICARE coverage for members separated or retired from the armed forces for a serious injury or illness when care is not reasonably available in the VA. Expires Dec. 31, 2012.

Disability Retirement: Requires by July 1, 2008 a standardized process for medical and physical disability evaluations that takes into account timely decisions, uniformity between services, and provides servicemembers with advice and counsel. Requires DoD to include all conditions that render a member unfit for duty in determining disability ratings for military disability retirement purposes. Requires three pilot programs: use of the disability rating assigned by the VA, use of joint DoD/VA rating system, and use of a single DoD website for accessing DoD disability evaluation information.

Wounded Warrior Separations Review: Requires review of all disability separation cases between Sept. 11, 2001 and Dec. 31, 2009 in which a rating of 20% or below was assigned. Review is to be conducted upon request of member or next of kin or under the board's own initiative.

Disability Severance Pay: Eliminates offset of disability severance pay by VA disability compensation. Increases minimum disability severance pay to 12 months of basic pay and maximum to 38 months of basic pay. Applies to separation pay for injuries incurred in combat.

VA Health Care: Authorizes 5 years (versus 2) of automatic VA health care eligibility for members who serve in a combat theater.

4-Star Guard Chief: Establishes the Chief of the National Guard Bureau as a 4-star position.

Guard/Reserve TRICARE Coverage: Restores eligibility for Selected Reserve members and families whose coverage previously earned by active service since Oct 7, 2001 had expired.

Child Custody: Bars courts from vacating child custody agreements because of the deployment of a military member.

Reserve Drill Expenses: Authorizes reimbursement of up to \$300 in drill-related travel expenses for certain members, effective upon the date the president signs the legislation into law.

World War II POW Payments: Authorizes retroactive payment of inflation-adjusted promotion pay amounts for Navy and Marine Corps POWs of World War II (equalizes with past treatment of POWs of other services).

Honoring the Flag: Expressly authorizes veterans the option of saluting the US Flag (vs. putting the hand over the heart).

http://www.moaa.org/quicklist/lac_issues_update/lac_issues_update_071207.htm