



AFSA Chapter 567 Legislative Bulletin 2011-001  
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June 7, 2011

June 4, 2011 (SECDEF says military pay, retirement may be cut/changed. 😞 Panetta hearing, to be next Defense Secretary, to be held next week. Last enlisted Airman who served in Vietnam retires today. Bulletin below courtesy of CMSgt [Ret] Jim Lokovic from Division #12)

1. Next Week: **House Out, Senate In.** Next week, the Senate will be in session while the House (only one or two individuals) will be meeting only in very brief pro forma sessions. Again, this is to prevent President Obama from making recess appointments.
2. SECDEF Gates Says Military Pay and Benefits May be Cut. AFSA coalition partner, the *Fleet Reserve Association*, posts an article by journalist Tom Philpott which says Secretary Gates, in a speech last week, specifically criticized a “one-size-fits-all approach” to basic pay and retirement, suggesting “tiered and targeted” methods could cost less but pay more to servicemembers in “high demand and dangerous” specialties. He implied overall pay levels are set too high as evidenced by the services’ continuous ability to meet recruiting and retention targets, except for the Army and only “during the worst years of Iraq.” Gates again asked that TRICARE fees be raised, particularly for working age retirees, and he eyes replacing the all-or-nothing 20-year retirement plan with a more “flexible” system that would allow earlier vesting in benefits but also encourage more members to serve longer careers.” To read more, go to the Fleet Reserve Association’s Website at:  
<http://www.fra.org/AM/template.cfm?template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=12227&section=news>
3. SECDEF-Selectee Panetta Hearing Next Thursday. **Next Thursday, June 9<sup>th</sup>**, Leon Panetta, the current CIA director, who has been selected by President Obama as the next Secretary of Defense, will face two confirmation hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee. One will be an open hearing; the other will be a closed session. Remember, it is the Senate which confirms presidential appointments of this sort. Panetta will replace Secretary Robert Gates who is retiring at the end of this month. It is said that Panetta was chosen by the President, in part, due to his demonstrated prowess at budget cutting. Panetta’s nomination was announced at the same time that President Obama nominated General David Petraeus to be the next director of the CIA.

4. Last Enlisted Airman who served in Vietnam. **AFSA coalition partner *Air Force Association*** reported on Friday, June 3, “When **CMSgt. James Clemenson retires on Saturday**, it will mark the end of an era for the Air Force. Clemenson is the last enlisted airman on active duty status who was stationed in Vietnam to retire from service, according to North Dakota Air National Guard officials. He’s been a member of the North Dakota Air Guard’s 119th Wing in Fargo for nearly the past 40 years, but during the last four of them, he’s been on active duty status with the National Guard Bureau in Washington, D.C., they said. Clemenson enlisted in the Army in January 1970 and did two tours during the Vietnam War from October 1970 through April 1972. After receiving an honorable discharge, he joined the Air Guard the following year. Only one other active duty airman, CMSgt. Jim Honeycutt, still remains in service who wears a Vietnam Service Ribbon, although it’s for temporary duty in country versus a mobilization, said the officials.” You can read more about Chief Clemenson in an article from the North Dakota National Guard Public Affairs Office at: <http://www.dvidshub.net/news/71467/retiring-nd-vietnam-veteran-among-last-air-force>

## **Legislative-Retiree Affairs Bulletin 2011-053**

Friday, 03 June 2011 08:32 Written by President Bruce Blodgett **0 Comments**

June 2, 2011 (*Administration responds to House version of FY 2012 Military Construction, VA, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. TRICARE ECHO Program for those with special needs. PTSD linked to heart disease. Bulletin below provided courtesy of CMSgt [Ret] Jim Lokovic, Div #12 Trustee*)

1. Administration Responds to FY 2012 Military Construction, VA, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. **On June 1, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reported the Administration’s position on H.R. 2055, the “FY 2012 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill” as passed by the House of Representatives.** In the area of Military Construction, the OMB wrote, “The Administration appreciates the Committee’s support for critical Military Construction projects but is concerned with the use of incremental funding that would not support usable segments for the following projects: Aviation Complex, Fort Wainwright, Alaska; Mountainview Operations Center, Buckley Air Force Base, Colorado; Ambulatory Care Center, Joint Base Andrews, Maryland; and Guam Strike Fuel Systems Maintenance Hangar, Joint Region Marianas, Guam. Incremental funding of Military Construction runs counter to sound budgeting principles and fiscal discipline.” To read the entire “Statement of Administration Policy,” go to: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/112/saphr2055h\\_20110601.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/legislative/sap/112/saphr2055h_20110601.pdf)

2. House Passes VetStar Award Program Bill. **On June 1, the House passed H.R. 802 which would direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a VetStar Program.** This is a program that would annually recognize businesses for their contributions to veterans’ employment.

