



Jayhawk Chapter MOAA Newsletter



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May Program:

Our speaker for the May meeting will be April Blackmon Strange, Director of KU's LtGen William K. Jones Military-Affiliated Student Center.

★★★★★ CHAPTER
awarded for

2002 / 2003 / 2005 / 2008 / 2009
2010 / 2011 / 2012 / 2013 / 2014

★★★★★ CHAPTER
awarded for

2004 / 2006 / 2007 / 2015

President's Comments. . .

Another two months have passed and we are now well into the awards and graduation season. Jayhawk Chapter members have numerous family members, from grandchildren to extended family members, who are graduating from every level of education (I hear they even do preschool graduation now). Our collective extended family includes those members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine ROTC detachments who are graduating and receiving commissions as Ensigns and Lieutenants.



The Jayhawk Chapter has and will be participating in the various Award ceremonies presenting Comfort Scholarship awards and MOAA medals to well-deserving Cadets and Midshipmen, rewarding them for outstanding academic achievement and leadership potential.

The big event is the 15th of May in the Kansas Union Ballroom where KU's multiservice military commissioning ceremony will take place. I encourage all of you to attend if you can do so. It is an excellent inauguration for the career of the young officers as leaders in their respective services.

Your Chapter leadership attended a Kansas Council of Chapters meeting in Wichita the 29th April and we will have a full but abbreviated report for the membership at our bimonthly meeting the evening of 16 May. Please RSVP to Jim Cooper for the evening.

The underlying issue is and still remains membership. We will welcome any guests and prospective members you invite to our meetings. Keep talking up the Chapter let them know all the positive things we individually and collectively are doing in the community.

George

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1 May 2017

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* Reservations should be sent
to Jim Cooper by
10 May



JAYHAWK CHAPTER NEWS

A half-dozen members have not paid their Chapter Dues. We have not been able to contact them, and they are at risk of being dropped from the Directory.

URGENT: Let John or Shirley Halladay know if there are any changes to your Directory listing or if you would like to use a different picture.

PERSONAL NEWS

We seem to be having a rash of long-time members moving this year:

Gerry & Ruth Rutledge
3409 Firethorn Drive
Whitestown, IN. 46075

Lee & Darcy Gerhard
991 Westhaven Blvd. #13
Franklin, TN 37064

[E-mail addresses for both of the above remain the same.]

Stan Sneegas: Barbara and I have sold our house and will be at 536 Hurricane Circle, Lawrence, KS 66049 until the first of August. We are getting rid of our "landline" in May (785) 865-0712, but will keep our cell phones: Stan (785) 331-9536 and Barb (785) 331-6193.

Our youngest son, Alan, will be deploying to Kuwait in May with the Army.

Tom & Francie Arnold have sold their home and are also leaving Lawrence this summer, but we will have to list their new Seattle address in an upcoming issue of the Newsletter.

* * * * *



Army News *LTC Tracey Olson, USA*

Greetings Jayhawk Chapter!

The Jayhawk Battalion has had an extremely busy semester. On April 8, we hosted more than 300 competitors from 38 universities to the 23rd Annual Ranger Buddy Competition. Two-person Cadet teams participated in a series of challenges, that tested their physical skills, individual movement techniques, first aid tasks, weapons tasks, knots proficiency and military reporting formats. Our male, female and co-ed teams took 2nd place in each category, earning KU the "Top Battalion" Award for best performance overall.

On May 15, we will commission 22 new lieutenants into active duty, the National Guard, and the United States Army Reserves. We will host the commissioning ceremony at the Campanile on the University of Kansas campus at 8am.

Our Cadets are gearing up for a busy summer. We will send 24 MSIII Cadets to attend Advanced Camp at Fort Knox, KY. Several of our Jayhawk Cadets will travel abroad this summer as they participate in Project Global Officer (Project GO) – a Department of Defense program geared towards studying critical languages while earning college credit. Cadet Farlow will travel to Estonia and Cadet Rosa will travel to Arizona State University to study Spanish. In addition, Cadet Schroer will attend SAPPER School at Fort Leonardwood, MO.

The Jayhawk Battalion will experience high personnel turnover this summer. We already said farewell to CPT

Inskip, who deployed with the Kansas National Guard earlier this year and to MAJ Haralson who will PCS to Fort Drum, NY and prepare for his upcoming deployment. We'd like to wish CPT Lavery all the best as he prepares to deploy with the Kansas National Guard next month. And finally, SFC Heilbronner will PCS to Fort Polk, LA and prepare for his upcoming deployment as well. I sincerely want to thank them for their dedication to the KU Army ROTC program and, most especially, for their investment in developing of our future Army leaders.

We'd like to welcome LT Robinson and SFC Gregory to the Jayhawk team. LT Robinson, (CPT Inskip's replacement) is assigned to be our Partnership School Instructor. SFC Gregory (SFC Heilbronner's replacement) is assigned to be a Military Science Instructor. We'd also like to congratulate SFC Gregory for making the promotion list to MSG.

Rock Chalk! ALL IN!

LTC Tracey Olson
Professor of Military Science



Navy News

CAPT Dave Meron, USN



Greetings from the Jayhawk Navy!

As the 2017 spring semester ends, it is time to reflect upon the successes of the Jayhawk Battalion. Midshipmen have been diligently studying, volunteering and training. Notable occasions include the Colorado Drill Meet, the Big Event, training with the University of Nebraska, and other accomplishments.

