



# Jayhawk Chapter MOAA Newsletter



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## January Program:

Our speaker will be Jim Peters, Director of the Osher Institute, speaking on "The Underground Railroad in Lawrence and Douglas County"

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## President's Comments. . .

### Greetings fellow Jayhawk Chapter members

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all of the Jayhawk MOAA Chapter family. I hope this newsletter finds everyone doing well, enjoying time spent with friends and family, and looking forward to an excellent 2019.

I trust that everyone affected was able to make an informed and positive choice in the various options for Dental and Vision Insurance as well as make or renew choices for the various Tricare programs as appropriate. I am certainly grateful for all of the assistance that MOAA was able to provide, making the road down which I traveled to make those choices much easier to navigate. I am always reminded at these times how valuable my MOAA membership can be when making decisions as well as protecting my earned benefits.

MOAA has published our goals for 2019, at the top of which are 1) Better and more timely access to earned benefits 2) More Support for Wounded Warriors and Women Veterans 3) Elimination of financial penalties for military survivors and concurrent receipt penalties for Military retirees and 4) Protect military and veteran family support programs are among the top organizational goals for the year. The most critical current issue is achieving the passage of HR 299 which will expand presumptive exposure to Agent Orange to potentially over 900,000 veterans of the Blue Water Navy. Go to the MOAA legislative website to get guidance on contacting our legislators and extending our support for this critical legislation.

I also agree with some of our members that it is getting to be more difficult to track the changes in leadership than it is to track the changes in benefits. It promises to be certainly an interesting year as a result I am sure.

After some serious discussion Jim and I decided to postpone the elections for the 2019-2020 slate of officers to the March meeting, which we will hold on March 19. We are scheduled to have a member of the MOAA Board of Directors attend the March meeting and we will have them participate in the induction ceremony for the new slate of officers. This will also give the Nominating Committee additional time to fill the slate for 2019-2020.

I have yet to harvest my annual deer for the season. Sometimes I think they know I am out there. There is also the issue of it seems an endless list of other commitments that keep me out of the field during gun season. However there is always late season the beginning of January and I keep feeding them, hoping they will still be there at harvest time.

Again Merry Christmas and Happy New year to you and your families and look forward to seeing all of you the 15<sup>th</sup> of January at the Country Club.



*George*

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\* Reservations should be sent  
to Jim Cooper by  
09 January 2019



## ***JAYHAWK CHAPTER NEWS***

**CHAPTER DUES (\$20.00) are due in January.  
Please send your check to CAPT (Ret) Jim Cooper  
5216 Brown Lane, Lawrence, KS 66049-5112**

### ***CONDOLENCES***

**Darlene Sheriff:** Graveside services for Darlene Mae Kuhlman Sheriff, 86, Lawrence were held Friday, November 16, 2018 at Leavenworth National Cemetery in Leavenworth, KS. Darlene passed away Friday, November 2, 2018 at Lawrence Memorial Hospital.

Darlene was born April 4, 1932, to Wilbur and Alice Bailey Kuhlman in Kansas City, KS. Darlene grew up in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Nebraska, and Colorado and graduated high school in Cambridge, Nebraska. In the eighth grade, in Wakita, OK, Darlene played in the state final basketball game.

She married Don Sheriff on October 12, 1950, in Fort Collins, CO. Don was in the Air Force. They spent another 17 years in the Air Force before Don retired. While at Offutt Air Base, Omaha, NE. Darlene started a library system in the Bellevue Grade School. She raised the money, bought the books, and gathered volunteers to maintain the library. She was named the Nebraska PTA Member of the Year for this event.

After retirement, they moved to Kansas City, KS. Darlene became a ten-year Advertising employee for the Woolworth Company. In 1977, Don and Darlene moved in with Darlene's mother, Alice, on the family farm in southern Leavenworth County. They built a log house themselves, next to Darlene's mother. Darlene took care of her mother until her death.

She was preceded in death by her oldest son, R. Earl Sheriff; her parents, Wilbur and Alice Kuhlman; and a sister, Betty Dee Mohler.

Survivors include her husband, Don; two daughters, Melanie Proctor, Four Seasons, MO, Kathy Lathrom, Boston, MA; son, Howard Sheriff, Denver, CO; a sister, Barbara Lee Johnson; a brother, Howard Kuhlman; five grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren.

### ***PERSONAL NEWS***

Address change for **John Priddle:** 3635 Dandy Drive, Lawrence, KS 66049.  
Land line has been dropped; cell phone is 331-6672.

**From Herschel Stound:** Our 12 year old Granddaughter, Lillian Stroud, is a Ballet Dancer at Midwest Ballet here in Topeka. She has been in the Nutcracker Ballet for the past seven years. Yes, we attended all six performances this year, and did not regret going at all. We are even looking forward to #8 Nutcracker next year. Still Proud Grandparents!

**From Dean Bevan:** I wrapped up my 14th performance as FDR with the terrific cast of "Annie" on Dec. 16.

**From Mike Dailey:** Linda and I recently returned from a three week holiday to Italy – Rome and Florence. Our trip included a visit to the American WWII Military Cemetery just outside Florence. We also spent time visiting the Vatican, Trevi Fountain, the Pantheon, and many other sights in Rome. In Florence we made time to visit the Uffizi, the Accademia, Ponte Vecchio, the Bargello, the Medici Chapel, and a host of other points of interest. This was our sixth holiday in Italy since 2004. Clearly we love the people, the sights, the wine, and the food!