3. TRICARE Echo Program for Special Needs. A TRICARE press release reported, “For beneficiaries with specific mental or physical disabilities, TRICARE’s Extended Care Health Option (ECHO) provides benefits, including financial assistance that is not available through the basic TRICARE program. ECHO does not replace benefits from other TRICARE programs; it simply offers supplemental benefits, such as possible coverage for assistive services, durable equipment, transportation, special education, in-home medical services and in-home respite care services.

“ECHO is available to active duty family members, including family members of National Guard and Reserve members activated for more than 30 days; family members eligible for continued TRICARE coverage through the Transitional Assistance Management Program; children or spouses of former service members who were victims of physical or emotional abuse; and family members of deceased active duty sponsors during the period they are in transitional survivor status.” For more information on the ECHO program, go to: [http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/press\\_article.aspx?fid=538](http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/press_article.aspx?fid=538)

4. PTSD Linked to Heart Disease. An article posted by *NEWSMAX health* reports, “People with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be at a higher risk for heart disease, with a study of U.S. war veterans finding that those with the disorder were more likely to have heart disease than their peers.

“The war veterans with PTSD were also more likely to have heart disease progress faster, and they were more likely to die of any cause over the next three years, according to the study in the *American Journal of Cardiology*. . . While the study doesn’t mean that PTSD necessarily causes heart disease, it does suggest that worrying about the mental toll of the disorder is only part of the total picture.” To read the entire article, go to:

[http://www.newsmaxhealth.com/health\\_stories/PTSD\\_Heart\\_Disease/2011/05/31/391363.html](http://www.newsmaxhealth.com/health_stories/PTSD_Heart_Disease/2011/05/31/391363.html)

5. Bills of Interest Introduced June 1<sup>st</sup>.

H.R. 2070, by Rep. Bill Johnson, R-Ohio, would direct the Secretary of the Interior to install in the area of the World War II Memorial in the District of Columbia a suitable plaque or an inscription with the words that President Franklin D. Roosevelt prayed with the nation on June 6, 1944, the morning of D-Day. Note: The *History Place* reports on this prayer: “This is the prayer originally entitled ‘Let Our Hearts Be Stout’ written by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Allied troops were invading German-occupied Europe during World War II. The prayer was read to the Nation on radio on the evening of D-Day, June 6, 1944, while American, British, and Canadian troops were fighting to establish five beach heads on the coast of Normandy in northern France.

“The previous night, June 5th, the President had also been on the radio to announce that Allied troops had entered Rome. The spectacular news that Rome had been liberated was quickly superseded by news of the gigantic D-Day invasion which began at

6:30 a.m. on June 6th. By midnight, about 57,000 American and 75,000 British and Canadian soldiers had made it ashore, amid losses that included 2,500 killed and 8,500 wounded.” Those wanting to read the prayer can go to:

<http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/fdr-prayer.htm>

H.R. 2074, by Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle, R-N.Y., would require a comprehensive policy on reporting and tracking sexual assault incidents and other safety incidents that occur at medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

## Legislative-Retiree Affairs Bulletin 2011-052

Friday, 03 June 2011 08:26 Written by President Bruce Blodgett [0 Comments](#)

June 1, 2011 *(House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee proposes FY 2012 Defense Appropriations Act. Mental Health options under TRICARE. Air Force opens new “Air Force Warrior and Family Operations Center.” House passes legislation to improve veterans’ claims appeals. Bulletin below provided by CMSgt [Ret] Jim Lokovic in Division #12)*

1. House Panel Presents Appropriations Bill for Defense. **The House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Defense has proposed a spending bill that would pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and many of the programs passed in the Defense Authorization Bill last week. It pays for a 1.6 percent military pay raise starting in January 2012 and \$32.3 billion for the Defense Health Program, among other items. As a side note, the spending bill would block all funding for developing an alternate engine for the F-35—in opposition to the House Armed Services Committee’s markup of the FY 2012 NDAA which called for the second engine. The Administration had threatened to veto the FY 2012 Defense Bill if the second engine was included. To read more, go to: [http://appropriations.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease\\_id=317](http://appropriations.house.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&PressRelease_id=317)**

2. TRICARE Spells Out Mental Health Treatment Options for Beneficiaries. **A press release by the TRICARE Management Activity reports, “TRICARE covers medically or psychologically necessary inpatient and outpatient mental health care. This includes substance abuse treatment, one-on-one counseling, group therapy, and a variety of other services. Non-active duty TRICARE Prime beneficiaries do not need a referral or pre-authorization for their first eight visits per year to a TRICARE authorized mental health provider. Active duty service members must always seek nonemergency mental health care at a military treatment facility (MTF) when available or get a referral from their MTF or service point of contact before receiving civilian care.” To read the entire press release, go to: [http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/press\\_article.aspx?fid=537](http://www.tricare.mil/mediacenter/press_article.aspx?fid=537)**