The first weekend of March, KU NROTC traveled to Boulder, CO to participate in their annual drill meet. Events included competition in drill, color guard, rifle/pistol and an endurance race. The Jayhawks performed exceptionally well, placing 2nd overall!, a significant achievement as we competed against large programs such as USC, UCLA, Berkley, Oklahoma, Missouri and Minnesota.



In preparation for uniform changeover, the battalion held a summer whites inspection. The purpose of the inspection is to ensure midshipmen, specifically freshmen, know the proper way to wear their uniforms.



The battalion has also had the pleasure of hosting two guest speakers. First, crewmembers from the USS Hawaii came and talked to midshipmen about the opportunities and life aboard a nuclear powered, fast-attack submarine. The crew received a tour of Allen Fieldhouse before speaking to the midshipmen. Another guest, was Colonel Tom Holden, USMC (Ret). Col Holden was a Marine Corps CH-46 pilot in the Vietnam War. He also holds the distinguished honor of piloting the last United States aircraft to leave during the fall of Saigon. His insight, wisdom and leadership were incredibly valuable in the development of the midshipmen.



At the start of April, midshipmen from the University of Nebraska NROTC unit traveled to Lawrence to develop their skills on KU's regulation obstacle course. The University of Kansas NROTC is one of only a handful of NROTC units in the country to possess a regulation USMC O-course. KU midshipmen trained the Nebraska midshipmen before challenging them to a race. While Nebraska put up a fair fight, the Jayhawk Battalion prevailed.



Every year, the city of Lawrence holds an event referred to as the Big Event. The purpose of the event is to promote citizenship and community service. Midshipmen volunteered at Peterson Park in North Lawrence where they assisted in clean-up of a community garden. Tasks included mulching, weeding and bed assembly.



Last week we had our annual Dining In, perhaps the most anticipated event for upperclassmen. Dining Ins build camaraderie and cohesion between the active duty staff and midshipmen.

Our final two events for the year are the Jayhawk Battalion Awards Ceremony April 26th at 1600, this ceremony highlights our midshipmen's accomplishments and recognizes their outstanding performance throughout the year. Finally, our Joint Commissioning is May 15th at 1000, both events are in the Kansas Union. We hope to see you soon.

Thank you for your continued support of the Jayhawk Battalion.

Rock Chalk and Go Navy!

CAPT David J. Meron

NEVER STOP SERVING



Air Force News

LtCol Bill Pastewait, USAF

Hello from Detachment 280, the Flying Jayhawks!

It's been a great year for the Flying Jayhawks! As we close out the semester we are preparing to commission seven new 2Lts into the United States Air Force. On Monday, 15 May, we will commission:

- Cadet Brian Frew – Developmental Engineer
- Cadet Rodney Hodges – Nuclear Operations
- Cadet Adam Hopkins – Air Battle Manager
- Cadet Dale Hupe – Pilot
- Cadet Caitlin Longhofer – Nuclear Operations
- Cadet Melanie Mohseni –
Space Operations/Air Liaison Officer
- Cadet Alexander Pruss– Pilot

As these seniors prepare for graduation and commissioning we submitted 12 cadets to compete for an enrollment allocation (EA). The EA grants a student with a slot to Field Training and a chance for entry into the Professional Officer Course. We were extremely pleased to have a 100% selection rate for our detachment this year! All of our cadets will attend Field Training this summer. This 19-day program consists of an “in-garrison” session at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, and a “deployed” session to Camp Shelby Army National Guard, Mississippi. Successful completion allows them to contract into the Professional Officer Course and moves them one step closer to commissioning.

We hosted our Alumni Leadership Laboratory on 13 April. This event was an opportunity to recognize just a fraction of our over 1,200 alumni who received a commissioning through Detachment 280. The Alumni Leadership Laboratory incorporated both senior and sophomore students. Each group was assigned one of the seven alumni and was responsible for interviewing the alum, collecting photographs or memorabilia, creating a storyboard of that person and presenting them at the event. We were fortunate to recognize the following alumni:

Matt Jones, Captain Stephanie Cyr, Larry Rosselot, Lt Col Ron Mastin, Lt Col Mike Means, Dr. Harold Finch and Lt Col Jerry Cullen. This was a fantastic event and the cadets really enjoyed linking up with these former cadets and hearing all the great stories about the Air Force, KU and Detachment 280.

The highlight of the semester so far is scholarship awards! Cadets Ciara Cavitt, Rachel Maurer and Christian Dell from the University of Kansas and Cadet Mary Tighe from Benedictine College were recipients of a Type-II Air Force ROTC scholarship. This competitive scholarship covers \$18,000 in tuition per year and includes books and stipend payments.

Detachment update:

Cadet Melanie Mohseni was selected to attend Air Liaison Officer (ALO) Phase II training. This is a highly competitive career field and if she passes Phase II she'll be commissioned into the Air Force as an ALO officer.

Coming Up:

Commissioning will take place at 1000 on Monday, May 15th, in the KU Memorial Union.

Sophomore cadets and Cadre are off to Field Training! Our commissionees are off to be 2Lts in the United States Air Force!

Thanks for all the fantastic support from MOAA this year! Is it greatly appreciated!

Rock, Chalk!

Very Respectfully,

LtCol Bill Pastewait

Commander, Air Force ROTC Det 280

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MOAA LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

This is a summary of the many items MOAA produces each week on legislative activities. Those who have e-mail receive the full Legislative Updates each week.

MOAA Legislative Update, 24 February 2017:

Final Report On Arlington National Cemetery

After months of analysis, a report concludes Arlington National Cemetery will need to change eligibility restrictions to keep its doors open.