**From Mike Kelly:** I want to thank everyone who participated in the Veterans Day Parade. It was especially gratifying for me to see the strong presence for the Gold Star families. The KC-135R flyover provided by the 190th Air Refueling Wing at Forbes Field was another highlight. If anyone has any suggestions for our parade next year, set for Saturday November 9, 2019, please contact me. This winter, the parade committee will be concentrating on our charity work. If you are aware of a charity need for veterans residing in Douglas County, our committee can consider a donation to that cause. Happy New Year to everybody!

**From Ray Finch:** In mid-October, Jean and I visited our eldest son, John (who now commands the 202nd MI Battalion) and his family at Fort Huachuca, AZ. The primary purpose of the visit was to see our new grandson, Sebastian.

**The newsletter is only as good as the material available,  
so each member is requested to forward to the editors news and other items of interest.**



## *Army News* *LTC Tracey Olson, USA*

### **Greetings Jayhawk Chapter!**

In Army true fashion, The University of Kansas Army ROTC program stayed busy throughout the second half of the semester. We conducted multiple small team level training exercises, our Joint Military Ball and commissioning ceremony.

This year, the program put on the Chancellor's cup, which pitted the ROTC programs against each other in various sporting events. The events included a flag football, basketball, tug-a-war and push-up competitions. This year's trophy went to the Naval program, they won flag football, tug-a-war and the push-up competition. The Naval Midshipman Commander received the Chancellor Cup during the Joint Service Ball at the Double Tree Hotel in Lawrence on the 26th of October.

Our training focus remained centered on individual tasks which gradually build into larger collective level tasks. Subjects included machine gun employment, advance movement techniques, field craft and first aid. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, we commissioned two Second Lieutenants into the Army. Family and friends of the newly commissioned Lieutenants, witnessed the ceremony at the Military Science Building on main campus. 2LT Jordan Freitag commissioned as an Engineer Officer in the North Dakota National Guard and 2LT Levi Lindsay commissioned as a Nurse in the Army Reserve.

Looking forward to next semester, we have three major events taking place.

First, our spring FTX will be conducted on Fort Riley where we will partner with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This training event will include an M4 range, squad level training, platoon level training, the confidence course, simulators and a flight with an aviation unit.

Next, we are hosting the 25th Annual Ranger Buddy Challenge at Rim Rock Farms. Last year, over 450 competitors from 42 different Universities competed, we are hoping for a similar turnout for this year's event.

Lastly, we will celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Army ROTC on the University of Kansas with a military ball on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April. With the celebration, we are looking at different ideas throughout the week for alumni to gather and socialize, to include a golf scramble.

### **Rock Chalk!**

*LTC Tracey Olson*  
*Professor of Military Science*



## *Navy News* *Capt Trenton Lennard, USN*



### **Greeting From the Jayhawk Battalion!**

The second half of the fall semester proved just as busy as the first. A major accomplishment this semester was that the NROTC Midshipmen led the planning and execution of the highly successful Joint Service Ball in November. We were honored to have KU NROTC alumnus CAPT Sean Bailey, the Commanding Officer of the USS George H. W. Bush (CVN-77), as the guest speaker. He offered advice and wisdom to the combined ROTC units, and spoke with our unit several times during his visit.

In October, the NROTC unit participated in several joint events. One of the most demanding was the test to earn the German Armed Forces Proficiency Badge (GAFPB). Organized and run by German Army Officers from Fort Leavenworth, the grueling test took several days to complete and consisted of a swimming portion, PT evolutions, pistol marksmanship, and a final ruck run. All the Midshipmen that participated from the Jayhawk Battalion passed, earning a coveted badge in either the Gold, Silver, or Bronze category.

Battalion members were also able to spend some time with the German Army Officers and learn about their service. More joint camaraderie was experienced during the Salute to Service football game against Iowa State University on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Midshipmen and cadets attended the game in uniform, sang their respective service songs and showed their KU pride.

The Veterans Day celebrations provided many opportunities for us to remember those who have answered the call of service to our country. As a collective, the ROTC units stood



watches in front of the Campanile and the Vietnam War Memorials for 24 straight hours. The following morning, the Naval unit participated



in a formation run during the campus Veterans Day Memorial 5K in memory of MIDN Nick Herren and the other KU NROTC service members past and present. The weekend reminded everyone, military and civilian alike, of the sacrifices made by those in the United States military and those who have served.

We would like to thank the Jayhawk MOAA for honoring one of our own at the MOAA dinner in November. MIDN Wyatt Bowers is one of our best and brightest students, and he embodies the highest levels of leadership, citizenship, character, and discipline and deserved being honored with the Major General Clay Comfort Award. Thank you for hosting members of the Battalion. It was a great event.

Finally, our winter commissioning ceremony marked the end of ENS McNichols' career as a Midshipman. He was commissioned on 17 December at a ceremony at the KU

Union and he will depart for NAS Pensacola soon to begin his training as a student naval aviator. We wish him the best of luck. Fly Navy!

Once again I want to thank you for your support of the Jayhawk Battalion. I am constantly humbled by the high quality military and civilian personnel that make up the KU NROTC staff. Additionally, our active duty students and Midshipmen continue to amaze me. I am honored to be part of this organization. Happy Holidays to all from our battalion and we thank you for your ongoing support!

**Rock Chalk Jayhawk!**

***Capt Trenton Lennard***



***Air Force News  
LtCol Nichole Phelan, USAF***

**Happy Holidays from Detachment 280, the Flying Jayhawks!**



We just finished a fantastic fall semester with some amazing accomplishments for our cadets. Cadet Kenneth Webb and Andrew Bemis from the University of Kansas were recipients of a Type-II Air Force ROTC scholarship for sophomore cadets. This competitive scholarship covers \$18,000 in tuition per year and includes books and stipend payments. Cadet Grant Mitton was selected as the Cadet Wing Commander for the Spring 2019 semester. He, along with his Cadet Vice Wing Commander, Cadet Thomas Kennedy, will plan and run all training and activities for the Flying Jayhawk Cadet Wing during the next 15 weeks. Finally, Cadet Samuel Anderson became 2d Lieutenant Anderson at our first ever commissioning ceremony held at Benedictine College. He was given the oath by his father, USAF Retired Col Dean Anderson. Lt Anderson majored in Mechanical



Engineering at Benedictine and reports to Laughlin AFB, TX in February to attend Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training.

