



# The Chindit Chapter 567

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## **LEGISLATIVE UPDATES AND NEWS**

### **Continuing Resolution - Passed**

The clock is ticking for lawmakers to pass legislation that will keep the government running beyond September 30. Congress failed to pass any of the required 12 annual funding bills making the action necessary before the start of the new fiscal year that begins October 1.

On Wednesday evening, the House rejected a stopgap measure that would have kept federal agencies running through November 18 by a vote of 195 to 230. Disagreement over discretionary spending levels and the amount of disaster aid relief contributed to the defeat. House appropriators have no choice now but to redraft another bill that addresses these concerns.

The House was already on a collision course with the Senate over funding for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The bill rejected on Wednesday would have provided \$3.65 billion for FEMA and the Senate is adamant they want \$6.9 billion for the agency—a level they approved nearly a week ago. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) made it clear on Tuesday he would move to amend the House bill if it did not include the higher figure.

Both chambers were scheduled to be in recess next week but last night's House action jeopardizes the planned break. As of press time, there was no word when a new bill might be considered.

### **Higher TRICARE Fees and Changes in Retirement Benefits**

As AFSA reported earlier this week, the deficit reduction plan presented to Congress by President Obama on Monday targets healthcare for older

**military retirees and raises pharmacy copays for most beneficiaries. It also calls for a review of the military retirement system.**

**A new \$200 annual fee for TRICARE for Life (TFL) users being proposed by the President would begin in FY 2013 and indexed to a yet-to-be medical inflation factor, meaning it would rise every year thereafter. Pharmacy costs would be raised to levels similar to those required by other federal employees, and apply to all active duty dependants, retirees and their family members, but not active duty service members.**

**The President proposes to set up a commission to develop recommendations for reforming the current military retirement system.**

**Like the 2005 BRAC process, DoD would make a proposal to the commission which could alter it before sending it to the President. The President cannot revise the commission's proposal, but he must decide whether or not to send it to Congress. If he does, lawmakers would then have to approve or disapprove it without modifications.**

**The document says "The Administration believes that any major military retirement reforms should include grandfathering provisions that ensure that the country does not break faith with military personnel now serving" Whether that statement will offer any consolation to military members already worried over the erosion of earned benefits remains to be seen. Recently-approved changes in TRICARE fees (by Congress) coupled with talk of reducing military retirement from multiple sources has already had a negative impact on morale.**

**As indicated in a recent survey by The Military Times, an overwhelming majority of the current force, nearly 88 percent, dislike changing the existing retirement system. Following through with reduced retirement benefits and higher TRICARE fees could prove to be disastrous for DoD and severely impair the military's recruiting and retention efforts.**

**In Tuesdays Alert, we encouraged readers to voice their concerns with these proposed changes to the President and their elected**

representatives in Congress. For your convenience, we repeated their contact information below. We also added contact information for the House and Senate Armed Services Committees because members serving on these two panels will ultimately decide what, if any, changes are made.

### **OTHER BILLS OF INTEREST**

Other bills that support AFSA's Legislative Platform initiatives or that may be of special interest to AFSA members.

**H.R. 159 "TBI Treatment Act" to direct the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program under which the Secretaries make payments for certain treatments of traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. Introduced by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX)**

**H.R. 943 "K-9 Companion Corps Act" to establish a grant program to encourage the use of assistance dogs by certain members of the Armed Forces and veterans. Introduced by Rep. Mazie Hirono (D-HI)**

**H.R. 961 "Safe Haven for Heroes Act of 2011" to amend title 18, United States Code, with respect to the prohibition on disrupting military funerals, and for other purposes. Introduced by Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD)**

**H.R. 1046 "Honor the WISH Act" to authorize a member of the Armed Forces to designate anyone as the person authorized to direct disposition of the remains of the member if the member dies while on active duty. Introduced by Rep. Steve Cohen (D-TN)**

**H.R. 1154 "Veterans Equal Treatment for Service Dogs Act" to prevent the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from prohibiting the use of service**

**dogs on Department of Veterans Affairs property. Introduced by Rep. John Carter (R-TX)**

- **S. 769 Veterans Equal Treatment for Service Dogs Act of 2011  
Introduced by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA)**

**H.R. 1591 "Sanctity of Eternal Rest for Veterans Act of 2011" to guarantee that military funerals are conducted with dignity and respect. Introduced by Rep. Charles Bass (R-NH)**

- **S. 815 "Sanctity of Eternal Rest for Veterans Act of 2011" Introduced by Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME)**

**S. 67 to permit former members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability rated as total to travel on military aircraft in the same manner and to the same extent as retired members of the Armed Forces are entitled to travel on such aircraft. Introduced by Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI)**