



Jayhawk Chapter MOAA Newsletter



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July Program:

Our speaker, Bryan Baerg of the National Weather Service's Topeka Weather Forecast Office, will speak about the May 28, 2019, EF-4 Tornado

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President's Comments . . .

Summer is finally hitting in full force after a Spring that spurred me to start building an Ark in the backyard. This is the primary reason that we have Bryan Baerg, from the National Weather Service Topeka office, speaking to us at our July dinner meeting. He is going to discuss our May 28th tornado, but I'm sure he'll be able to address questions about why we've had such an unusually wet Spring. I urge you not to miss this one, it promises to be very interesting.



Hopefully you all received an email from MOAA President and CEO LTG Dana Atkins, requested assistance in pushing through the fix to the "Widow's Tax", or the DIC/SBP offset for surviving spouses, which has been a **key issue for MOAA** for several years. Sens. Doug Jones (D-AL) and Susan Collins (R-ME) are cosponsoring Senate Amendment 269 to end the offset, but the bill needs the support of Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-OK) or Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY). Use MOAA's toll-free number (866-272-6622) to call your senators and say: "My name is ___ and I live in Lawrence, Kansas. I ask you to please support Senate amendment 269 to the defense bill, ending the military widows tax. As my elected official, please don't break faith with military families. Thank you for your time."

LTG Atkins has also designated July 4th, 2019, as the inaugural "MOAA Day of Giving," and is requesting that members contribute to the MOAA Foundation. The MOAA Foundation's mission is to provide programs and services to military and veteran families of all ranks to ensure they enjoy a quality of life earned through their service to our nation. If you are so inclined and looking for a good cause to support with your dollars, please consider the MOAA Foundation.

We've had a rough year in terms of saying farewell to long-time members. Erv Hodges, LtCol, USMC (Ret) and Vince Muirhead, CDR, USN (Ret) were posted to their final duty station and, of course, earlier this year we lost Diane Darwin and Darlene Sheriff. Please keep all these families in your prayers.

Have a good summer, and take care of yourselves in July and August – hydration and prudence. We look forward to seeing you all soon.

Coop

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* Reservations should be sent
to Jim Cooper by
10 July 2019



JAYHAWK CHAPTER NEWS



CONDOLENCES



LtCol Ervin E. "Erv" Hodges, 89, former President of the Jayhawk Chapter of MOAA, died Saturday, June 8, 2019. He was born December 30, 1929 in rural Lawrence, the son of Alva and Kizzie (Brubaker) Hodges. Erv graduated from Liberty Memorial High School and attended the University of Kansas. In 1948 he joined the Marine Corps and after serving three years in the Pacific was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant in 1952.

He continued a 23 year military career that would take him to Japan, Korea, France and Vietnam. Erv also served with a Navy staff during two tours in the Mediterranean and Caribbean. He was particularly proud of his service as Commander of the U. S. Marine Guard at the American Embassy in Paris and as Commander of Helicopter Support Company in Marine Corps Test Unit #1. During the [Vietnam War](#), Erv served with Headquarters III Marine Amphibious Force from

1967 to 1968 which included the Tet Offensive and Khe Sanh operations. He was awarded the [Bronze Star](#) medal with combat V for his service in Vietnam.

Following retirement from the Marine Corps, Erv joined the City of Lawrence as Director of Personnel, Assistant Director of Finance and Director of Utilities until his departure to Grinnell Corporation as a Regional Manager until 1990.

Returning to Lawrence, Erv was active in local service organizations including Bert Nash Mental Health Board, Sertoma, Meals on Wheels, Lawrence Kiwanis Club, the Jayhawk Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America, Trinity Lutheran Church and a 50-year member of the American Legion. He was honored to receive the Baker University Civic Service Award, Lawrence Public Schools Outstanding Citizen Award, Sertoman of the Year 2002, and Lawrence High School Hall of Honor. Recognizing a need to honor the many heroes of our community who have given their lives in service, Erv organized the Douglas County Memorial of Honor Foundation to create a Memorial featuring the sculpture "From the Ashes" by Jim Brothers at the Lawrence Visitors Center. In 1997 he was elected to the Lawrence City Commission and served as Mayor in 2000.

In 1951, Erv married Shirley Rothberger. They were blessed with 68 years of marriage. Erv is survived by wife Shirley, son Mark Hodges, and daughter Cynthia Fritzel (Tim). Five grandchildren and 10 great grandchildren.

The memorial service to honor Erv Hodges was held at Trinity Lutheran Church, June 15, 2019.

PERSONAL NEWS

Dean Bevan: Judy and I went to my Pittsburg High School 63-year reunion in early June and followed that with a couple of weeks in Green Mountain Falls, Colorado. Additionally, my script, "Grim Reaper," was selected as the second-place winner of the 2019 Marion Thauer Brown Audio Drama Scriptwriting Competition! This year's competition had 83 entries from five countries.

Gary Bjorge: During the period 17-20 May, Nancy and I attended the annual reunion of the USS Ticonderoga Veterans' Association in Albuquerque, NM. The association is made up of Navy veterans who served aboard either the aircraft carrier USS Ticonderoga (CV-14 during WWII; CVA-14 during the 1950s and 1960s; and CVS-14 during its last years in service before decommissioning in 1972) or the USS Ticonderoga (CG-47), the first Aegis-equipped guided missile cruiser, which was commissioned in 1983 and decommissioned in 2004. Two veterans who were on the Ticonderoga when it was severely damaged by two kamikaze strikes on 21 January 1945 were in attendance. I served aboard the Ticonderoga during the years 1962-1964 and 1966-1967. Following the reunion, we spent several days sightseeing in New Mexico, Utah and Colorado.