Budget Challenges Front & Center For New Administration

With the new administration now in place at one end of Pennsylvania Avenue and a new Congress in place at the

other end, the top questions on most lawmaker's minds are what will the Trump administration's 2018 budget proposal look like, and what is the way ahead?

Given this political and fiscal environment, going forward, Congress is faced with a few options concerning the Budget Control Act of 2011:

- * Congress can vote to repeal sequestration, lifting budget caps and returning to regular order in terms of budget and fiscal considerations;

- * members can come up with another budget deal and find a way to raise the caps; or they can leave the caps in place.
- * Any option outlined includes the need to fund the government beyond April.

How Sequestration Affects Military Families

Sequestration is intended to save the federal government and the American people from increasing national debt. It slashes spending, indiscriminately. If it weren't for some temporary budgetary maneuvering a few years back, cuts could have been much worse than they are currently. Regardless, we are still facing the expiration of those budget maneuvers and the revival of sequestration cuts across the board. We don't know exactly how bad it might get, but we can tell you, this is the elephant sitting in the living rooms of military families who need childcare.

In an effort to control the growth of the federal government, and the costs associated with it, the president ordered a temporary hiring freeze of federal employees just a few days after taking office. As DoD examined the policy, it came out with guidance [exempting critical categories](#). One of those categories is "positions providing child care to the children of military personnel." Despite the exemption, some federal positions responsible for a part of the hiring process may be short staffed as a result of the hiring freeze, resulting in a backlog of hires and creating a seam between the authority to hire and the ability to do so.

MOAA Legislative Update, 03 March 2017: Is President Trump's Defense Budget Enough?

President Donald Trump's inaugural address to Congress on Wednesday outlined his plan for a broad shake-up of fiscal priorities aimed at boosting defense spending.

Trump stated, "Our military will be given the resources its brave warriors so richly deserve."

He went on to say, "I am sending Congress a budget that rebuilds the military, eliminates the defense sequester and calls for one of the largest increases in national defense spending in American history".

The budget would increase base defense spending by \$54 billion, or about 10 percent, compared to FY 2017. The administration also plans to submit a \$30 billion supplemental spending proposal for the current year.

Specific details of the administration's plan aren't expected until sometime in early May.

To fund the \$54 billion increase for FY 2018 without increasing the deficit, the administration plans to cut \$54 billion from domestic programs, which is sure to cause a political uproar on the Hill, given both parties' spending priorities.

Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney said this week that non-military spending will take the "largest proposed reduction since the early years of the Reagan administration".

While many in Congress, especially the defense hawks, have applauded the defense increase, several in key leadership positions on the Armed Services committees say it is not nearly enough.

The administration termed the \$603 billion budget request, which is an increase of \$18.5 billion over what the Obama administration had proposed for FY 2018, as an increase of 10 percent, but that number is only in comparison to sequestration levels of \$549 billion. So in reality, says Rep. Mike Turner (R-Ohio), Chairman of the House Armed Services Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee, "That's really only a 3-percent increase and is fake budgeting".

President Trump's budget proposal does not go above the total cap. Instead, as stated earlier, it takes \$54 billion from domestic agencies and gives it to DOD.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman, John McCain (R-Ariz.), echoed the same frustration, stating "With a world on fire, America cannot secure peace through strength with just 3 percent more than Pres. Obama's budget, "we can and must do better". McCain said he and Thornberry agree on a defense budget of \$640 billion "as a first step toward restoring military readiness, rebuilding our military, and reshaping our forces for the realities of 21st century warfare."

VA Costs Could Balloon with 'Choice Reform, New 'AO' Ailments

VA Secretary David J. Shulkin this week announced that his priorities for improving services to veterans include expanding access to private sector health care in part by asking Congress to remove two irksome cost controls.

Under the often-criticized VA Choice Program, enacted in 2014 in response to a wait-time scandal across the VA health system, veterans can seek private sector care at the VA's expense only if they face wait times longer than 30 days for a VA appointment or they live more than 40 miles from a VA health care facility.

The Trump administration now wants Choice extended and expanded, as do key congressional leaders, despite warnings from veteran service organizations that shifting too many patients and too much funding to private sector care could begin a slide toward full privatization of VA health care.

Shulkin told attendees at a conference of the American Legion Tuesday he wants Congress to extend authority for Choice past its Aug. 7 sunset date "because we need those resources to be able to provide the care for veterans that they deserve."

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), an architect of the VA Choice Program, also wants it expanded. He said the VA "does the best job of anybody on [post-traumatic stress disorder], traumatic brain injury, prostheses" and other select health services. But veterans shouldn't have to wait to get routine medical care, McCain told the American Legion conferees. They should have the same access to local physicians and hospitals as do Medicare patients.

Burn Pit Study Released Share This Burn Pit Study

A new study on burn pits highlights the need for more comprehensive data in veterans' health records.

The study, required by a 2013 law, also established a registry for servicemembers exposed to toxic chemicals generated from open burn pits. The study is a joint effort between the VA and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. To date, over 64,000 veterans have joined the registry.

During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military has relied on burn pits as a way to incinerate waste and junk. This means things such as batteries, tires, and human waste have all been set ablaze, often with things like gasoline or jet fuel, and usually within close proximity to military bases.

A 2015 inspector general report found during the height of conflict in Afghanistan, the military generated about 440 tons of waste a day. According to the report, "[During] the first four years of contingency operations in Afghanistan, the U.S. military used open-air burn pits exclusively to dispose of its solid waste."