*Detachment update:*

Senior cadets received their Air Force Specialty Codes in preparation for active duty. The eight seniors graduating in the Spring of 2019 were classified as follows:

- 4 - Pilots, 1 - Missile Operations, 1 - Contracting,
- 1 - Intelligence and 1 - Acquisitions.

Cadets are now waiting to receive their base preferences.

Detachment 280 Cadet Wing had a very busy last two months. The cadets organized a parents' open house before the Salute to Service Football game. The upperclassman attended a pregame tailgate brunch at the Chancellor's residence. Over Veterans Day weekend, they held a 24-hr vigil at the military monuments on campus, ran in KU's Veterans Day 5K, and participated in the Lawrence Veterans Day parade. One busy month led to another, with the culmination of their 15 week semester ending with a cadet

wing change of command and award ceremony held the first week in December.

We have to give a shout out to our fall Cadet Wing Leadership, Cadet Logan Albers and Cadet Veila Colunga, who led the largest Cadet Wing this detachment has had in over a decade. The Wing accomplished many amazing feats this semester with a complete remodel of our Medal of Honor room, the cadet lounge, and even creating a new detachment patch, which has not been updated in almost 20 years. If you have not been by the military science building lately and seen these new updates, I would highly encourage you to please stop by and say Hi!



### *Coming Up:*

Cadets are on winter break until the Spring Semester starts. We have several new events planned for the Spring that include a base visit, possibly to the Colorado Spring area. We wish each of you and your families a very Happy Holidays and thank you so much for your great support of our program.

### **Rock, Chalk!**

Very Respectfully,

***LtCol Nikki Phelan***

Commander, Air Force ROTC Det 280

## ***Congratulations to Herschel and Jacque Stroud***

*In order to provide for the appropriate recognition of those individuals within our community of proud supporters of The University of Kansas who have provided exemplary service to the Topeka Jayhawk Club and the Jayhawk Nation, the Board of Directors of the Topeka Jayhawk Club hereby creates the "TJC Volunteer of the Year" award.*

*A few of their many activities include:*

*Working together to coordinate the Topeka Jayhawk Club Band.*

*Scheduling events, maintaining music files and coordinating with members.*

*Making sure the band is at Forbes to welcome the Team when it leaves and returns from the NCAA Tournament.*

*They are the best cheerleaders and supporters any organization could hope to have.*



*Herschel and Jacque Stroud were presented the award by Coach Bill Self during the 2018 Roundball Luncheon at the Downtown Topeka Ramada Inn on December 12th.*

## ***MOAA NEWSLETTER ADVOCACY***

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

### **MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 01 November 2018:** **President Trump's Call for Budget Cuts May Affect Military Pay, TRICARE**

President Trump's recent call for a 5 percent cut across every federal department includes the Defense Department, [Defense News confirmed in an Oct. 27 report](#).

What does all of this mean for servicemembers and retirees? Potential reductions could mean:

- \* A military pay raise for fiscal year 2020 that is below the Employment Cost Index
- \* Another possible push to reduce the calculation for Basic Allowance for Housing (especially with regard to dual military couples)
- \* And increases in TRICARE fees for beneficiaries.

Deputy Defense Secretary Pat Shanahan on Oct. 26 indicated that this will not be a one year blip, but rather part of a flattening of budgets. At the Military Reporters and Editors News Conference, Shanahan said, "When you look at the \$700 billion, it's not just for one year drop down, [or] a phase, it's a drop and then held constant over the future years defense program, a five year projection included in every budget."

Congress will have the final word in the outcome of the FY2020 defense budget.

Also requiring congressional action in FY2020 are the reductions that would come with a return of the mandated sequestration cuts required under the 2011 Budget Control Act.

All of this portends that after two years of sustained growth in the defense budget, there will now be proposed reductions and cutbacks to defense spending and programs.

Earlier this month, MOAA reported the Employment Cost Index could be driving another big pay increase in 2020, but the prospect of cuts means the actual raise could come in below ECI next year.

[Related: [This Key Indicator Points to the Largest Military Pay Raise in 10 Years](#)]

MOAA needs members to keep up with developments and stay engaged as the administration's FY2020 budget takes shape and the proposal goes to the new 116th Congress sometime in early February.

### **MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 08 November 2018:** **VA Secretary Hints At More Changes Coming In Early 2019**

Since his swearing-in ceremony on July 30, Veterans Affairs Secretary, Robert Wilkie has demonstrated his leadership style by getting out and about - continuously. From visiting the VA Medical Centers, to attending the [Military Family Summit](#), Wilkie is making sure he is visible and hears all voices in VA. Last month, Wilkie attended a VA Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs meeting with veteran service organizations, including MOAA, where legislative priorities were shared.

Wilkie reflected on his first months as secretary and the progress that has been made thus far. He also hinted at upcoming changes. Wilkie's overarching commentary focused

on the fact that VA is an enormous organization and that changes must be made in phases. These changes would then only be implemented after Wilkie is convinced that the outcomes to veterans will be free of glitches, errors, and problems. Towards that goal, VA's [new Electronic Health Record](#) is being tested in Washington and Alaska to work out any glitches before it goes nationwide.