Bernie Kish: I had an exciting, enjoyable and patriotic three weeks beginning on May 21st.

A lifetime friend of mine – LTG Joe Laposata passed away in December. His military honors funeral was at Arlington National Cemetery. Being a three star general – it was with full military honors. Those of you who have attended a funeral at Arlington know that it gives you goosebumps and makes you feel that you are on sacred ground – which you are – I was honored to deliver his Eulogy.

**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.**

On Memorial Day Weekend, I was in New Orleans for a Sport Management Academic Conference. While there, I spent seven hours at the World War II Museum. It is a remarkable facility. Actually it is now a Campus – several buildings. If you get to the Big Easy – make sure you visit. I did not see all I wanted to see and will go back.

For the 75th Anniversary of D-Day June 6th – I visited the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene. The Museum is under renovation. But it was still well worth the trip. I attended two classes which were terrific – one of the code developed by the Navaho Indians who served in the Army in WW II (the code was developed to confuse the Germans trying to intercept American messages) – and the other on the landings at Omaha Beach – “Bloody Omaha.” Just being there on June 6 gave a visitor once again an appreciation for the sacrifices and bravery of our men and women on that day and throughout the war.

Finally, I spent Father’s Day Weekend with my daughter Kathryn, husband Jon and 6 year old grandson Theo in Los Angeles. Great time. We went to a Dodgers-Cubs game and did a ton of other fun things. Theo is a little scamp who is so enjoyable to be with.

So – a terrific three weeks. One that made me “Proud to be an American” and a Dad and Grandpa.

Jim Cooper: I served 30 years in the Navy and never witnessed or participated in a ship christening – perhaps because I was a Naval Aviator! But finally, at the beginning of April, that changed when Sandy served as part of the christening party for the Navy’s USNS (US Naval Ship as opposed to United States Ship) GUAM, the first of her class, a high-speed transport. GUAM is not a combat vessel, but is part of the Navy’s support fleet, which is managed by the Military Sealift Command in Norfolk, Virginia.

GUAM began as an audacious venture to bring large-capacity, high-speed ferry service to the Hawaiian Islands. She was completed in 2008, but never saw commercial service, as the Hawaiian tourist industry (i.e., interisland airlines, rental car companies) launched a staunch counterattack and with the help of allies in the state government, the ferry plan stalled out. The Navy acquired GUAM in 2012 and modified her for military use. GUAM was forward deployed to Okinawa in 2017, but her christening ceremony was delayed over the last several years for a variety of emergent reasons.

The ship’s sponsor (the person who breaks the champagne bottle on the bow), Bruni Bradley, happens to be an old friend of Sandy’s. Bruni was in the Navy herself for 25 years and is married to a retired Navy 4-star Admiral who is also the current Ambassador to South Korea, Harry Harris – and Harry used to work for me. As the ship’s sponsor is permitted to select assistants, Bruni selected Sandy to be Matron of Honor, and another friend who is an active duty officer as Maid of Honor.

The bottom line is that the Navy flew Sandy to Okinawa (I paid my own way as the bag carrier) for several days for the events involved in the christening. We love Japan, and were stationed in Okinawa in 1978, so it was a homecoming of sorts, and we enjoyed every minute of it. We saw old friends and made new ones. The Marines were a big part of all this, as in wartime, GUAM will carry units of the 3rd Marine Division, which is stationed at Camp Butler, Okinawa, to the Korean Peninsula in case of hostilities. Fully loaded, GUAM can carry the equivalent of 15 C-17 Globemaster flights worth of men and supporting equipment anywhere on the peninsula within 16 hours.

The experience was short but sweet. It was inspiring to be out with the men and women who are forward deployed and serving as the tip of the spear. Go Navy and Semper Fi!



Mike Kelly: Georgiana and I celebrated the 65th wedding anniversary of my parents at J. Wilsons restaurant on June 13th. Family traveled from all over the country to attend and it was a lovely event. In late May, at the beginning of the summer break from school, we also traveled to Chicago on AMTRAK with our great nieces and young friends for a few days sightseeing. Museums, shopping, a Royals-White Sox game, riding the subway, and Chicago-style pizza were some of the highlights.



Army News *LTC Tracey Olson, USA*

No response from the Army ROTC unit this issue.



Navy News

CAPT Trenton Lennard, USN



Fair Winds to the Class of 2019!

The Jayhawk Battalion pushed hard as we wrapped up the semester and headed into the summer break. The obvious highlights of the past few months were all the events and ceremonies that culminated in the graduation and commissioning of nine new Naval Officers.

Graduation events began in earnest with the Naval Service Awards Ceremony held on 1 May in the Union. Many of our midshipmen were recognized for their hard work, academic success and military bearing. We were fortunate enough to host representatives from countless local organizations and families as they presented the awards. MOAA (both national and local) supported three awards. MIDN 4/C Gurnett, MIDN 4/C Gardner, and MIDN 2/C Petit received the MOAA sponsored awards – thank you for recognizing these outstanding future officers. As the Battalion Commanding Officer, MIDN Garton also took the opportunity to publicly thank his staff for their hard work. He also provided some words of wisdom and advice for the underclass midshipmen.