Long-term exposure to burn pits has been thought to coincide with higher rates of certain types of cancer, respiratory diseases, and other illnesses. The VA continues

to say there isn't enough research available to directly link any medical conditions with exposure to burn pits.

MOAA Legislative Update, 10 March 2017: The Gap Between Providing and Accessing Resources for Military Families

Military families regularly face challenges the typical American family would consider extraordinary, such as moving every two-four years. The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) listens to servicemembers and families as they discuss such challenges associated with the military lifestyle. We consider and analyze their difficulties and then work with policymakers and legislators to find solutions.

Through these engagements, we have learned remedies take many forms. Sometimes a change in law or policy is required; sometimes it's a matter of sharing knowledge of preexisting programs and removing barriers to accessing them. Lately, the latter scenario has become more typical, and narrowing the divide between resource availability and access to such programs has become a readiness issue for families and their servicemember.

For servicemembers and their families to gain access to desired resources, they must:

- Know about the existence of the resource;
- * understand how and when to ask for it, what it's called, and who is eligible; and
- * trust there will be no penalty or stigma attached to a request for it.

Ideally, servicemembers and families are aware a program or solution to their challenge exists; understand how and when to ask for the resource in question; and trust their supervisors and leadership will be supportive. If any of those elements are lacking, the process of getting help becomes difficult. In those less-than-ideal cases, servicemembers and families often turn to advocates like MOAA to bridge the divide.

We already know how important it is for our military to retain the best and brightest, and we know those people are more willing to stay if they know their families will be taken care of. As the saying goes, we recruit the soldier but retain the family.

If you have a family and would like to comment on your experience, MOAA want to hear from you. Click [here](#) to share your thoughts in a quick survey.

More Choice, Better Health Care in Store for Vets

VA Secretary, David Shulkin, had a busy week. First, he met with MOAA and other veteran organization leaders at the White House on Tuesday. On Wednesday, he testified before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, outlining his plans for reforming the agency's health care system.

At his confirmation hearing in February, Shulkin told Congress he intends to build a system that puts veterans first. "Give me the resources and the authority, then hold me accountable," he said.

Since 2014, amid reports of widespread access problems and hidden wait lists at the Phoenix, Ariz. VA medical center, Congress has been working to improve access and quality of health care for veterans.

Congress responded by passing the Veterans Choice program, which allows qualified veterans to receive care in the private sector.

Thanks to the [input of MOAA members](#), we were able to ask the secretary about his priorities and got the first glimpse of how he plans to reform the VA health system transformation and the Choice program.

Since the roll out of Choice, Congress has made adjustments to the law, but the secretary needs additional

funding and authority to fully execute his mandate. Under current law, funding for the Choice program expires this August.

At the hearing, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said, "If the Choice program lapses, the system will again fail."

Later, Secretary Shulkin similarly affirmed a national disaster would occur if the Choice Act wasn't extended. McCain and Shulkin are working with other Senate and House leaders to introduce a bill called the Veteran Choice Improvement Act. It is a replacement program for Choice, but includes a newer, better version of community care systems, one simpler and easier to understand and navigate, while expanding access to care.

"MOAA is pleased to see such impressive commitment on the part of the Secretary and members of Congress to provide veterans the care and services they earned and deserve," said Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), MOAA President and CEO.

"During my meeting at the White House, and then again at the hearing, Secretary Shulkin reiterated his position that he does not support privatization, but rather an integrated health care system" Atkins said.

The plan includes some private sector contributions, and lays out a vision of eight principles to guide the program's development:

- * Ensure no degradation of existing care.
- * Commit to an integrated system.
- * Increase "choice" [health care options] for all veterans; however, program expansion would start with service-connected veterans (it is estimated that 15.6 percent of veterans are categorized as "service-connected").
- * Ensure enrolled veterans get care closer to home (move to a clinical eligibility standard rather than the current 30-day/40-mile rule).
- * Optimize coordination with other health insurance coverage the veteran may have. The VA would establish a "Primary Coordinator of Benefits" position to manage the effort.
- * Maintain affordability for the lowest income-level veterans.
- * Assist veterans supported by multiple providers with a VA primary coordinator of care across the system (in-house or community care).
- * Apply industry standards for performance, health standards, quality, payment, etc.

Committee members spent significant time questioning Shulkin, the VA Inspector General, and Government Accountability Office witnesses, expressing their concerns and seeking more information about the secretary's plans.

Enlisted Unanimously Request Fiscal Certainty

Senior enlisted advisors to the military branch service chiefs testified regarding quality-of-life issues before the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies. No member of the armed services is considered to be better suited to speaking about the day-to-day challenges of servicemembers and their families than these enlisted leaders, the most highly ranked in their respective services.

Each of the leaders was asked to list their top three concerns for their troops:

Sergeant Major of the Army Dailey:

- Readiness
- The future of the Army
- Soldiers and families

Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Giordano:

- Increasing PCS lead times
- Childcare availability

Mobility and resulting impacts on spouse employment

Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Green:
Hometown/installation readiness
Personal readiness and families' needs
Transition

Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Wright:
Operational tempo
Pay and compensation uncertainty
Childcare and spouse employment

Oral statements were followed by almost two full rounds of questions from the committee. Questions ranged from concern over healthcare access to Medicaid and ECHO for military children with special needs and the scandal involving nude photos shared in a private Facebook group.

The senior enlisted leaders echoed concerns that remain at the top of MOAA's legislative agenda. We are actively supporting appropriations and authorizations for robust programs to maintain servicemember and family readiness. Additionally, repealing sequestration and restoring some level of fiscal certainty will be one of two issues we address when we Storm the Hill this year with hundreds of MOAA leaders from across the country. Sergeant Major Dailey's reminder that the individual chooses to serve is a poignant one; we want the choice to serve to be an easy one.

