



AFSA ON THE SCENE REPORT FOR ENLISTED LEADERS

"Knowledge is only powerful with action..."

November 2007 Edition

The "AFSA On the Scene Report for Enlisted Leaders" is distributed to top enlisted leaders by the Air Force Sergeants Association as a means of keeping the enlisted force informed on information affecting their professional and personal lives. This information is meant to supplement information provided in SERGEANTS Magazine. Command Chief Master Sergeant recipients of this electronic product are asked to provide this AFSA On the Scene Report to each of their chiefs, first sergeants, and other enlisted leaders assigned to their locations. All recipients of On the Scene Report are encouraged to further disseminate this information to Air Force leaders and fellow enlisted members. Direct any questions concerning On the Scene information to the Military and Government Relations directorate via staff@afsahq.org or by calling 800-638-0594, Extension 291.

MONTGOMERY G.I. BILL REFORM. AFSA has long sought to reform the Montgomery G.I. Bill (MGIB). We continue to pursue MGIB educational benefits for those who declined participation in the Veterans Educational Assistance Program. We are working toward elimination of the \$1,200 "user fee" for Airmen to participate in the MGIB program. We are also urging Congress to allow enlisted MGIB enrollees to transfer their benefit to family members if they elect to do so. Another AFSA initiative is to extend or eliminate the 10-year period after service, after which the earned benefit is taken away from the military veteran/retiree. We are also pushing modifications to the Selected Reserve educational benefit to more closely match the Active Duty benefit. While several congressional bills have been initiated in support of these objectives, the House and Senate versions of the FY 2008 Defense Bill address only the Selected Reserve Montgomery G.I. Bill; both chambers are considering allowing Guard and Reserve members to use their education benefit for up to 10 years after service. Despite this extremely limited approach, AFSA will continue to fight for reforms of the Montgomery G.I. Bill.

OTHER FY 2008 NDAA ITEMS BEING DEBATED:

Accumulated leave for service members. The Senate would allow an increase of the annual accruable leave to be "carried over" at the end of each Fiscal Year from the current limit of 60 days to a limit of 90 days.

Military pay increase of 3.5 percent. The Administration is arguing for a January 2008 military pay increase of only 3 percent, claiming that Congress' proposed 3.5 percent raise would cost \$2.2 billion over the next five years, from FY 2008 to FY 2013. The current military pay raise formula is based directly on the growth of private sector wages (as measured by the Employment Cost Index).

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Application of that formula would yield only a 3.0 percent raise for January 2008. Fortunately, Congress agrees with AFSA that a 3.5 percent raise is warranted. Accordingly, AFSA and its coalition partners have asked Congress to stick to its guns on this one, especially in light of the recruiting difficulties being experienced by the military services.

Enhanced military pay raise formula. Despite Administration/DoD opposition which claims this year's military pay raises are excessive, the Senate has included a provision that would provide continued raises for our military at .5 percent above the Employment Cost Index from FY 2009 to FY 2012. AFSA strongly supports this option and is spending much time on the Hill supporting it because of the high deployment of military members and the importance of winning this War on Terrorism.

Increase average number of members in E-9 pay grade. The Senate would like to see an authorization to increase the maximum number of E-9s from 1 percent to 1.25 percent of the enlisted force.

Hardship Duty Pay. This provision would increase the maximum amount of Hardship Duty Pay from \$750 to \$1,500 per month.

Notice of deployment for reserve component members. The role of the Guard and Reserve forces has shifted over the years from an "as needed" force to nearly constant mobilization. No-notice and short-notice mobilizations create hardships for citizen Airmen, often because of the demands of civilian employment, among other things. The House would like to require that an Airman is notified at least 30 days prior to mobilization with the eventual goal of extending notification requirements to 90 days.

Guard and Reserve retirement. This Senate provision would allow Guard and Reserve members to see retirement as early as 50 years of age. This sounds great; however, to reach such an age one would have to serve on active duty. The retirement age would reduce (below age 60) at a rate of three months for every 90 days served on active military duty when called up in support of a contingency. AFSA's position has not changed; there should be a reduction in the earliest retirement age for Guard and Reserve members to age-55, across the board and without stipulations. However, the Senate's provision should be supported at this time since it is a step in the right direction.

Reserve retirement points. The yearly maximum retirement points for Guard and Reserve Airmen is 90 points per year. The Senate would like to see the point maximum increased to 130 per year. AFSA would like to see the maximum eliminated. AFSA's position is "full credit for time served."

Eligibility for Combat-Related Special Compensation. Concurrent Receipt, in its current form, is an incomplete and unfair program. AFSA has been working for years to have concurrent receipt for everyone with a Veterans Administration disability rating. Although the language between the House and Senate differs, the benefits for Chapter 61 retirees (those who are medically retired) would be expanded. The House would provide CRSC for those who served at least 15 years and are rated with at least a 60 percent disability. This provision would expire in 2015. The Senate supports AFSA in wanting to indefinitely include all Chapter 61 retirees with less than 20 years of service, regardless of their VA disability rating.

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Concurrent receipt for retirees rated at 100 percent disability due to Individual Unemployability (IU). Currently IU individuals fall under a phase-in program of concurrent receipt. The language in the Senate version of the Defense Bill would eliminate that phase-in period and allow immediate full concurrent receipt. This elimination would allow those IU retirees currently affected by the phase-in period to receive pay retroactively to January 1, 2005.

Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)–Dependency Indemnity Compensation (SBP-DIC) offset. The Senate version of the Defense Bill would eliminate the dollar-for-dollar reduction of SBP for each dollar a DIC surviving spouse receives from the Veterans' Administration. The House version would continue the offset but provide DIC widows a monthly allowance, up to \$40, until March 1, 2016. Although the intent of the House may be to improve the current program, AFSA supports the Senate in its desire to immediately eliminate the SBP-DIC offset.

Prohibition of TRICARE fee increases. Both the House and Senate agree that TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Standard Inpatient copayment levels, TRICARE Reserve Select, and pharmacy co-pays should not be increased. The two versions of the Defense bill would prevent DoD from increasing any healthcare costs for FY 2008. The Senate version includes a Sense of Congress statement that pretty much says "a price tag can't be put on the service to our nation provided by America's military men and women."

Continuation of TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS). The Senate has proposed an adjustment to the TRS program which would allow Guard and Reserve Airmen who are eligible for the Federal Employee Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP) to also remain eligible for TRS after October 1, 2007, until their previously earned TRS eligibility has expired.

It is important to keep in mind that the provisions cited above are not finalized, but are proposals being debated at this time. The Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), also known as the Defense Bill, is currently being discussed. The ongoing conference between the House and Senate is working to reconcile differences between their two versions of the FY 2008 NDAA. This time is critical because the compromise Defense Bill that comes out of conference will be submitted to the President for signature into law. AFSA is working to ensure the House and Senate provisions which would support the quality of the lives of current and past enlisted Airmen and their families are retained and sent to President Bush. The likelihood of success on these matters can be enhanced by citizens who communicate with their elected officials and urge support of these key provisions.

EMERGENCY CARE REIMBURSEMENT

Senator Sherrod Brown, D-OH, introduced S. 2142 on October 4, 2007, that would allow veterans full reimbursement of *emergency* medical care at a non-Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility. AFSA supports this bill because, as it now stands, such veterans can only be reimbursed with the approval of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. However, the current law only requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to pay the "reasonable value" of emergency medical services provided to veterans

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eligible to receive VA medical care. So, if a local emergency room charges a veteran \$2,000 for an emergency procedure and VA determines the “reasonable value” of that emergency procedure to be \$1,500; VA will only pay \$1,500. In such a case, the veteran would be responsible for the remaining \$500. AFSA’s position is that the veteran should not bear these expenses, and we support Senator Brown’s bill. A veteran should pay no more for emergency treatment at a non-VA facility than he or she would be expected to pay at the VA (which is usually at no cost to the veteran).

CONTRACT TERMINATION

Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren, D-CA, introduced H.R. 3786 on October 9, 2007, that would allow military members the ability to cancel cellular phone, cable or satellite television, or internet service contracts due to a deployment (over 90 days) or permanent change of station. AFSA supports this bill because it better aligns with the demands of an expeditionary Air Force. Military members should not be unduly burdened with living with these contracts when they are deployed in the defense of this nation and the War on Terrorism. If this bill was passed into law, the service member would have to submit a notice and a copy of his/her military orders in order for the contract to be terminated—a minor thing compared to paying for a service that cannot be used.

ACTIVE DUTY MGIB AVAILABILITY

Representative Tim Walz, D-MN, recently introduced H.R. 3882 which would allow participation in the Active Duty Montgomery G.I. Bill for members of the Guard and Reserve who serve 20 consecutive months of Active Duty. The current requirement is 24 months. AFSA has sent a letter of support to Congressman Walz as this bill would further our efforts toward reforming the Montgomery G.I. Bill.

PENALTY-FREE RETIREMENT WITHDRAWALS

Senator Elizabeth Dole, R-NC, has introduced S. 2184, the “National Guard and Reservists Financial Relief Act,” which would provide penalty-free withdrawals from retirement plans for service members called to active duty for at least 179 days. AFSA has sent Senator Dole a letter of support for S. 2184. This bill allows a guard or reserve member to be more flexible financially when called to active duty. Maintaining continuity at home is a struggle for any deployed service member. Senator Dole’s bill would help Guard and Reserve members handle the financial burden a deployment can place on a military family.

AFSA’S 2008 PROFESSIONAL AIRMEN’S CONFERENCE (PAC). The 2008 PAC will be held at the Grand Hyatt River Walk Hotel in San Antonio, Texas, from August 23 – 27, 2008. This will be a great opportunity for Airmen to experience enlisted professional development forums and listen to top Air Force leaders who will brief on critical Air Force issues. AFSA urges Command Chief Master Sergeants and other Air Force leaders to mark their calendars, plan their budgets, and plan to join us in San Antonio in August 2008. Attendees will also get to witness the presentation of numerous Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force awards for enlisted excellence in various career fields. The William

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H. Pitsenbarger Heroism Award will also be presented during the 2008 PAC along with the AFSA Excellence in Military Leadership Award.

WILLIAM H. PITSENBARGER HEROISM AWARD. MAJCOMs are reminded that submissions for the William H. Pitsenbarger Award of Excellence are due to be sent directly to AFSA Headquarters no later than March 1, 2008. The awards are for individual acts of heroism, on or off duty, during the period 1 January to 31 December 2007. Individual MAJCOMs will receive nominations from their subordinate organizations, hold their own selection boards, and forward the nomination package for their (one) nominee to AFSA Headquarters. A selection board, approved by the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, will be held at AFSA Headquarters. The Pitsenbarger Award will be formally presented on August 27, 2008 during the Air Force Honors Banquet which follows the AFSA 2008 Professional Airmen's Conference. For criteria, deadlines, and specific MAJCOM procedures; consult your MAJCOM Award and Decorations monitor.



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