Over the weekend of 03 May the Semper Fi Society traveled to Clinton Lake to participate in their annual end-of-the-year Field Exercise. Many Marine Corps and Navy option midshipmen, as well as active duty Marine and Navy students, completed two days of field training to include night land navigation, a 7.5 mile hike (stepping off at 0400), M249 SAW weapon familiarization, and continual Small Unit Leadership Exercises (SULE). This consisted of the midshipmen practicing their skills as a squad leader or fire team leader while simulating different tactical scenarios presented by the Opposing Force as run by the active duty Marines. This invaluable training helps the midshipmen prepare for the challenges they will face at OCS and in their future careers. Semper Fi!



The KU NROTC Staff and Class of 2019 Ensigns and 2LT.

On 8 May, the Jayhawk Battalion held our last quarters of the year and we completed a Battalion Change of Command. MIDN 1/C Garton relinquished command of the battalion to MIDN 2/C Heyroth. The battalion was also introduced to their new Marine Officer Instructor Capt Ross. The Midshipmen were provided some last guidance from the staff before taking their final exams the following week and departing campus for home or heading to their summer training locations.

On 19 May our seniors and active staff participated in the University of Kansas commencement ceremony. On 20 May eight of our seniors were commissioned into the Naval Service and one into the Marine Corps. We were involved in two commissioning events, an 0830 Naval Commissioning and then a 1000 Joint Commissioning. Due to the hard work of the students and the staff, both events were flawlessly executed.

We had a packed house for the Naval Commissioning with hundreds of friends, family and

former military members in attendance. I am extremely impressed with our new officers. Their leadership will certainly be missed by the battalion. Over the next few months we will have three new Ensigns depart for Basic Division Officers Course on their way to their first ship, one Ensign depart for nuclear power school, one 2LT head to Quantico for The Basic School, and four Ensigns will travel to the white beaches of Pensacola and Aviation Schools Command. I want to wish them all Fair Winds and Following Seas!

We are already working hard preparing for next year as we plan out the arrival of the next class of Midshipmen Candidates. Please keep our current midshipmen in your thoughts as they are engaged in high risk training throughout the summer.

Thank you for your support of these young people. They are men and women of character and I am honored to serve as their commanding officer.

Rock Chalk!

CAPT Trenton Lennard



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

Lt Col Phelan advised there would be no report from AF ROTC for this issue.

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, 09 May 2019:

MOAA Supports Bill That Would Allow Servicemembers to Sue Over Military Medical Malpractice

Servicemembers have long been powerless to hold the military medical system accountable in the event of malpractice; a 1950 Supreme Court decision inspired the so-called "Feres Doctrine," which prohibits lawsuits in such instances.

A new House bill, which is supported by MOAA and other military and veteran advocacy groups, would change that.

The bipartisan proposal, introduced by Rep. Jackie Speier (D-Calif.), would expressly allow such claims against the government. Such claims would come with a three-year statute of limitations, per the legislation, and any award would not be reduced by Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance benefits.

The bill "is a step in the right direction," said Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret), MOAA president and CEO, and "provides for an exemption of the Feres Act for our military members."

Multiple servicemembers and their families have challenged this decades-old doctrine after they or their relatives allegedly received improper treatment by military medical personnel, including:

Lt. Rebekah "Moani" Daniel, a Navy nurse who died after childbirth at a Navy hospital in 2014 when medications given to stop her bleeding failed. Further lifesaving measures were **initiated too late**, according to court documents. The case has **reached the Supreme Court**.

Sgt. 1st Class Richard Stayskal, USA, who was diagnosed by Army doctors with pneumonia but later brought his symptoms to a civilian doctor, who told him he had **Stage 4 lung cancer**. Stayskal testified before the House Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee last month; Speier's bill is known as the Sergeant First Class

Richard Stayskal Military Medical Accountability Act of 2019.

Staff Sgt. Dean Witt, USAF, who entered a military facility for an appendectomy and would, after **multiple medical mistakes**, be left in a vegetative state and be taken off life support three months later. The Supreme Court **refused to hear** Witt's family's case in 2011; Witt's widow, Alexis Witt, testified before the personnel subcommittee.

Servicemembers injured during combat or in the line of wartime duty are not eligible to sue the government for medical malpractice or other damages; that regulation, part of the 1946 Federal Tort Claims Act, would not be affected by Speier's legislation.

Military Spouse Appreciation Day: 3 Ways to Show Your Support

May 10 is Military Spouse Appreciation Day, a special day set aside to honor military spouses and recognize the sacrifices they make to support their servicemembers.

Most military spouses move every two to three years, picking up their lives and starting over in a new location, trying to find a new job and new schools for their kids, and fitting in with a new community. They keep the home fires burning through deployments, trainings, and TDYs.

You can do more than just thank a military spouse for their support of our servicemembers. Take action and write your member of Congress to address three issues that impact military spouses.

Employment

According to DoD, the military spouse unemployment rate is 24%. This is over six times the national average. The military spouse unemployment rate is so high due to a number of factors – the frequency of moves, difficulties getting relicensed in a new state, and availability of child care, among others.

Many small- and medium-size businesses take advantage of the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC), a federal incentive for hiring target groups that face significant employment barriers such as veterans, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, and former felons. It's time to act on behalf of another population that faces continual barriers to employment and ask Congress to expand the WOTC to include military spouses as a target group.