Wilkie made clear VA must undergo what he termed "business transformations" in order to better serve veterans. One example he provided is improving supply chains to VA Medical Centers. In 2017, VA made 4 million purchases using credit cards for items such as medical supplies. Wilkie has started reviewing DoD supply practices to determine if there is a more efficient system.

During the October meeting with Wilkie, MOAA representatives took the opportunity to stress the importance of VA and DoD collaboration in addressing matters of toxic exposures to current conflict veterans, specifically when it comes to their healthcare and benefits.

#### Midterm Summary: Veterans Win Elections, But Will Divided Congress Hurt Defense?

While a handful of races could remain undecided for days, or longer, the membership of the 116th Congress took shape Tuesday night - and it could include more than 100 military veterans.

Here's a quick look at some of the races involving servicemembers of all stripes, and what else MOAA members (and others following military and veterans issues) should know about the fallout from the 2018 midterms.

#### Native American Veterans Memorial must reflect all services

The Smithsonian recently approved [the design](#) for a National Native American Veterans Memorial to be constructed on the grounds of the National Museum of the American Indian. The design includes the logos of the five armed services, omitting both the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, whose members are veterans under federal law. MOAA asks that you take a moment to write your members of Congress and say that ALL veterans should be included in this important memorial. Please join MOAA and [The Military Coalition](#) in this fight.

Native American veterans of USPHS and NOAA have admirably served this country. They deserve the same recognition.

#### MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 15 November 2018: Maryland Launched a State Military Coalition, and You Can, Too

Thirteen Maryland-based service organizations, including MOAA's Maryland Council of Chapters, have joined forces to better represent the state's servicemembers and veterans, and their families.

The Maryland Military Coalition formally launched over Veterans Day weekend and will lobby the state legislature and government to improve the lives of members of all seven uniformed services.

Col. Bob Norton, USA (Ret), the coalition's president-elect, said the group will focus on "broad, cross-cutting issues we all agree on." These could include pay and benefits, health care, quality-of-life programs, and taxes, said Norton, who is the second vice president for MOAA's Maryland Council.

The 13 charter coalition members are:

- Air Force Sergeants Association
- American Military Society
- Association of Commissioned Officers [NOAA Corps]
- Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS [U.S. Public Health Service]

- Disabled American Veterans
- Jewish War Veterans of the USA
- Maryland Air National Guard Retiree's Association
- Military Officers Association of America
- Military Order of the Purple Heart
- Military Order of the World Wars
- National Association for Black Veterans
- The Retired Enlisted Association
- Veterans of Foreign Wars Maryland

The Maryland Military Coalition is modeled after [The Military Coalition](#), a national group of military and veterans organizations that includes MOAA National.

The state of Maryland includes 460,000 military-connected people, the coalition estimates. That includes Fort Meade, the Army's second-largest post, based on employees.

"It's vitally important that we all come together to speak with one voice," said Arthur "Coop" Cooper, a retired Army sergeant first class and past national president of the Retired Enlisted Association.

#### MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 22 November 2018: Services Submitting Budgets To Include President Trump's Cuts

The services are expected this week to deliver their preliminary draft of the fiscal 2020 defense budget to the Defense Secretary. They will have to navigate the challenge of complying with President Donald Trump's request of slashing \$33 billion from the defense budget request.

Potential savings could come from troop levels, new or substantially higher health care fees, or caps to military pay.

MOAA is already on record urging Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to protect military pay and health care in the FY20 budget.

Mattis and the White House are expected to receive the budget proposals some time after Thanksgiving.

The services will likely provide the Defense Secretary with a budget at multiple spending levels. This will highlight the potential tradeoffs that will be needed if the administration follows through with its newly proposed \$700 billion top line, or if Congress fails to reach a new budget deal for 2020.

Congress is currently operating under a two-year budget deal, set to expire at the end of December 2019. If Congress fails to reach a new spending arrangement, previously agreed to budget caps will return, DoD will be forced to take a \$71 billion budget cut.

#### MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 29 November 2018: State of the VA: Benefit Upgrades, New Website, and New Offices

True to his word, Secretary Robert Wilkie has been busy calming the waters at Veterans Affairs, implementing reforms to improve the veteran experience, and streamlining the delivery of services he committed to improving when taking office on July 30, 2018.

Customer service is one of Wilkie's top priorities. This month he rolled out a number of initiatives to honor his commitment to making VA a friendlier and easier place for veterans to be served:

1. [VA.gov Redesign](#). After gathering feedback from over 5,000 veterans, servicemembers, their families, caregivers and survivors, VA took a bold step forward in modernizing its homepage to help veterans navigate the website to get at the content they need, quicker and easier. With 10 million visits a month to the website, customers frequently voice their complaints and frustration with the layout and navigability, saying it focused too much on presenting information about VA as an organization and not what customers need.

"Veterans, their families, caregivers and our many customers have successful online transactions in their day-to-day lives," Wilkie said. "They should expect the same



exceptional digital experience coming to VA. Our customers will receive a more simple and intuitive experience when accessing our online front door - the new VA.gov."

**Click [here](#) and check it out! Tell MOAA know what you think of the website redesign at [legis@MOAA.org](mailto:legis@MOAA.org).**

**2. Benefits Initiatives.** VA also announced some benefit improvements to help servicemembers and veterans in need-see how these improvements may help you or someone you know:

**[Benefits Delivery at Discharge Program](#)**- new improvements allow servicemembers filing disability claims between 90 to 180 days before they separate from service to receive a decision on their claim within 30 days of discharge.

**[Veterans Impacted by Super Typhoon Yutu and Hurricanes Florence and Michael](#)** - VA declared the typhoon in the Northern Mariana Islands and hurricanes in Florida, North Carolina and Georgia significant disasters to warrant prioritizing and moving veteran benefits appeals claims to the top of the list for resolution.

