



AFSA Division 12 Legislative-Retiree Affairs Bulletin 2011-031
Division 12, the Cacti Division
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1. Sample Letter against TRICARE Fee Increases. Representatives Walter Jones, R-N.C., and Dan Boren, D-Okla., have introduced H.R. 1092, which would prohibit DoD from increasing TRICARE fees without congressional approval. The bill would prohibit increases in copayments, annual premiums, and prescription costs for retirees enrolled in the program. As we detailed in the last bulletin the Administration, through DoD, has proposed increasing the fees for TRICARE Prime and for drugs obtained through the TRICARE Retail Pharmacy program. Basically, Prime would be increased by a “modest” 13 percent, then increased annually commensurate with cost increases in civilian health care. This is all a concerted effort on the part of the Administration to have military retirees pay significantly more for their healthcare. As we indicated in the previous bulletin, indications are that DoD will be going after every TRICARE program. For example, the media is now suggesting that DoD will be looking next to TRICARE for Life (TFL) and, in accordance with the President’s “Debt Commission” recommendations would have TFL not cover the first \$500 in medical expenses and then only half of the next \$5,000.

It is important to understand that these increases—whether in Prime, Standard, or TFL can be prevented if Congress puts an item in the next National Defense Authorization Act prohibiting the increases. However, Congress will not do so if the people do not demand it. The President and DoD, absent any strong opposition, pretty much have a stranglehold on the media on the issue, and top military leaders, including the members of the JCS, have been silent on the matter. What they don’t take into consideration is the potentially devastating impact such increases would have on enlisted military retirements. *This certainly would be a career disincentive for current and future enlisted members.* It is no surprise that those with “hefty” retirement checks consider the increases “modest.” It would certainly be refreshing if top military leaders spoke out for and recognized the difference between and enlisted retirements and those that are not.

Frankly, the only way we will stop the increases and the impact they will have on your futures, particularly should DoD go after TRICARE for Life, is if you take action now—and get your family members, friends, and colleagues to do the same. Tell the Airmen next to you that if they don’t action along with you, they may not have a decent retirement when they get to that point of their lives. Tell your commanders about the Debt Commission proposals for TRICARE for Life—that proposal would be damaging to their finances and the wellbeing of their families during their final years as well.

We urge all Airmen—those serving now and those who so honorably served in the past—to immediately send a letter to your two senators and your representatives—telling them to take action on your behalf. If you sit by and let this happen, you will have to live with it.

Those in Nevada, in particular, need to make sure to send a letter to your senators, one of whom is Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., who is the Senate Majority leader. Let him know how such increases would affect your wellbeing and that of your families.

The sample letter follows:

(Date)

The Honorable (Full Name)
House of Representative (or United States Senate)
Washington, D.C. 20515 (or 20510 for the Senate)

Dear Representative (or Senator) (Last Name),

I urge you to support the provisions of H.R. 1092, the “Military Retirees Health Care Protection Act,” recently introduced in the House by Rep’s Walter B. Jones, Jr., and Dan Boren. This bill would rightfully prohibit the Pentagon from increasing military health care fees without the approval of Congress. The bill would prohibit increases in co-pays, annual premiums, and prescription drug benefits for those enrolled in the TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Standard, and TRICARE for Life programs.

Military retirees should be given significantly special consideration over those citizens who didn’t serve in the military. Most worked for decades through their careers (through their prime working years) with relatively low compensation, faced repeated family separations, experienced regular hardships, made great sacrifices, fought this nation’s wars, and agreed to give their lives at a moment’s notice if ordered to do so—situations singularly unique to military members. Their family members also served over these long careers and faced extraordinary challenges.

In particular, it is especially important to protect those covered by TRICARE for Life. In 2001, Congress passed the TRICARE for Life program—in its current form, with no expectation that any future group of leaders would work to undermine the program. Those in the TFL program are, in the vast majority of cases, on fixed incomes and in the final years of their lives. Any move on the part of the government to change that program would be unconscionable.

Again, Representative (or Senator) (Last Name), I urge you to stop current DoD moves to increase current military retiree healthcare costs. Congress should honor those who served, take control of the situation, and have oversight over any military healthcare cost increases,

and I urge you to support the provisions of H.R. 1092. I anxiously await your response. As a voter, your position on this matter is important to me.

Sincerely,
(your signature)

Your FULL NAME
Contact information

Readers, please take the time to write to your two senators, your representative, and to the President. The above letter will work well for all three. Of course, personalize the letter to your own situation. Try to limit it to one page. You can find the identities and addresses of your two senators and representative at www.contactingthecongress.org or www.thomas.gov. The contactingthecongress Website will give you more expanded contact information, including e-mail addresses (which you can use to complement your letter) should you want to send an e-mail. However, remember that a written letter is still your most powerful, impactful tool in this regard—and we hope each of you take the time to send one right away.