[TAKE ACTION: Ask Your Lawmakers to Expand the WOTC to Benefit Military Spouses]

Military Housing

Media reports and testimony from military families paint a picture of substandard housing conditions, lack of oversight of public private partners, and poor customer service and maintenance. Military families detailed jumping through a multitude of hoops to address health and safety hazards in their homes without proper tenant rights and described the negative impact these experiences had on their family physically, financially, and emotionally.

MOAA supports a number of bills that ensure proper oversight of privatized housing, ensures frequent testing is conducted, addresses health care concerns, and provides more transparency. All military families deserve safe housing. You can join other concerned servicemembers in delivering this message, loud and clear.

[TAKE ACTION: Ask Your Lawmakers to Back These Bills to Improve Military Housing]

Widows Tax

Under current law, survivors of deceased military members must forfeit part or all of their purchased Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity when they are awarded the VA's Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). The loss of any portion of the SBP annuity is known as the "widows tax." For approximately 66,000 military survivors, the widows tax makes SBP the only insurance product in the country that you pay in to but are legally prohibited from collecting.

S. 622, The Military Widows Tax Elimination Act, recently crossed the 60-cosponsor mark in the Senate, a key hurdle to bringing the legislation to a floor vote. The House companion bill, H.R. 553, has over 260 cosponsors, but still needs more support to be considered for a vote. Let your member of Congress know that supporting military survivors is important to you.

[TAKE ACTION: Ask Your Lawmakers to End the Widows Tax]

Navy Vet Lawmaker Introduces Measure to Repeal Tax Hike for Gold Star Families

This article by Patricia Kime originally appeared on *Military.com*, the premier resource for the military and veteran community.

[RELATED: Act now and contact your legislators to end the widows tax.]

Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Virginia, introduced the legislation, the Gold Star Family Tax Relief Act, or H.R. 2481, which would classify survivor benefits as earned income, reducing the tax burden of the payments.

The bill would affect military widows and widowers who put some of their survivor benefits in their children's names -- a move taken by many to ensure that they don't lose a portion of their Defense Department survivor payments and Veterans Affairs payments.

Gold Star spouse Theresa Jones, who lost her husband, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Landon Jones, in 2013, wrote about the change in a *Military.com* opinion editorial April 29. The taxes she owes for her sons' death benefits for 2018 increased more than four-and-a-half times from the previous year, she said.

"The last little bit of stability my children have has now been put on the chopping block," she wrote.

By law, when one person receives both payments, they are offset, meaning they see a \$1 reduction in payments from the

Defense Department, called Survivor Benefits Plan payments, for every dollar they receive from the [Department of Veterans Affairs](#) for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

This offset has been dubbed the "widow's tax." To avoid paying the offset and to better provide for their children, many spouses elect to put the survivors' benefits in the children's names. These are the payments that saw the heavy tax increases this year.

[RELATED: Tax Code Changes Led to Disaster for Some Gold Star Families]

When it comes to survivors' benefits, DoD allotments are taxable; Veterans Affairs payments are not.

The bill has 15 cosponsors -- seven Democrats and eight Republicans.

Rep. Michael Waltz, R-Florida, said the legislation is needed to protect children who have sacrificed so much.

"Children of those who have paid the highest measure of devotion to our country shouldn't be burdened with the highest tax rate for their survivor benefits," Waltz said in a release. "I'm proud that a bipartisan group of colleagues came together to fix this oversight in the tax code and urge the House to pass this bill quickly."

MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 16 May 2019:

MOAA's Tracking 3 Key Issues During the Military Construction Budget Process. Here's Why

Congress has been moving full steam ahead to get the military construction and veterans affairs (MilCon/VA) appropriations bill through the House and make its next stop at the Senate. Now that the full House Appropriations Committee has passed the spending bill, it will move to the full House for a vote before it moves on to the Senate.

MOAA is working to ensure these three important items are preserved during Senate reconciliation of the bill:

**Child Care
Water Contamination
Family Housing**

MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 23 May 2019:

Deep Cuts Are Coming to Military Medicine

What is Congress doing about it? MOAA has put the word out to our legislators, and they have a lot of questions for DoD. To get answers, the House Appropriations Committee on Tuesday recommended withholding \$250 million from the Defense Health Agency until the department could explain the risks of making such drastic cuts. The \$250 million is to be used to hire civilian and contract workers for medical jobs, [Military.Com reports](#).

The Bottom Line: Even with initial steps from Congress, this may be just the beginning, and we need all hands on deck -- we need you.

MOAA Backs Congress in Move to Decrease Tax Burden for Military Survivors

(Updated May 23 at 2:30 p.m. with House vote on H.R. 1994.)

MOAA will back a House bill designed to correct a recent tax-code change that has already reduced the survivor benefit for some Gold Star families by thousands of dollars.

The Gold Star Family Tax Relief Act would fix an unforeseen consequence of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act's treatment of military survivor benefits." MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret.), wrote in a letter of support to the bill's sponsor, Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Va.).

Identical legislation passed the Senate by a unanimous-consent vote May 21. Also, the House on May 23 passed H.R. 1994, the [Setting Every Community Up for Retirement Enhancement \(SECURE\) Act of 2019](#), which contains provisions that would reverse the tax act's changes for military survivors and others, along with making several changes to IRA rules and other retirement regulations.

Citing an unnamed Senate aide, *The Wall Street Journal* reported May 23 that the Senate will vote on the House version of the SECURE Act rather than its own. Per [The Hill](#), the

Senate version does not include language that would lower rates for military survivors.

What Happened?