**[Free Federal Agency Legal Assistance](#)** - VA joined with the Departments of Labor, Justice, Defense, Homeland Security, and others, committing to improving and increasing access to free legal services for veterans facing eviction or home foreclosures, driver's license revocations, child support or those with other critical needs that impact their ability to work or seek health care.

**3. [VA Health System Realignment](#).** Just before the Thanksgiving holiday, VA announced its plan for reorganizing the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). The plan is part of a bigger initiative directed through an [executive order](#) signed last year by President Donald Trump, requiring reorganization of the entire federal government.

The plan is to break up dozens of program offices, consolidating them into four offices to provide "greater accountability and clearer governance over these critical functional areas" - an integration and consolidation effort Wilkie says will reduce bureaucracy and help the agency focus on the veteran.

The four new offices are:

- \* *The Office of Population Health.* This will focus on health care in a particular region, looking at population segments and markets to eliminate administrative burdens and redundancies, while aligning VA with other federal agencies and private institutions to promote best practices and standards.
- \* *The Discovery, Education and Affiliates Networks (DEAN) Office.* This combines two former offices, the Office of Academic Affiliations and the Office of Research and Development. The office is charged with advancing cutting-edge medical care and innovations to address the complex health issues of veterans. It also provides a platform for the next generation of physicians to deliver the most innovative care, thus also improving medical care for all Americans as VA history of [medical innovations](#) has shown.
- \* *Engineering and environment of care functions* will merge into a single office to address environmental and safety issues across the system to ensure VA continues to deliver high quality health care.
- \* *Human resources functions* delivered through four different offices at VA headquarters will combine into a single office to improve efficiency, transparency and provide more consistent service across VHA.

**[MOAA Interview: Secretary Wilkie on VA Changes, Health Records, Blue Water Navy Benefits, and More](#)**

As he walked to his high school in Fayetteville, N.C., Robert Wilkie would often pause as he passed the Veterans

Affairs hospital down the street. The brick building towered over the school and the nearby houses. An inscription on the front of the building read, "The Price of Freedom is Visible Here."

"That means a lot to me," Wilkie said, thinking of his father, an artilleryman stationed at Fort Bragg who was severely injured during combat in the Vietnam War.

**[\[RELATED: State of the VA: Benefit upgrades, new website and new offices\]](#)**

**Q. One of the things you've made a point of doing is visiting VA centers across the country. As you've engaged with VA patients and patients at the centers, what's been their feedback?**

**A.** I made a point to visit as many sites and states as possible, from Anchorage to Orlando to Nevada to Massachusetts, and I wanted to get a feel for two things. One, those who use VA centers. The other, the people who work at the VA.

So two things were pretty clear. One, we do have [an] incredibly dedicated workforce. They understand they have a special mission. The second part is what I have conveyed to Congress, that once a veteran gets into the system, [the veteran is] pretty happy with the service and the medical attention that [the veteran] gets, which runs counter to what you read in a lot of publications.

So, if that's the case, then what is the real obstacle to VA becoming the 21st century health care administration? It's probably administrative. It's getting people into the system, cutting down the number of hoops that an individual has to jump through to reach the VA. We've done a lot of things.

We just launched our new [VA.gov](#), which consolidates hundreds of websites down to just a handful.... Our community caregiver program - we've gone from multiple programs to one to make it easier for those using our services to navigate. It is a question of bureaucracy, and that also entails modernizing our IT system ...

**Q. Are there other administrative efforts still in the works?**

**A.** Oh, sure. The most important, in terms of IT, are the electronic health records. That is something that I had responsibility for first as the undersecretary of defense [for] readiness.

I use my father as an example. Multiple decorated combat soldier. Three Purple Hearts. ... At the end of his career, he came out of service needing two knees, two hips and [had] lead in his body from Cambodia in 1970. As a result of that, [he] carried around an 800-page record, and there was one copy. We can no longer do that to our veterans.

So, if a veteran has to go to a local pharmacy or a local doctor, that local pharmacy or local doctor will now have the ability to put that medical information into that record so that big VA has a complete record, complete picture of that veteran's health care and where that veteran stands on the spectrum.

**Q. Will it make filing claims a smooth process?**

**A.** Well, that's already being done with our rapid claims process that has been put in place. We've reduced the number of outstanding claims by the tens of thousands just in the last year. That's been on track for a while, and we're very proud of our ability to answer those claims and questions rapidly. ... The electronic health record, because it involves the Department of Defense, it's going to take a little longer to implement.

**Q. The GI Bill - people were having trouble with stipends. What is the status of that? How is the VA working to resolve it so that it doesn't happen again?** (Editor's note: Read the latest on the GI Bill [here](#).)

**A. Let's take a step back and describe what actually happened.**

There was an increase in terms of - let's just use the word "COLA" - an increase in the housing allowance of less than half of 1 percent, so we're talking about \$69 in most cases. The system could not handle that. ...

We were directed by the Congress to recalculate that housing allowance based on the student who's already in the system and registered in South Carolina suddenly going to Boston for an internship or clerkship, and that brought an old system to a halt.

We have asked anyone who has a hardship to tell us. We have about 800 cases that have been identified across the country that we've put to the top of the list. No one has been evicted from schools. All of our universities and colleges are working with us with this delay. We know about them.

**[RELATED: [VA Leaders Vow Post-9/11 GI Bill Allowance Delays Near Over](#)]**

We just happen to be right now in spring registration, so there's a whole new influx of claims coming in for students who are coming into spring semester to start in June. But we've got a good handle on it. I received numerous complaints that veterans in New York City were being evicted coming from some elements of government up there and we asked them for details - couldn't give us any.