MOAA Sponsors Congressional Event to Discuss National Guard and Reserve Priorities

On March 8, MOAA, along with partners in The Military Coalition, sponsored an event with the House National Guard and Reserve Caucus. The meeting, hosted by Reps. Steven Palazzo (R-Miss.) and Tim Walz (D-Minn.), brought together leaders from the Guard and Reserve community to share their priorities with members of Congress and military and veterans' service organizations.

The Chiefs of the National Guard Bureau, Army National Guard, and Navy, Army, and Air Force Reserves, as well as the commander of Marine Forces Reserve and the director of Reserve and Military Personnel for the Coast Guard Reserve were all in attendance.

Lt. Gen. Charles Luckey, USAR, said the Army's war plans include the rapid use of the Guard and Reserve forces. He explained, "We are looking at different combat environments where every domain will be contested so we need the Guard and Reserve capabilities to match those of active duty. The rear is not the rear anymore, and it's not secure."

Lt. Gen. Rex McMillian, USMCR, echoed, "The next fight is coming, and it's sooner than you think."

All the services emphasized the need for a ready and capable reserve force that can provide strategic capabilities to the active duty component. Section 12304b of Title 10 allows the service secretaries to use selected reserve forces without the need for an emergency call-up by the president or secretary of defense. The orders give the services needed latitude but also create a problematic benefits gap.

Reservists activated under 12304b orders do not receive creditable service towards the Post-9/11 GI Bill or pre-deployment health care, benefits they otherwise would receive when called up under traditional orders.

12304b orders also require the services to plan for their use years in advance. Such long-term planning significantly restricts the services' capabilities to effectively use the authority, something that is not conducive with the current demands of Guard and Reserve forces.

"12304b orders can be useful tools for an operational reserve," says Lt. Col. Aniela Szymanski, USMCR, MOAA Government Relations' director of National Guard, Reserve, and Veterans Benefits, "but Congress needs to fix them so servicemembers get the benefits they deserve."

Last year, DoD submitted to Congress legislative proposals to resolve the disparity in 12304b orders, but those proposals were not included in the final FY17 defense bill.

On March 7, Palazzo introduced H.R. 1384, a bill to resolve the inequity existing between these different types of active duty orders.

Preparing to Storm for the Widows

MOAA will "Storm the Hill" in April 2017 on several issues including repeal of the SBP-DIC offset, often referred to as the "Widows Tax."

The offset is truly unfair and we have been working to repeal it for more than 15 years. Outright repeal would cost approximately \$8 billion at this juncture and budget dollars are very tight right now.

In 2007, Congress recognized the "unfairness" of the offset and authorized the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) as a vehicle to repeal the offset gradually, in a manner similar to concurrent receipt of disability pay. However, SSIA will expire in May 2018 - unless Congress extends the allowance.

MOAA Legislative Update, 17 March 2017:

COLA Keeps Rising

The February CPI is 237.477, 1.03 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline.

The CPI for March 2017 is scheduled to be released on April 14, 2017.

Note: Military retiree COLA is calculated based on the CPI for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), not the overall CPI. Monthly changes in the index may differ from national figures reported elsewhere.

MOAA Legislative Update, 24 March 2017:

MOAA Testifies Before Joint Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees on Health Care

On March 22, MOAA's Director of Government Relations for Veterans Benefits Lt. Col. Aniela Szymanski, USMCR, testified before a joint session of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs committees on MOAA's legislative priorities.

MOAA asked the committees to act immediately to extend the VA Choice Program, which is scheduled to end Aug. 7, 2017. To date, thousands of veterans have used the VA Choice Program to obtain medical care from community providers when they have been unable to obtain appointments at their local VA medical center or clinic.

An end to the Choice Program would result in veterans losing access to critical health care services because the VA will be unable to meet the demands. Sen. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) introduced a bill March 7 to extend the Choice Program, S. 544, which MOAA supports.

SCOTUS Begins Hearing on Division of Retired Pay

A case involving the Uniformed Services Former Spouse Protection Act (USFSPA), a controversial 1982 law, is being heard before the Supreme Court. The case will determine the extent of a state court's legal authority to divide military retired pay in a divorce where the former servicemember waives a portion of military retired pay in favor of VA disability compensation.

MOAA Annual Letter

Dear MOAA Members:

As I celebrate my first anniversary as MOAA's president and CEO, I am reminded of the positive influence our organization has on the entire military community. Whether it's advocating for higher pay raises, containing health care expenses, offering one-on-one benefits counseling, or providing individualized career guidance, our actions continue to make a difference.

I'd like to take this opportunity to share highlights of our association's remarkable success in 2016. I hope you'll find this a useful effort to provide some reflection on the challenges, opportunities, and accomplishments profoundly impacting the livelihood of all servicemembers — past, present, and future — and their families.

You can be assured of MOAA's commitment to never stop serving. We're proactively identifying issues, working closely with Congress, and offering solutions—all in an attempt to create the "best future" for the military community. MOAA always will be at the forefront, protecting and defending your earned benefits and providing the resources you need at every stage of life and career.

As the latest officer to have the privilege to serve as your president, I remain grateful for this opportunity to continue serving the men and women who serve and have served our great nation.

Yours in service,

Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret)
President and CEO

MOAA Legislative Update, 31 March 2017:

Are Commissaries in Jeopardy?