The recent tax reform law raised the tax rate to 37% on certain survivor benefits, particularly those from the Defense Department to children of survivors. They had previously been as low as 12%. Some military families weren't aware of the change until they processed their 2018 taxes, resulting in a [financial shock](#).

[READ THE LETTER: [MOAA Supports H.R. 2481](#)]

[TAKE ACTION: [Ask Your Lawmaker to Repeal the Widows Tax](#)]

Ending the SBP-DIC offset "would ensure military survivors receive the full amounts of their DoD-provided Survivor Benefit Plan and VA-earned Dependency and Indemnity Compensation without offset," said James Naughton, MOAA's associate director of government relations. This would mean "survivors wouldn't be forced to transfer their benefits to their children, a short term solution with long-term financial ramifications to military families."

New House Caucus to Target Key Issues for Women Servicemembers, Veterans

The four women in the House of Representatives with military experience – three freshmen congresswomen and one candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination — announced the formation Wednesday of a new caucus that will focus on the issues faced by women in uniform, past and present.

Thanks to high costs in the area and little guidance from leadership at the time, "I couldn't personally figure out how I was supposed to make child care work and fulfill my military responsibilities to serve our country," Houlahan said. She separated from service soon after.

Along with issues facing currently serving women such as child care concerns, increased reports of sexual assault, and the opening of combat roles to all in uniform, the caucus will address veterans' needs, as the VA adjusts to a rapid increase in the number of woman veterans. Women make up 11.6 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, according to VA statistics, and as a group, they are younger than their male counterparts – 51.3 percent born after 1970, compared with 48 percent of men.

MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 30 May 2019: Defense Bill Issues to Watch

Tricare

**[TAKE ACTION: [Do Not Raise TRICARE Fees](#)
[Do Not Dismantle Military Medicine](#)]**

Military Survivors: The committee did not include language to eliminate the widows tax, the dollar-for-dollar deduction of DoD's Survivor Benefit Plan from the VA's Dependency and Indemnity Compensation. In April, MOAA members from across the country visited legislators on Capitol Hill to tell Congress to end the widows' tax. MOAA is looking for lawmakers to file an amendment to repeal the offset.

TAKE ACTION: [Act Now to End the Widows Tax](#)

Concurrent Receipt: The draft text of the defense bill currently does not contain language to expand concurrent receipt. MOAA will continue to press lawmakers to file an amendment to include language to expand concurrent receipt.

TAKE ACTION: [Support Full Concurrent Receipt For Disabled Military Retirees](#)

VA Ready to Roll Out MISSION Act Program on June 6, But Expect Glitches: Officials

[RELATED: [VA Care Improvements To Debut June 6](#)]

The new program, officially called the "Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Integrated Outside Networks (MISSION) Act," will replace the previous Choice program that

veterans and private doctors complained was riddled with inefficiencies in administration and delays in payments.

[RELATED: [MOAA President talks VA MISSION Act on Government Matters TV show](#)]

However, they also said they expect the ratio of veterans who choose private health care through the VA -- about 30% -- to remain the same.

President Donald Trump campaigned on a pledge of letting veterans pick their own doctors. The MISSION Act was intended to streamline veterans' care by overhauling and expanding the existing Choice program while consolidating its seven existing care options into one.

"All during the campaign, I'd go out and say, 'Why can't they just go see a doctor instead of standing in line for weeks and weeks and weeks?' Now they can go see a doctor. It's going to be great," Trump said at the bill's signing.

[RELATED: [President Trump Signs MISSION Act Reforming VA Health Care](#)]

Veterans groups initially expressed concerns that the MISSION Act would lead to the "privatization" of VA health care, but officials have repeatedly said that most veterans are satisfied with their care through the department and will remain with the VA.

Under the new access standards going into effect June 6, veterans can see a community provider if they've been waiting for more than 20 days for primary or mental health care, or face a 30-minute drive to the nearest VA facility.

Burial Benefits Expansion Included in 2020 VA Budget

[RELATED: [Read MOAA's Military Burial Guide](#)]

Today, this undertaking has evolved to include burial benefits for each eligible veteran, managed by the VA National Cemetery Administration (NCA). Each gravesite at any of the 136 locations includes a headstone or marker, a burial flag, and a Presidential Memorial Certificate, along with grave care at no cost to the family. Certain families even qualify for a VA burial allowance to assist with funeral expenses.

Eligibility requirements for burial at an NCA location accommodate veterans from the five armed forces, reserve components, NOAA, USPHS, the Merchant Marines, and others. Family members are also entitled to share the veteran's benefit, even if they predecease the veteran.

The VA budget for FY 2020 includes \$329 million to fund the current cemeteries, along with the activation of eight new cemeteries by next year. The new cemeteries will improve burial access for veterans residing in rural areas, specifically in Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Maine, Utah, and Wisconsin. The funding will also be used to provide for almost 140,000 internments, enhanced service to the NCA scheduling office to reduce wait times, and provide legacy programs to ensure "No Veteran Ever Dies" through digital memorialization efforts.

Cemeteries across the nation continue to increase community awareness of veterans' service and sacrifice. Some of the largest cemeteries include locations in Calverton, N.Y.; Elwood, Ill.; Riverside, Calif.; Fort Custer, Mich.; Quantico, Va.; and Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas.

MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 06 June 2019:

Big Changes to VA Health Care Start June 6: What You Need to Know

The VA will change the way some veterans receive care, including urgent care, beginning June 6, when the department launches an element of the MISSION Act called the VA Community Care Program (VCCP).