So, one of the things we have to fight here at the VA, we've had a tradition - and it's not a good tradition - of having the department run by anecdote. When, for a department this size, we need facts and figures because we are so big: 370,000 employees, \$200 million budget, 173 hospitals, 1,200 clinics, not to mention the benefits that we handle.

We are doing these corrections deliberately and carefully, and we're doing everything we can to make sure that there's no hardships.

**Q. One of your top priorities is improving customer service. Tell me where you're at with that, what are the things you've identified to improve it, how are you going to measure how it's being improved?**

**A.** I mentioned that our problems are primarily administrative and bureaucratic. But if a veteran has a bad experience when the veteran calls for an appointment, then walks into a medical center or clinic and is not greeted properly, that could lose that veteran to the VA for a lifetime. So we are looking at how to better train, how to better compensate, how we make [the veteran's experience] more robust.

We have outstanding leadership in our veterans experience office that's run by Dr. Linda Davis, a retired colonel, someone that's seen the Army from every aspect, speaks the language, understand the culture and she is out there not only bringing more volunteers in the system, but making sure that the people we have on the payroll know how to communicate with the people we serve. I'm happy to say that in the last few months, the satisfaction rate for both patients and those who work in VA is on the upswing. We haven't seen that in decades. I think that is part of a cultural change, a change in terms of the temper of the organization, where the waters have been calmed and the problems of this department, certainly in the first six months of this department are behind us.

And I'm very proud to be part of an organization that I really believe has the most noble mission in the federal government.

#### Veteran Burial Options Continue to Expand

The end of National Veterans and Military Families Month marks an ideal time to reflect on the service and sacrifice of servicemembers and their family members. Across the country, people will be visiting gravesites of loved ones who once donned the uniform.

National cemeteries serve as the final resting place for millions of servicemembers and veterans and their spouses. What started as 14 cemeteries for the casualties of the Civil War have grown to a network of nearly 140 cemeteries across 40 states and Puerto Rico. More are in the planning stages.

Nearly every state also runs its own veterans cemetery, and many states have more than one. While the VA often helps fund these cemeteries, the state government is solely responsible for their operations and eligibility criteria.

The VA takes great pride in the burial opportunities and services it provides. The National Cemetery Administration (NCA) consistently ranks at the top of the [American Customer Satisfaction Index](#), an independent study of customer satisfaction among corporations and federal agencies.

For eligible veterans, the VA provides the gravesite, grave liner, government headstone or marker, U.S. burial flag, Presidential Memorial Certificate, and perpetual care of the gravesite at no cost to the family. They also open and close the grave.

The NCA's strategic mission is to provide opportunities for dignified burials of veterans within 75 miles of 96 percent of the veteran population. It's a big task, but it's on track to meet that goal by opening new cemeteries and adapting to new burial preferences. For example, the first burials at the new Pikes Peak National Cemetery took place during the first week of November, and the Black Hills National Cemetery is expanding by 200 acres in accordance with legislation passed in May.

MOAA has heard from our members about the importance of having these national veterans' cemeteries both geographically accessible and maintained with the same care and custom as some of the country's more famous cemeteries.

Capacity is an ongoing concern as well. Plots at VA national cemeteries cannot be reserved in advance, and space at a handful of cemeteries is starting to fill up too quickly. Finite burial space is an age-old issue, so it's something we will have to continue monitoring.

If you're curious about VA burial benefits, cemetery locations, or something else related to veterans' cemeteries, [take some time to explore the NCA website](#).

#### **MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 06 December 2018:**

[MOAA to Family Readiness Council: Preserve Lending Protections](#)

#### **Military Lending Act**

Protections provided in the MLA [have recently come under threat](#). The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, headed up by Mick Mulvaney, has stopped supervising financial institutions to ensure their compliance with the act. MOAA has been vigilant in ensuring protections provided by MLA remain in place by [sending a letter](#) to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Mulvaney and publishing it [in a full-page ad](#) along with other MSOs and VSOs.

MOAA is going the extra step to make the recommendation to the MFRC to preserve protections MLA provides as they are critical to the well-being of military families.

#### **MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 13 December 2018:**

[MOAA Survey: We Need Your Opinion on TRICARE and Military Health](#)

MOAA wants to know about your experience with military health care and the TRICARE program. We need all beneficiaries to take an important survey. As with previous surveys, MOAA will use the data to assess trends and help shape legislation to directly improve access and quality of care for you and your loved ones.



**[Bottom Line Up Front: [Take our survey here](#) and pass it along to your networks!]**

A recap from the past year indicates military beneficiaries have experienced unexpected increases in many of their TRICARE fees.

MOAA's previous two surveys reveal beneficiaries preferences across an array of measures as indicated in the chart below:

You may recall one year ago, DoD unilaterally decided to change its TRICARE Select (formerly Standard) fee schedules from a percent-of-cost model to flat-rate fees. These structural fee changes disregarded the intention of the 2017 NDAA to grandfather current military members, veterans, and families of both and insulate them from health care cost-share increases. Key changes included the following points:

**Retiree TRICARE Prime copayments:** Copayments range from 67 percent to 173 percent higher than 2017 Prime retiree copayments in select categories.

**Active duty family and retiree TRICARE Select copayments:** DoD used a provision in the policy to restructure the former TRICARE Standard/Extra cost shares, into what it described as an improved flat-rate copayment structure, touted as being more predictable for beneficiaries. The result is increased out-of-pocket costs, which are inconsistent with private-sector PPOs and have been detrimental to many military families and retirees who rely on TRICARE Select for coverage.