Last week, the GAO released an overdue report required as part of commissary reform measures included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016. GAO briefed the Armed Services committees more than a year ago on their preliminary observations, but just released the report on its analysis and review of certain aspects of commissary operations. In the meantime, the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) has been moving full steam ahead on pilot programs in variable pricing and private-label products, directly impacting the experience of commissary patrons.

The GAO report concludes that certain DeCA business processes "are not consistent with those generally employed by commercial grocery stores." This isn't surprising, as DeCA is constrained by law regarding how much they can charge, to whom they can sell, where they can operate, etcetera. But the report identifies certain areas where the standards used by DeCA are inefficient. This leaves MOAA concerned, because during GAO's evaluation of the processes, DeCA already was implementing new ways of doing business. Achieving data fidelity is difficult when the evaluation instrument is out of touch and out of sync with the subject. The GAO concludes that:

Think tank proposes major cuts to servicemembers' BAH

A prominent conservative think tank has proposed drastic changes to the military's Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), which they say too many troops view as an entitlement.

The Heritage Foundation, based in Washington, D.C., is calling on Congress to make radical changes to servicemembers' BAH. Their proposal would put an end to dual-military couples who live together collecting two housing allowances. It also would mean servicemembers

who find housing that costs less than their BAH rates would no longer be able to pocket the difference.

"Congress should restore BAH's place as an allowance, versus an entitlement, by requiring married military couples to share a single BAH, and all service members to document their housing expenditures in order to receive BAH," the authors wrote in a new 21-page report titled "[Preventing a Defense Crisis: The 2018 National Defense Authorization Act Must Begin to Restore U.S. Military Strength.](#)"

MOAA Legislative Update, 07 April 2017:

MOAA Storms the Hill

MOAA council and chapter presidents from across the United States, accompanied by members of the national board of directors and headquarters staff, plus members of MOAA's Currently Serving Advisory Council, Currently Serving Spouse Advisory Council, and Surviving Spouse Advisory Committee stormed Capitol Hill April 5th and visited nearly all 535 senators and representatives in support of key legislative priorities.

MOAA stormers used personal testimonies and experience to supplement the primary asks:

- * [Eliminate the SBP-DIC Offset](#)
- * [Eliminate Harmful Sequestration Cuts](#)
- * [Prevent Disproportional TRICARE Fees](#)

Over 165 MOAA members and staff took the Hill while thousands more flooded email inboxes with similar messages. This valuable time with lawmakers goes a long way toward accomplishing MOAA's legislative goals. Initial feedback from the event suggests that our issues were well received, but there is still quite a lot of work to do.

The efforts of MOAA members are already paying dividends. 23 additional representatives became cosponsors of legislation to repeal the widows tax, up from 53 just one week ago. 18 members of the Senate have signed on for repeal, an increase from 17 previously. We anticipate more cosponsors to sign on following the Easter recess.

MOAA President Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), introduced Coffman and closed the evening by thanking the stormers who had taken to Capitol Hill earlier that day to engage their congressional representatives.

To see some photos from the meetings and learn more about this year's Storming the Hill events, check out: www.moa.org/moaastorms.

New VA website will feature up-to-date wait times, patients' reviews

The VA will unveil a new website this month that will help veterans make better choices about their health care, Secretary of the VA David Shulkin told MOAA members Tuesday, April 4.

"You will simply type in where you live or where you want to get care and ... automatically what will pop up is where you can get that care within the VA system and what the wait time will be," Shulkin said.

The VA secretary was the keynote speaker at a briefing to prepare members of MOAA's board of directors, chapter leaders from across the country, and headquarters staff members before the association's annual Storming the Hill event, which took place Wednesday, April 5.

The new site, which Shulkin said will launch in the next two weeks, also will allow veterans to rate their care at VA facilities. Allowing patients to see what their peers think about a VA facility will help improve transparency, he said.

"We all know that there are some really, really good VAs and some that need a lot of work," Shulkin said.

"You're going to be able to see which ones they are based on what your fellow veterans say."

The new tools are part of the secretary's [10-point plan to modernize VA care](#). While the department posts wait times on its website now, Shulkin said they're often buried in hard-to-read spreadsheets.

MOAA Legislative Update, 14 April 2017: **FY17 Budget and Defense Spending in Limbo**

Members of Congress adjourned Friday, April 7, for a two-week recess, and headed back to their home states and districts, leaving great uncertainty as to what will happen regarding the 2017 budget and associated defense spending.

The government is currently being funded under a continuing resolution (CR), which was signed by President Barack Obama Dec. 10, 2016. The previously passed resolution runs out April 28, just four days after members of Congress return from their recess.

Under a CR, funding remains under the previous year's levels and the start of new programs is not authorized, except in rare circumstances.

More Vets Getting Help Through VA Crisis Line

Before breaking for recess, the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs held a hearing to address issues surfacing from three separate investigations, conducted in the last year, on the VA Crisis Line (VCL).

Established in 2007, the VCL was the VA's response to the high rate of veteran suicide - a rate 21 percent higher than the adult civilian population. The VCL is one of several elements of a larger outreach strategy to help veterans in crisis and reduce suicides.

Since its inception, the VCL has responded to nearly 2.8 million calls and dispatched 74,000 emergency services to veterans in crisis. This demand is only expected to continue rising even as the VA struggles to keep up with call volume; it has been working fervently to adapt to the changing needs of veterans seeking assistance.

However, with growth, so too comes challenges. Investigations from the VA Inspector General (IG) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted serious management and organizational problems in every aspect of the VCL operations.