3. Air Force Warrior and Family Operations Center Opens. **Last week, the Warrior and Family Operations Center opened at Randolph AFB. This new facility will house four programs: Air Force Wounded Warrior, Airman and Family Readiness, Retiree Services, and Sexual Assault Prevention and Response. According to an Air Force press release, “The new ‘people center’ will provide a one-stop workplace for nearly 80 Airmen tasked with delivering a full spectrum of integrated services supporting all**

Airmen and their families throughout the military lifecycle and beyond,” officials said. “This mission includes a special focus on Airmen who suffer combat-related wounds, illness or injury.” To read more, go to: <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123258082>

4. Bill to Improve Veterans Appeals Process Passes House. Yesterday, the House passed H.R. 1484, the “Veterans Appeals Improvement Act of 2011,” which was introduced by Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif. This bill provides that if a veteran claimant submits evidence in support of a case for which a substantive appeal has been filed to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals, this evidence shall be submitted directly to the Board and not to a regional office of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), unless the claimant requests that the evidence first be reviewed by the regional office. The legislation also establishes the Veterans Judicial Review Commission to evaluate and make specific decisions to improve the administrative and judicial appellate review processes of veterans’ and survivors’ benefits determinations. In the words of the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., “Now, under current law, veterans who disagree with their initial claims decisions by the VA can appeal to the VA’s Board of Veterans’ Appeals. But if a veteran submits additional evidence before the board in support of his claims, it automatically goes back to the very beginning of the process.

“The legislation before us [H.R. 1484] would stop the shuffling of veterans back to the end of the line. It would direct that evidence submitted by a veteran in support of an appeal before the Board of Veterans’ Appeals be considered by the board unless the veteran, himself or herself, elects to send it back to the very beginning of the process. This provision has garnered wide support from veterans’ service organizations and the Department of Veterans Affairs. I believe it will reduce the frustration that many of our veterans face when appealing a ratings decision and that it will also reduce processing times.”

## Legislative-Retiree Affairs Bulletin 2011-051

Tuesday, 31 May 2011 21:20 Written by President Bruce Blodgett [0 Comments](#)

May 31, 2011 (*House is working this week, Senate is effectively in recess. Number of veterans declining. Leaders working to cut VA disability claim times. Unemployment exceptionally high among young post-9/11 veterans. Bulletin below written by our*



friend in Div #12, CMSgt [Ret] Jim Lokovic);

1. House in Session, Senate in Pro Forma Session. This week, the House will be tackling issues such as increasing the debt ceiling, while the Senate will meet briefly (on Tuesday and Friday) for two pro forma sessions to prevent the President from making recess appointments of government officials. The only military-related business will be a vote on a resolution to end U.S. participation in the current military action in Libya.

2. H.R. 2002 Applies only to Medical Retirees. The language in the press release for H.R. 2002, by Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, as reported in our May 27 bulletin (#050), suggested that all retirees might be able to transfer their GI Bill benefits to family members. Because the bill text is not yet available, I called Congressman Chaffetz' office in Washington and asked for clarification. I got the following response:

Hi James,

“... the bill will only affect those who are separated from the military for an injury sustained. It is basically to keep the law as it is now, but to offer those military members eligible more decision time (3 years) on whether to keep the benefits or to transfer the benefits. Currently, that decision must be made immediately upon separation, and this bill will allow the 3-year period for those already eligible to claim benefits [adequate] time to make the decision.”

Eric Smith

Congressman Jason Chaffetz

3. Number of Veterans Declining. An interesting May 28 article in the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* reported that projections from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) says that it will be several decades before the last of the World War II veterans have passed away. The remainder of this brief article is posted here in its entirety for your review. “About 2 million U.S. veterans of that conflict [WW II] remain from among the more than 16 million who served between 1941 and 1945.

“Most World War II veterans are in their mid-80s and, as a result, their number is declining rapidly. Nevertheless, the VA estimates that about 57,000 World War II veterans will be alive in 2025, the last year for which the federal agency has made a projection.

“Of the 5.7 million men and women who were in the armed forces during the time of the Korean War, about 2.5 million are alive. The VA estimates that 1.8 million men and women served in Korea.

“About 8.7 million Americans were in the armed forces during the Vietnam-War era, with 3.4 million deployed in Southeast Asia. There are 7.8 million living veterans from that period.

“Of the 2.32 million men and women who served during the time of the first Gulf War– Desert Storm and Desert Shield–in 1990 and 1991, about 3 percent–approximately 70,000– have died.

“VA statistics on veterans of America's wars include at least two unlikely facts:

“While the last veterans of the Civil War have been gone for more than a half-century, two of their children are still listed on benefit rolls.

“Even more surprising, perhaps, is that the government reports that 82 parents of World War II service members are receiving benefits.”