**Mental health visits considered specialty care:** This change generates significantly higher out-of-pocket costs than under the previous TRICARE Extra - higher than many civilian plans. These TRICARE Select costs create barriers to mental health care access.

**TRICARE pharmacy copayments:** The copayments have doubled and tripled. For some, a \$7 increase from \$0 for a generic prescription can be tolerated; however, for those on a fixed income and receiving several generics and other specialty medications, it is costly - and costs will increase at rates beyond the COLA in the future as the attached chart shows.

**The effects of cost-share increases:** Many beneficiaries have become overburdened quickly under these new copayments. While an occasional copayment of \$30 or \$40 for a specialty visit is not a financial strain for many, an active duty family with one or more special needs children or adults with multiple medical issues requiring many more appointments per week will see an overwhelming increase in costs. Hitting catastrophic caps will become more of a norm than an exception.

**Blue Water Navy Bill Stalls in Senate, But Fight Continues 'Our Veterans Are Too Important'**

Earlier this year, [VA Secretary Robert Wilkie questioned the scientific evidence](#) and objected to the cost projections behind the proposal. He requested senators put a hold on the legislation until the completion of an ongoing VA study comparing the health of Vietnam War veterans with those of a similar age who did not deploy, which could be done in late 2019. Along with Enzi, Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, [voiced opposition to the bill](#), saying he wanted to wait for the study to be completed.

MOAA, [in a letter from the Military Coalition](#), recently addressed that study and pointed out that it will not provide any answers regarding Agent Orange exposures in Vietnam. The cost of providing care to affected veterans has been estimated at more than \$1 billion. Funding would be covered through an increased fee on VA home loans.

In a fiery speech, Gillibrand said Tuesday that she has been working on this legislation for more than 10 years. She called out the VA for not lending its support to the legislation.

"Do your job," said Gillibrand, who submitted the legislation for the unanimous consent vote. "Your job is to protect and to speak for these veterans, not deny the basic health care that they have already earned."

Tester, who serves as the ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said the legislation is long overdue. The Montana Democrat said it is the government's responsibility to care for veterans when they return from service.

"If we're not willing to take care of our veterans when they get back home, we should not send them to places in this world where they might be exposed to toxins or get shot," Tester said. "This is serious business ... our veterans are too important."

**MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 20 December 2018:**

**MOAA's 2019 Key Goals: Don't Let TRICARE For Life Become a Target**

MOAA's top legislative goals for 2019 will be featured in an upcoming edition of *Military Officer magazine*, which is available to MOAA [Life and Premium members](#). [Here's a preview of one key issue; see the links below for the rest, including ways you can make your voice heard.](#)

**The Goal: Prevent disproportional TRICARE fee increases.**

**Background:** The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) recently introduced, as a potential option, TRICARE for Life enrollment fees and minimum out-of-pocket requirements as ways the federal budget could escape red ink. Independent of the CBO report ([PDF](#)), DoD and Congress have stated retiree health care costs are spiraling out of control, and beneficiaries do not pay enough for their health care. Based on DoD's own data, MOAA knows this is not true - the difference is attributable to rising institutional and readiness costs. Despite that, the report and the ongoing budget pressure have turned TRICARE For Life into a potential target for fee increases to offset readiness or other programs.

**MOAA's Stance:** Military retirees, through their service and sacrifice, have paid in full for their TRICARE For Life benefits. Congress - not DoD - should determine appropriate TRICARE fees.

**Actions:** Reverse or significantly decrease the 2018 TRICARE Prime copayment increases for grandfathered/Group-A beneficiaries. Modify fee structure to reduce out-of-pocket costs for successive specialty appointments, such as physical therapy or mental health care. Protect TRICARE For Life as a second payer to Medicare Part B.

**[TAKE ACTION: [Say NO to New Fees for TRICARE for Life](#)]**

**Congress Continues to Rewrite Tax Legislation Which May Affect Veterans**

For the final few months of 2018, Republican lawmakers have built and rebuilt legislation to expand or extend provisions and fix certain flaws in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. The marquee legislation was widely celebrated as a massive victory for businesses, investors, and taxpayers. But these attempts to tweak the law show there are some ongoing issues.

The House, by way of House Ways and Means Committee Chair Kevin Brady (R-Texas), has now put forth three different versions of a tax extender and reform bill. With each new version comes a new cost estimate. According to Brady, the latest might cost \$80 billion, 30 percent more than the original bill.

The bill, as currently written, also would clarify that veterans are to be considered eligible for the [Low-Income](#)

**Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC).** This HUD program gives state and local agencies authority to issue tax credits for the acquisition, rehabilitation, or new construction of rental housing targeted to lower-income households.

The constant rewrites are a product of uneasiness in the Senate as well as principled opposition from Democrats, who want to wait for their turn as the House majority to take a stab at tax reform. Regardless of whether or not the House bill is passed this week, if the Senate is interested in passing tax legislation, it will provide its own substitute text. Presumably, the House then would accept that version without qualms, just to get something passed.

Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), next in line to chair the Senate Finance Committee, has made it clear the House needs to reconsider provisions related to the alternative minimum tax and state and local tax (SALT) deductions if they hope to gain some traction. During an interview on CNBC's Squawk Box, he insisted on the necessity of a compromise within his own party.

The government shutdown debate, which largely revolves around funding for the border wall, will certainly suck up a lot of the air in Congress in the final few days of this year. There is a chance the Senate will try to tack their tax provisions onto a spending bill, but anything that makes the funding debate more controversial than it already is might not go over well.

A last-minute Christmas tax-focused spending spree is possible, but expect some strong resistance in both the House and Senate first.