"Perhaps most troubling, the IG also found that VA had failed to implement a single action plan to address the recommendations made in the IG's initial report [February 2016], even though VA had agreed with all the recommendations and committed to implementing corrective actions by no later than last September," stated committee chairman, Rep. Phil Roe (R-Tenn.). "I understand that the recommendations that GAO made last summer [August 2016] are also all still open."

Last month, the IG once again reported additional deficiencies, including those from the two earlier investigations. This brings the total to 23, all of which remain outstanding.

A VA official countered the IG statement during the hearing, saying that VA had submitted a report to the IG to remove six of the seven discrepancies from the initial February 2016 report, and by the end of this year, the agency expected to have all discrepancies corrected and plans implemented.

Still, there is much more work to be done. Legislation is needed to make sure the VA has the funding and resources it requires to respond effectively to veterans in need. Promotion of the VA's vast mental health and suicide

prevention tools and programs is necessary to increase awareness.

Just this week, the VA announced the deployment of a new predictive modeling system called [REACH VET](#) (Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health), which analyzes medical record data to identify veterans at higher risk of suicide, hospitalization, illness, or other health issues.

"We appreciate the VA and Congress' sustained efforts in working with veteran service organizations like ours to promote the crisis line and other suicide prevention tools and materials," said MOAA's director of government relations for veterans-wounded, ill & injured health care, Cdr. Rene Campos, USN (Ret). "VA's crisis line is an important lifeline and resource for veterans and their families in distress."

MOAA urges all of our members to become familiar with the resources and tools available through the [Veterans Crisis Line](#) website.

If you or a veteran are in need, please dial 1-800-273-8255. The call is confidential and the center is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year.

TRICARE Dental Contractor Change-Up

The TRICARE Dental program, which covers eligible families for active duty as well as the Guard and Reserve members, will change to a new contractor May 1. While a typical change in contractors involves different providers joining the new network, the recent change to United Concordia has drawn quite a bit of attention by concerned beneficiaries and their dentists.

The new TRICARE contract requires United Concordia to provide a minimum of 95 percent of beneficiaries enrolled in the program with an in-network dentist. The dentist's office must be within a 35-mile radius of the beneficiary's home, and provide an appointment within 21 days of a request. United Concordia stated it has exceeded this contractual requirement. However, reports of complaints from beneficiaries are surfacing, suggesting existing dentists will not be joining the new network due to lower reimbursement rates.

Cost of Living Update

The March CPI is 237.477, 1.1 percent above the FY 2016 COLA baseline.

The CPI for April 2017 is scheduled to be released on May 12, 2017.

Note: Military retiree COLA is calculated based on the CPI for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), not the overall CPI. Monthly changes in the index may differ from national figures reported elsewhere.

MOAA Legislative Update, 21 April 2017: **Military Health System Reform**

It is often said that the only constant in health care is change. During the next few months, beneficiaries will move forward with the Military Health System's (MHS) most sweeping changes in decades. The MHS, to be sure, faces many of the same challenges that exist in civilian health systems including rising costs, pressure to meet consumer demand, and making the transition from paying for the volume of care to paying for the value of care.

However, the primary difference between the MHS and civilian systems is the MHS is built first and foremost for readiness. Unlike civilian health care delivery, the MHS is consistently under pressure to deliver a range of services

from providing trauma care for combat troops on the battlefield, to providing humanitarian care around the globe, not to mention delivering health care for more than 9 million other beneficiaries. This complex enterprise, with an annual budget of \$50 billion, must also continue to adapt to and evolve into new technologies. It must embrace establishing a modern electronic health records system and instituting quality and access standards that the increasingly savvy beneficiary demands. It is within this environment that Congress placed into law the extensive provisions contained in last year's defense bill. Now is the time for the military to put these major changes into action.

Looking to the Future: All Eyes Will Be On Performance

The MHS health care changes go a long way toward achieving many of MOAA's goals from the past several years. Specifically, they addressed the systemic and problematic issues chronically associated with access, quality of care, and the efficiency and consistency of beneficiary care. It also modernizes the TRICARE program as Congress intended.

Congress Mulls Changes to Post-9/11 GI Bill

Congress is considering a proposal to require all new servicemembers to contribute \$100 per month for 24 months in order to take advantage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Reservists would be required to pay \$67 per active duty month until reaching \$2,400 in contributions.

Currently, the Post-9/11 GI Bill is free for any veteran who served at least 90 days on active duty after Sept. 10, 2001, providing recipients with a prorated benefit of up to 36 months of tuition and allowances for housing and books. Qualified servicemembers can transfer their GI Bill benefits to a spouse or dependent.

Last year, in an effort to cut costs, Congress attempted to tweak the amount of money given to GI Bill beneficiaries using transferred benefits. After a political outcry, the proposal was dropped.

"There's the concern some folks with a strained budget, particularly junior enlisted, may feel like they have to choose between family health care now, education later, or retirement well into the future."

Blended Retirement's Lump-Sum Feature Enticing — but Is It Fair?

When the first wave of active duty personnel who opt into the new Blended Retirement System (BRS) next year start to retire a decade later, they will face a decision on retired pay so unusual the DoD Board of Actuaries has called it inappropriate and asked Congress to rescind the choice.

The decision they will face might be explained like this:

Congratulations on your pending retirement. Do you want your full immediate annuity? Or do you prefer to get part of its value in a discounted lump sum at retirement, in return for forfeiting either one-half or one-quarter of your retired pay until age 67, when you would see full annuities restored?