The VA has shared critical information to service organizations like MOAA to help get the word out. MOAA staff has answered some questions below. Check back at MOAA.org for more details as they become available. As of June 5, you'll also be able to click these links for full urgent care and VCCP regulations as published in the Federal Register.

[FROM VA.GOV: Health Care Options Through VA (PDF)]

Q. What is the MISSION Act, and how will it improve my care?

A. The MISSION Act is a landmark law enacted last year to strengthen VA's ability to deliver the best care and services. Key portions of the act will:

- Expand eligibility for caregiver services to all eras of veterans.
- Expand telehealth services.
- Increase access to community care
- Establish access to urgent care in the community.

Q. What is the criteria for driving distance and wait times?

A. VA's standards would make veterans eligible for community care if they:

- Must drive 30 minutes to a VA facility to receive primary, mental health, or non-institutional extended care; or must drive 60 minutes for specialty care.
- Must wait 20 days for a VA appointment to receive primary, mental health, or non-institutional extended care; or must wait 28 days for specialty care.

Q. How are these different from the old standards?

A. The old system required veterans to be more than 40 miles from a VA facility or face a 30-day wait for an appointment.

Q. Will VA still need to officially authorize the care I receive in the community?

A. Community care generally must be authorized in advance by VA before a veteran can receive care from a community provider.

Q. Who will schedule my community care appointments?

A. As VA implements its new Community Care Network (CCN) in 2019 and 2020, community care appointments will be scheduled directly by VA, not a third party. You will also continue to have the option of making your own community care appointments.

Q. Will I be able to go to any community provider I want?

A. If you are eligible for community care, you will be able to receive care from a community provider who is part of VA's Community Care Network.

Q. Will the process for getting prescription medication be changed?

A. There are no changes to how prescriptions are processed.

Q. Will I have to pay a copayment for community care?

A. Copayment charges work the same way with community care as they do if you receive care at a VA medical facility. Usually, this means you'll be charged a copayment for non-service connected conditions. Copayment charges and payments are made through VA, not through your community provider.

Q. I like the care I get at VA and don't want to go to a community provider, even if I'm eligible. Can I still go to the VA?

A. Yes, veterans who are eligible for community care will continue to have the choice to receive care at VA or a community provider.

Q. I am receiving community care right now, and I like the clinician who is taking care of me. With these changes, will I still be able to see my clinician?

A. Eligibility for community care will continue to be dependent upon your individual health care needs and circumstances, available care at a VA medical facility, and other factors. VA

staff will work with you to determine your eligibility and if you can continue to see your clinician.

Q. What is the urgent care benefit?

A. VA does not publish a specific list of covered services for urgent care, so veterans are encouraged to call or visit their local VA medical facility for more information after the benefit starts June 6 so a VA staff member can advise you on available urgent care providers and provide more details on the benefit.

Q. I've got more questions.

A. Visit the VA's health care web portal for department contact information or visit your local VA Medical Center. Click here to locate a VA Medical Center near you.

Bill Could Block Military Medical Cuts

Yes, our members truly make a difference!

This week the House Armed Services Sub-Committee on Personnel (HASC-P) submitted their portion of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization bill, which outlines their intention to stymie the proposed cuts of nearly 18,000 military medical personnel.

This is an encouraging sign, and affirms the concerns MOAA has had all along, including those expressed earlier by the House Appropriations Committee, who went so far as to withhold \$250 million for health care contractors or civilian hires, until DoD can respond adequately to specifics such as the impact these reductions would have on quality and access to care. MOAA members and supporters since May have sent more than 23,000 letters, sending a clear message of concern and the need for legislative action.

[SEND A LETTER: Tell Your Lawmakers to Protect Military Medicine]

MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 13 June 2019:

Defense Bills: House and Senate Versions Compared

Hours before members of the House Armed Services Committee began a marathon Wednesday session debating and voting on additions to the annual defense authorization bill, text of the Senate version of the legislation went online for the first time.

Deliberations in both chambers are far from over, and that doesn't even factor in the process of aligning the House and Senate version into a compromise bill that can pass both chambers and reach the president's desk. But the initial wording gives a look at lawmaker priorities and shows where MOAA's influence, and that of similar advocacy organizations, on behalf of servicemembers and veterans, and their families, has been heard ... and where more work may be needed.

Here are 3 things to monitor as the process continues.

- 1. A pay raise win.** Summaries from leaders of both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees pledge that their final legislation will include a 3.1% military pay raise, which would align with the administration's FY 2020 budget request and with MOAA efforts to sustain pay comparability with the private sector. While nothing's settled until passage, this appears to be one of few issues that won't be affected by ongoing debate – a key House member said as much at a recent news event.
- 2. Halfway on health care?** While House Armed Services Committee (HASC) members included language that would put a stop to a proposal to cut up to 18,000 medical billets, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) has not. House committee members shared MOAA's concerns about the potential consequences of cutting roughly 20 percent of the military's medical force. They included language requiring DoD to study the issue further and report back to Congress.

[SEND A LETTER: Tell Your Lawmakers to Protect Military Medicine]

3. TRICARE: No news might be good news. Neither piece of legislation includes discussions on raising TRICARE fees or creating new ones. Last year, the authorization act did include such language until late in the process, when it was removed after a campaign by MOAA and other veteran and military advocacy groups.

Commentary: Medical Cuts Could Cause Irreversible Damage

Change is a constant in the military. Military medicine has undergone numerous sea-changes over the past four decades, including the switch from a drafted force to an all-volunteer force, downsizing, the development of the TRICARE system, the implementation of TRICARE for Life, and now – more downsizing.