**Have Your Say: Tell MOAA Your TRICARE Story**

As part of a campaign to ensure the TRICARE benefit remains strong, and that any fee increases result in corresponding improvements to care, MOAA has launched its latest in a series of surveys to gauge the program's effectiveness.

[Click here to participate](#), but if your TRICARE concerns go beyond simple data points, consider offering MOAA the rest of your story.

### **MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 27 December 2018:**

#### MOAA's 2019 Key Goals: Protect Access to Earned VA Benefits

MOAA's top legislative goals for 2019 will be featured in an upcoming edition of *Military Officer* magazine, which is available to MOAA [Life and Premium members](#). Here's a preview of one key issue; see the links below for the rest, including ways you can make your voice heard.

#### **The Goal: Ensure timely access to service-earned VA benefits.**

**Background:** The veteran population of nearly 22 million is projected to decline in coming years.

**MOAA's Stance:** Major health care and benefit system reforms have been implemented in recent years but require an ongoing commitment and investments to meet demand and ensure timely access. Continuing implementation will pose challenges to fund evolving technologies, infrastructure, [electronic health records](#), full staffing at every echelon, and the various support systems that tie these efforts together. Further, political forces continue to threaten or erode the core VA health and benefit missions and foundational services.

**Actions:** Oppose efforts to use veterans' disability benefits compensation or other benefits to pay for VA system improvements and diminish or restrict access to service-earned benefits.

#### [TAKE ACTION: [Visit MOAA's Legislative Action Center](#)]

More key goals:

Ensure any TRICARE reform sustains access to top-quality care.

Prevent disproportional TRICARE fee increases

Sustain military pay comparability with the private sector.

Stop erosion of compensation and non-pay quality-of-life benefits.

End financial penalties for military survivors.

End concurrent receipt penalties for military retirees.

Achieve equity of benefits for Guard and Reserve members with their active duty counterparts.

Strengthen DoD-VA collaboration and services to support wounded warriors and an expanding population of women veterans.

Protect military and veteran family support programs and policies.

#### Wilkie Urged to Heed Vet Groups Over Access to Community Care

In September, three months after signing the mammoth VA MISSION Act, President Donald Trump claimed in a speech that soon, "if a veteran can't get the care they need from the VA in a timely fashion, they have the right to go see a private doctor. Today, for the first time in American history, I am about to sign a bill that will fully and permanently give our great and cherished veterans choice."

The bill Trump actually signed that day in Las Vegas funded the VA for the next two years and 2019 military construction projects.

The law he signed months earlier will replace the beleaguered Choice program by next June and do much more. It mandates more timely appointments and improved staffing at VA medical centers and clinics. It requires the VA to create a new network of commercial walk-in clinics and to ensure prompt payment to outside health care providers. It orders the VA to expand over the next several years its comprehensive caregiver program to older generations of injured veterans.

At a joint hearing Wednesday of the House and Senate veterans' affairs committees, VA Secretary Robert Wilkie reported on his department's progress implementing the VA Mission Act. The facts he shared left many lawmakers concerned that deadlines set only six months ago, particularly for caregiver benefit expansion, might not be met because of the VA's aging computer systems.

#### MOAA's 2019 Key Goals: Keep Pace with Private-Sector Pay

MOAA's top legislative goals for 2019 will be featured in an upcoming edition of *Military Officer* magazine, which is available to MOAA [Life and Premium members](#).

**MOAA's Stance:** As the cost of labor increases across the nation, so too should the paychecks of our uniformed servicemembers. Adequate pay and allowances - including competitive raises - are key to recruiting and retaining an effective all-volunteer force.

**Actions:** Maintain continuous, unified messaging to legislators and service leadership, advising annual military pay raises approved by Congress correlate with ECI to help overcome damage done by the three recent pay caps (2014-2016).

*It is better to look ahead and prepare than to look back and regret.*



# JAYHAWK CHAPTER MOAA



A membership meeting will be held **Tuesday, 15 January 2019**  
at Lawrence Country Club

Dinner cost is \$24.00/meal.

**The Program:** Our speaker will be Jim Peters, Director of the Osher Institute,  
speaking on "The Underground Railroad in Lawrence and Douglas County"

**Social Hour:** 1800 hours      **Dinner:** 1840 hours

**The Menu:** Caesar Salad, Teres Major steak with mushroom sauce on a rice pilaf,  
mixed vegetables, rustic rolls, Chefs choice dessert  
There will be a vegetarian option available.

Send your reservation and check payable to Jayhawk Chapter MOAA  
to arrive no later than Wednesday, **09 January 2019, to:**  
*CAPT Jim Cooper, 5216 Brown Lane, Lawrence, KS 66049-5112*

*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.*

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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).

Annual Chapter Dues (\$20.00) \$\_\_\_\_\_

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, 5216 Brown Lane, Lawrence, KS 66049-5112*



MOAA WEBSITE: [www.moaa.org](http://www.moaa.org)  
KANSAS COUNCIL WEBSITE: [www.kansasmoa.net](http://www.kansasmoa.net)  
JAYHAWK CHAPTER WEBSITE:  
[www.jayhawkmoaa.org](http://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 2019 Meeting Schedule:**

|         |            |            |           |
|---------|------------|------------|-----------|
| Tuesday | 15 January | Tuesday 16 | July      |
| Tuesday | 19 March   | Tuesday 17 | September |
| Tuesday | 21 May     | Tuesday 19 | November  |

**2019 Kansas Council of Chapters Dates/Locations:**

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| 23 February | Wichita Chapter  |
| 27 April    | Flint Hills Chapter (Kansas National Guard annual meeting) |
| 10 August   | Jayhawk Chapter  |
| 26 October  | Santa Fe Trail Chapter                                     |



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***IN GOD WE TRUST***