What sort of dollars are we talking about? Defense officials will not announce the actual personal discount rate to be used to illustrate lump-sum values until June 1. But here are calculations Kopp made that actuaries have deemed as reasonable:

- * If a 38-year-old E-7, completing a 20-year career, could retire today under the BRS formula, the lump-sum offer would be \$174,454 in return for forfeiting 50 percent of retired pay until age 67, when this generation also reaches full retirement

age for Social Security. The second lump-sum option for the same E-7, payable for accepting a 25-percent annuity cut until old age, would be \$87,277.

- * Kopp looked at a 42-year-old officer retiring after 20 years in the rank of O-5. The lump-sum offer would be \$309,132 to take a 50-percent retired pay cut until age 67, and \$154,566 to accept a 25-percent annuity cut for 25 years.
- * Kopp also calculated total retirement dollars these retirees would forfeit to accept lump sums. From age 38 to 67, the E-7 who accepted a 50-percent cut in retired pay would get total retired pay of \$488,363 - and would forfeit an equal amount to accept a lump sum of \$174,454 at retirement. The E-7 who accepted the 25-percent cut until 67 would forfeit \$244,182 to receive \$87,277 at retirement.

To allow these calculations, Kopp assumed retired pay cost-of-living adjustments of 3 percent to match annual inflation. He also plugged in that personal discount rate of 7.3 percent for both officers and enlisted retirees.

New TRICARE Dental Plan: Patients Will Save, But Some Docs Will Flee

Responsibility to provide dental care coverage to 1.37 million active duty family members and 376,000 Reserve and Guard members and their families will shift May 1 from MetLife to United Concordia Companies Inc. of Harrisburg, Pa.

The change in the TRICARE Dental Program contractor will bring lower patient premiums and a modest expansion of covered services. However, United Concordia also will lower key reimbursements to dentists below what they previously have been paid, prompting some dentists to warn patients they won't join the new network.

Starting next month, an unknown number of TRICARE Dental Program enrollees will need to find new dentists from a directory of participating providers United Concordia began to build after winning the competitive bid contract last year.

TRICARE beneficiaries are accustomed to having to switch health care providers from time to time, usually when they move to new locations or when TRICARE support contracts expire and a new company wins the business.

With TRICARE Dental, family advocates say they have several concerns. One is whether United Concordia, by lowering some payments to network dentists, will create coverage gaps in some areas. Another worry is that lowered payments could impact the overall quality of the network provider pool.

A third concern is whether the [dentist directory](#) run by United Concordia lists too many dentists who have already decided not to participate (or will make that decision soon). As with MetLife, he says, United Concordia will be required to meet Code of Federal Regulation standards that 95 percent of enrollees have access to care within 35 miles of their homes and within 21 days. Honey is confident that, also like MetLife, United Concordia will have a network big enough to surpass the targets and 98 percent of enrollees can access quality dental care within 20 miles of their home.

Delta Dental administers a separate TRICARE Retiree Dental Program, which is unaffected by this contract. The Defense Health Agency would like to see higher participation in the TRICARE Dental Program, particularly from reserve components. Only 14 percent of Selected Reserve and National Guard members have enrolled.



JAYHAWK CHAPTER MOAA

A membership meeting will be held **Tuesday, 16 May 2017**,
at Lawrence Country Club.

Dinner cost is \$24.00/meal.

The Program: Our speaker will be April Blackmon Strange,
Director of KU's LtGen William K. Jones Military-Affiliated Student Center.

Social Hour: 1800 hours **Dinner:** 1845 hours

The Menu: Rustic rolls with olive oil & Parmesan, Chefs choice on salad,
Beer-brined roasted pork loin with apple jack brandy sauce, horseradish whipped potatoes,
seasonal vegetables; Chef's choice on dessert

**Send your reservation and check payable to Jayhawk Chapter MOAA
to arrive no later than **Wednesday, 10 May**, to:
CAPT Jim Cooper, 1115 Stone Meadows Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049**

***Dinner reservations are confirmed on Monday before the dinner.
Cancellations, if necessary, should be made prior to Monday noon;
otherwise, the Lawrence Country Club will charge us for those meals.***

If you have any questions, you may contact Jim Cooper at 842-7037 or John Halladay at 843-6184

cut here

Yes, please make _____ reservations for me and my guests. (Spouse and other guests are welcome.)

The cost is \$24.00 per meal. I am enclosing a check for \$ _____ for meal(s).

Chapter Dues (\$20.00), **were due 01 January 2017** \$ _____

Clayton L. Comfort Award program contribution
(Separate check made out to "KU Endowment") \$ _____

TOTAL: \$ _____

Name _____ Telephone _____

IF YOU NEED A RIDE TO MEETINGS, PLEASE LET US KNOW HERE _____

AND GIVE US YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER _____

**TEAR OFF AND RETURN THIS FORM WITH A CHECK PAYABLE TO:
JAYHAWK CHAPTER MOAA**

CAPT Jim Cooper, 1115 Stone Meadows Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049

MOAA WEBSITE: www.moaa.org
KANSAS COUNCIL WEBSITE: www.kansasmooa.net
JAYHAWK CHAPTER WEBSITE:
www.jayhawkmoaa.org

*If you can receive this by
e-mail, please let us know.
Printing and postage costs
the Chapter close to \$3 for
each copy we have to mail.*

Tentative 2017 Meeting Schedule:

Tuesday	16 May	Tuesday	19 September
Tuesday	18 July	Tuesday	21 November

Kansas Council of Chapters Dates/Locations:

12 August	hosted by Jayhawk Chapter in Lawrence
4 November	hosted by Flint Hills Chapter in Manhattan



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IN GOD WE TRUST