The President's address is below. The salutation would be "Dear Mr. President," or "Dear President Obama."

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20500

2. Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. H. Res. 184 by Rep. Linda T. Sanchez, D-Calif., and S. Res. 55 by Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., would designate March 30, 2011, as "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day." S. Res. 55 was agreed to by the full Senate on March 7. The House Resolution is still pending in the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. The texts of these resolutions are very similar. The Senate Resolution reads:

"Whereas the Vietnam War was fought in the Republic of South Vietnam from 1961 to 1975, and involved North Vietnamese regular forces and Viet Cong guerrilla forces in armed conflict with United States Armed Forces and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam;

Whereas the United States Armed Forces became involved in Vietnam because the United States Government wanted to provide direct military support to the Government of South Vietnam to defend itself against the growing Communist threat from North Vietnam;

Whereas members of the United States Armed Forces began serving in an advisory role to the Government of the Republic of South Vietnam in 1961;

Whereas, as a result of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents on August 2 and 4, 1964, Congress overwhelmingly passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution (Public Law 88-408), on August 7, 1964, which provided the authority to the President of the United States to prosecute the war against North Vietnam;

Whereas, in 1965, United States Armed Forces ground combat units arrived in Vietnam;

Whereas, by the end of 1965, there were 80,000 United States troops in Vietnam, and by 1969, a peak of approximately 543,000 troops was reached;

Whereas, on January 27, 1973, the Treaty of Paris was signed, which required the release of all United States prisoners-of-war held in North Vietnam and the withdrawal of all United States Armed Forces from South Vietnam;

Whereas, on March 30, 1973, the United States Armed Forces completed the withdrawal of combat units and combat support units from South Vietnam;

Whereas, on April 30, 1975, North Vietnamese regular forces captured Saigon, the capitol of South Vietnam, effectively placing South Vietnam under Communist control;

Whereas more than 58,000 members of the United States Armed Forces lost their lives in Vietnam and more than 300,000 members of the Armed Forces were wounded;

Whereas, in 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated in the District of Columbia to commemorate those members of the United States Armed Forces who died or were declared missing-in-action in Vietnam;

Whereas the Vietnam War was an extremely divisive issue among the people of the United States and a conflict that caused a generation of veterans to wait too long for the United States public to acknowledge and honor the efforts and services of such veterans;

Whereas members of the United States Armed Forces who served bravely and faithfully for the United States during the Vietnam War were often wrongly criticized for the policy decisions made by 4 presidential administrations in the United States;

Whereas the establishment of a 'Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day' would be an appropriate way to honor those members of the United States Armed Forces who served in South Vietnam and throughout Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War; and

Whereas March 30, 2011, would be an appropriate day to establish as 'Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day': Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate--

- (1) honors and recognizes the contributions of veterans who served in the United States Armed Forces in Vietnam during war and during peace;
- (2) encourages States and local governments to also establish 'Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day'; and
- (3) encourages the people of the United States to observe 'Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day' with appropriate ceremonies and activities that--
 - (A) provide the appreciation Vietnam War veterans deserve, but did not receive upon returning home from the war;
 - (B) demonstrate the resolve that never again shall the Nation disregard and denigrate a generation of veterans;
 - (C) promote awareness of the faithful service and contributions of such veterans during their military service as well as to their communities since returning home;
 - (D) promote awareness of the importance of entire communities empowering veterans and the families of veterans to readjust to civilian life after military service; and
 - (E) promote opportunities for such veterans to assist younger veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in rehabilitation from wounds, both seen and unseen, and to support the reintegration of younger veterans into civilian life.”

3. Deadline for Special Retroactive Stop-loss Pay Once Again Extended. (DoD March 21 report) The deadline for eligible service members, veterans and their beneficiaries to apply for special retroactive pay as compensation for involuntary extensions of their military service contracts has been extended to April 8, Defense Department officials announced today.

The deadline extension is included in the continuing resolution President Barack Obama signed March 18 that provided funding for government operations through April 8. The Retroactive Stop Loss Special Pay was established to compensate for the hardships military members encountered when their service was involuntarily extended under Stop Loss authority between Sept. 11, 2001, and Sept. 30, 2009. Eligible members or their beneficiaries may submit a claim to their respective military services to receive the benefit of \$500 for each full or partial month served in a Stop Loss status.

When the special pay program began on Oct. 21, 2009, the services estimated 145,000 service members, veterans and beneficiaries were eligible for this benefit. Because the majority of those eligible had separated from the military, the services have engaged in extensive and persistent outreach efforts to reach them and remind them to apply, officials said. Outreach efforts -- such as using direct mail, social networks, and media outlets and engaging military and veteran service organizations -- will continue through April 8, officials added. To apply for Stop Loss pay or for more information, including submission requirements and service-specific links, go to <http://www.defense.gov/stoploss>

(end)