Through to the present, the system has handled all these challenges successfully (some smoother than others). In these past evolutions, there was sufficient time and flexibility for the system to absorb the changes without damaging its foundations.

However, veterans of these exercises, myself included, are concerned the magnitude and timeline of today's proposed changes are too great to absorb without fundamental damage to its infrastructure.

[SEND A LETTER: Tell Your Lawmakers to Protect Military Medicine]

Complexity = Vulnerability

The structure of military medicine is complex. The system recruits, educates, and trains physicians, dentists, nurses, additional health care professionals and an administrative structure with a unique ability to provide high quality traditional medical care and to deploy worldwide with U.S. forces to a fight anywhere in the world.

The complexity of that system is its vulnerability. Military medicine must compete to attract health care professionals with the rest of American medicine.

Post-graduate medical education is a complex ecosystem that requires an infrastructure of supporting specialties and functionalities. Military medicine already struggles with the adequacy of the programs because of size limitations, and further qualitative cuts could be lethal to the greatest attraction to military medicine for young professionals.

No way back

Health care has been the top-rated benefit affecting retention of military members in all services for decades. An all-volunteer force requires not only good medical care for deployed forces but also care for dependents left at home. A deployed soldier whose child is sick back home in Nebraska is not, in military jargon, "a full up round." That soldier needs the peace of mind that his family is being well cared for by a health care system he understands and trusts.

Military people expect their health care system to follow them into retirement. Retired personnel and their dependents have grown to be the majority of the beneficiaries of the MHS due to the demographics of an all-volunteer force.

Should these concerns come to pass, the unintended consequences could be profound and long lasting. If the system implodes, it cannot be rebuilt overnight.

Senate Approves Blue Water Navy Bill

In a historic vote by unanimous consent on Wednesday, Senate lawmakers approved legislation to grant benefits for Agent Orange exposure to Navy veterans who served in the waters off Vietnam – culminating a decades-long fight for the thousands of veterans who have been denied claims of presumptive exposure.

The bill passed without opposition. Last year, similar legislation failed in the Senate when two senators blocked a motion for unanimous consent votes, the furthest it had ever moved.

"This is a tremendous victory for our nation's veterans," said MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret). "After years of waiting, Blue Water Navy veterans and

their survivors will finally see the benefits they deserve without fear of those benefits being taken away."

MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 20 June 2019:

NDAAs 2020: The Latest on TRICARE, Medical Billet Cuts, and More

With the full Senate set to debate its version of the annual defense authorization bill this week and the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) recently completing a record 21-hour debate on its version, MOAA's staff has been tracking the amendments, proposals, and changes that will shape military spending for the next year and beyond.

The Widows Tax

During HASC markups, Rep Joe Wilson (R-S.C., sponsor of H.R. 553) offered up an amendment to repeal the Survivor Benefit Plan-Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset, better known as the Widows Tax, but it was later withdrawn because it was offered without a corresponding offset to pay for the provision.

Wilson's office continues to work diligently to focus on strategies to pay for the offset. The congressman's bill is still in motion, as it met the threshold of support in the House to be placed on the consensus calendar for a floor vote, which will likely occur in July. MOAA staff will continue to engage congress on this issue.

[TAKE ACTION: [Ask Your Lawmakers to End the Widows Tax](#)]

MOAA Launches TRICARE and Military Health Survey: Have Your Say Now

As part of ongoing efforts to improve health care access and quality for servicemembers past and present, and their families, MOAA has launched an important survey to better understand beneficiaries' experiences with military health care and the TRICARE program.

Data from the survey will help shape MOAA's advocacy efforts. It's an important way for beneficiaries to share their concerns about their care and to identify problem areas that otherwise may go unnoticed.

Take the survey [at this link](#) and share it with fellow beneficiaries; they can reach it at MOAA.org/tricare-survey-2019.

A recap from our last round of survey data indicates military beneficiaries have experienced unexpected increases in many of their TRICARE fees.

Learn more about the findings from MOAA's last TRICARE and military health survey [here](#). And don't forget to make your voice heard

MOAA Members Seek Expanded Federal Support for Veterans Treatment Courts

New federal regulations could help more veterans navigate the justice system by expanding veterans treatment court programs across the country.

Col. D.J. Reyes, USA (Ret), and members of the National Veterans Court Alliance met with administration officials and congressional leaders the week of June 10 to encourage their support for the Veteran Treatment Court Coordination Act of 2019. The legislation will establish an office in the Justice Department that would provide support and possibly funding to states to establish and maintain veterans treatment courts.

The courts are significant because they would help veterans charged with crimes linked to service-connected issues, such post-traumatic stress or traumatic brain injury.

"Veterans treatment courts address root problems," said Reyes, a MOAA Life member. "We found that veterans were put in the conventional crime pipeline, but that doesn't address the root problem. With the help of the VA, we've realized that this person had issues identified during their military service. We drew that connection."

MOAA chapter members have contributed time and money to veterans courts programs in Florida, Georgia, Missouri, Montana, and Tennessee, among other states.

The bipartisan bill, sponsored by Rep. Charlie Crist (D-Fla.) is being discussed in the House Judiciary Committee. Funding of \$25 million has been identified, but not appropriated.

"This will give them a real way to get back to normality," he said. "This is why we insist the expungement of the record be part of the treatment. It'll be much easier for someone to reintegrate into society if they don't have an albatross hanging around their neck."

