

EDUCATE

ADVOCATE

SUPPORT



Air Force Association

The Force Behind THE FORCE

Legislative Goals for 2008

April 4, 2008

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Montgomery GI Bill

- The MGIB covers about 73% of the national average cost of a four-year public college/university education and just 31% of the cost of the average private university.
- A strong and expansive MGIB will have a positive effect on military recruitment.
- AFA believes the MGIB should fully cover a 4 year education at any public school.
- Reservists who serve 36 months active duty should be entitled to full MGIB, not only 80%, per '08 NDAA.

Mental Health and Veterans

- The FY09 VA budget request proposed to reduce mental health funding by approximately \$38M.
- Over 140,000 OIF/OEF veterans have been diagnosed with a mental condition.
- PTSD and other mental conditions are more of an obstacle to making a living post-service than any physical injury they may face on the battlefield.
- The benefits of VA research, much as they have done in the science of prosthetics, would extend to the Active-Duty force, and to society at large.
- Robust funding for mental health research is needed.

Concurrent Receipt

- The FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act authorized full concurrent receipt for disabled retirees with at least 20 years of service deemed "unemployable" by the VA.
- AFA believes retired pay is earned by longevity of service, and VA disability compensation is payment for reduced quality of life and loss of function and future earnings. These are separate entitlements.
- That principle also applies to retirees with at least 20 years of service and 10-40% service-connected disability compensation from the VA. This large group of military retirees, however, are still excluded from receiving concurrent receipt.

TRICARE Fees

- AFA opposes unreasonable fee increases, and will continue to advocate for full funding of the Military Health System.
- Military health cost growth is a direct reflection of health care trends in the private sector.
- The long-term viability of our military is dependent on establishing a sense of long-term commitment between the service member and his/her country.
- A high quality health benefit is a recognition of service that should not be diminished.
- Prior to the enactment of any fee increases, DoD needs to engage in aggressive cost-savings and employ best business practices.

Improvements to TRICARE

- Allow service members to pay for TRICARE in pre-tax dollars, and allow them Flexible Spending Accounts, a move that would put them on par with all other federal employees.
- Allow TRICARE Prime Remote family members to live outside of their primary residence during a deployment without sacrificing TPR eligibility.
- Extend benefit to cover preventative services, such as smoking cessation, to reduce compound, long-term costs and health problems.
- Increase accessibility to the Shingles vaccine, and provide coverage under the pharmacy benefit.

Dental Readiness and Health

- Service members, the Reserve Component in particular, often face extraction as a last resort because they do not have the time or resources to meet minimum standards for deployment.
- Reservists should have access to their TRICARE dental benefit from the time they are placed on alert status. 90 days is often not enough to receive sufficient dental care.
- AFA supports H.R. 5595, a bill that would allow the VA to provide outpatient dental services to all veterans with a service-connected disability.

Compensation and Incentive Pay

- AFA has worked tirelessly to eliminate the pay disparity between military and civilian sectors.
- AFA supports a military pay raise of at least 3.9% -- one-half percentage above private sector pay growth annually until the current pay gap of 3.4% is eliminated.
- AFA supports the Air Force in its calls to Congress for added flexibility in offering signing bonuses and incentive pay in the nursing and larger health fields, and other critical fields, as a needed recruiting and retention tool.

Family Support Programs

- Funding is a perennial issue for these programs.
- The increased operational tempo and doctrine of an Operational Reserve require sustained and increased investment in programs such as child care and mental health support.
- Increased support in spousal employment is needed, as challenges in finding jobs after relocation adversely impact the military families' stability and satisfaction with military life.
- Financial literacy programs are also urgently needed to help young families make the right decisions and investments.

Tax Benefits for Employers

- AFA supports needed tax relief for employers of Selected Reserve personnel and reinforce the Employer Support for Guard and Reserve Program.
- AFA believes Congress should expand the Workforce Opportunity Tax Credit for employers who hire spouses of Regular and Reserve component service members.
- Employers who make up any pay differential for activated employees should be given a tax credit.
- Incentives for small businesses to hire temporary workers are also part of the cost of utilizing the RC.

PCS Allowances

- Flat-rate amounts have been eroded over time by inflation.
- AFA has heard from some of its members that the current downturn in the housing market has resulted in significant loss of investment, drastically changing the retirement and savings posture of many families.
- AFA, through the work of the AF CGO and Enlisted Councils, helped to secure a provision in the House FY08 NDAA to ship a second vehicle to overseas accompanied assignments at government expense.
 - That provision was removed in Conference Committee.

The Life Cycle of an Issue

- Many of the issues worked by the Association take over ten years to be enacted into law. Examples are TRICARE for Life, Repeal of Dual Compensation Restrictions, Source Tax Repeal, Combat Related Special Compensation, Survivor Benefit Program Upgrade, etc.

- Wouldn't it be nice if ...
- Military/Veterans organization consensus
- Educating Members & staff about the need
- Drafting legislation that reflects need & current realities
- Legal & Constitutional law review
- Seeking a Member to sponsor/introduce in both houses
- Refer to Committee – Hold Hearings
- Report out of Committee
- Floor vote in both houses
- Conference Committee to resolve differences
- Vote on final bill language in both houses
- Seek the President's signature
- Once signed, "Wouldn't it be nice if ..." becomes "It is hereby ordered that ..."