MOAA Newsletter Advocacy, 27 June 2019:

More Disruption to Military Medicine Expected in 2019

Change is coming...and fast.

MOAA has learned that the Defense Health Agency (DHA) will assume command and control of all military treatment facilities (MTFs) by Oct. 1, 2019. Original plans called for a phased approach to this goal by 2021. This is an aggressive undertaking, and officials admit it will require considerable effort to get it right — efforts that unquestionably would be hampered by a 20% reduction in military medical billets.

In the U.S. alone, DoD will establish 20 large-market areas and 16 small markets, as well as numerous stand-alone MTF's in rural areas, according to a message that DHA Director Vice Adm. Raquel Bono circulated among leadership. They will transition from a military service-led model into what they term a "market construct."

What will this mean for the beneficiary population? There will be disruptions for retirees as well as military families. Many already are being told to find providers outside of the MTFs, a move that will only become more pronounced by this accelerated timeline.

[ACT NOW: Tell Congress Not to Dismantle Military Medicine]

What would these "markets" look like? There's really only one example: the National Capital Region has been established as a market under the purview of the DHA for close to two years. This market has two major medical centers, Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and Fort Belvoir Community Hospital in Virginia. These tri-Service facilities are major referral centers, medical readiness teaching platforms and heavily concentrated with beneficiaries.

This should be a well-oiled market, except that it is not.

MOAA has learned of major issues with technician and nurse staffing which has resulted in major reductions in operating room capacity and putting valuable surgical training programs at risk. Many beneficiaries from all specialties have been referred out to the TRICARE networks. If the pinnacle of military medicine, Walter Reed, is having these critical issues, what can we expect from all of the other MTF's?

These changes, and plans to reduce the military medical footprint by about 18,000 positions, are a deep concern for MOAA, especially in a compressed timeline. More families will be told to go outside military installations for care, MTFs will offer reduced services for pediatrics and obstetrics (among other areas), and overall readiness will be threatened.

MOAA continues to urge Congress to provide greater control and oversight over these reforms and, at a minimum, adopt the provision addressing this issue in H.R. 2500, the House version of the National Defense Authorization Act. Tell your lawmakers you support this provision today, and ask them to protect military medicine.

President Trump Signs Blue Water Navy Benefits Bill

Long-sought legislation that will extend disability benefits to about 90,000 veterans who served off Vietnam's coast during the war was signed into law June 25 by President Donald Trump.

The Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019 will extend the presumption of exposure to toxic defoliants such as Agent Orange to these servicemembers, which will allow them to receive care for types of cancer and other illnesses linked to these chemicals. MOAA and other veteran service organizations, including Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, and the Fleet Reserve Association, have championed the bill, which failed to clear Congress in previous sessions.

"This is great news and rectifies literally decades of oversight to tens of thousands of veterans who have been denied of the appropriate medical care and compensation from their exposure to toxic chemicals during combat operations," said MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Dana T. Atkins, USAF (Ret). "Hopefully, this sets the stage for future considerations of toxic chemical exposure and mandates both effective documentation and treatment for those service members exposed to these dangers."

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

The legislation passed the House on May 14 and the Senate on June 12. In January, a Federal Circuit court ruling granted presumptive exposure to Blue Water Navy veterans who served within the territorial waters of Vietnam; a motion in a separate court case, filed between the House and Senate votes, confirmed the VA would not appeal that ruling.

The act includes coordinates that define "offshore of Vietnam" for the purposes of the benefit. It also extends benefits to veterans exposed to Agent Orange on the Korean DMZ, and it expands benefits to those suffering from spina bifida who had a parent who served in Thailand during the Vietnam war. These groups were not covered by the court ruling.

VA Secretary Robert Wilkie recently told a Senate committee that the VA began processing benefit claims from Blue Water Navy veterans before the legislation passed, according to Military Times.

Why Taking MOAA's TRICARE and Military Health Care Survey Will Make a Difference

For those who spend any time online, the requests are endless: "Answer this one question," "Take this quick poll," "Before you go, can you rate your experience on a 0-10 scale and then give us all your personal data?"

Not all surveys are created equal. But MOAA's TRICARE and Military Health Care Survey is worth your time for countless reasons, including the five listed below:

1. Share your stories. From fighting planned TRICARE rate increases to sounding the alarm on proposed military medical cuts, MOAA remains committed to ensuring high-quality, easy-to-access medical care for all service-connected beneficiaries. But alongside efforts on Capitol Hill, our staff relies on ground-level input from members and others on whether the programs being discussed inside the Beltway are working outside of it. These surveys compile that much-needed data.

**Age is not measured by years
but by your enthusiasm for life.**



JAYHAWK CHAPTER MOAA



A membership meeting will be held **Tuesday, 16 July 2019**
at Lawrence Country Club

Dinner cost is \$24.00/meal.

The Program: Our speaker, Bryan Baerg of the National Weather Service's Topeka Weather Forecast Office, will speak about the May 28, 2019 EF-4 Tornado

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

The Menu: Rustic rolls, Chef's choice on salad, grilled sirloin with herb butter, Au gratin 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 July 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.

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
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 2019 Meeting Schedule:

Tuesday	16 July	Tuesday 19	November
Tuesday	17 September		

2019 Kansas Council of Chapters Dates/Locations:

10 August	Jayhawk Chapter
26 October	Santa Fe Trail Chapter



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NEVER STOP SERVING!

IN GOD WE TRUST