

Issue: NATIONAL DEFENSE BUDGET

The House of Representatives voted 342-85 and the U.S. Senate voted 72-26 to adopt the short-term spending bill and avoid a government shutdown resulting in keeping the U.S. government operating from October 1, 2016, the start of the new fiscal year, until December 9, 2016 when Congress will attempt to approve a spending bill that will last longer than the current 2 month continuing resolution. Among chief concerns of the Honorable Eric Fanning, who was sworn in May 18, 2016 as the 22nd Secretary of the Army, is the budget and the demand for Soldier's around the world. He is already focused on providing soldiers and their families with more predictability amid increasing demands on the force and ongoing budget constraints. "The main challenge with the budget is the instability of it, the unpredictability of it," Fanning said. "We start every year with a continuing resolution and the threat of a government shutdown. We've got sequestration looming on the horizon." If BCA (Budget Control Act) caps (also known as sequestration) remain, we can no longer execute the defense strategic guidance.

- Not only do the spending cuts downsize the force structure, but also reduce service members pay and benefits, which decreases Soldier Readiness and could potentially lead to the loss of highly trained men and women
- While the Department of Defense is content on shrinking the size and scope of the United States military, our major adversaries, Russia and China, along with rouge nations such as North Korea and Iran are ramping up their military stocks and capabilities.
- The American Legion urges Congress to oppose the pending budget cuts in military spending and oppose the reduction of force proposed by the Department of Defense.
- The American Legion's message to Congress is not to allow our military forces to reach a weakened state in these uncertain and perilous times.

Issue: POW/MIA POLICIES

Under the direction of the Secretary of Defense and per the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) passed by Congress, the Department of Defense (DoD) formally created one agency responsible for the recovery and accounting of missing service members from past conflicts. The Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency was established on January 30, 2015 to more effectively increase the number of missing service personnel accounted for from past conflicts and ensure timely and accurate information is communicated to their families.

This agency brings together the former Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office (DPMO), the Joint Prisoner of War/Missing in Action Accounting Command (JPAC), and the Life Sciences Equipment Laboratory (LSEL). Consolidating the Department's personnel accounting assets will lead to better oversight of family resources and services, research, and operations. The agency will enable the workforce to achieve the fullest possible accounting for our missing personnel, better anticipate family needs, and adapt to changes in the DoD and the United States Government. The agency will also honor our veterans' sacrifices and confirm an obligation made to those serving our country.

- The American Legion believes U.S. Government POW/MIA operations are achieving substantial progress. The American Legion urges the President and Congress to support legislation and policies that will use all reasonable resources to achieve the fullest possible accounting of all missing American service members and designated civilians regardless of location or era of loss.
- The American Legion calls upon Congress to provide full funding, personnel, and any other resources for all members of the Department of Defense (DOD) POW/MIA accounting community, and to ensure these funds not be redirected by the DOD for any other purpose.
- The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to continue to declassify all POW/MIA information (except that revealing intelligence sources or methods) in a form readily available to the affected families and public review.
- The American Legion calls upon Congress to establish a joint standing congressional committee on POW/MIA affairs to ensure continued priority action by the executive branch in addressing the POW/MIA issue.
- The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to initiate or strengthen joint commissions with Russia, the People's Republic of China, and Democratic People's Republic of Korea to increase POW/MIA accounting and recovery efforts.

- The American Legion calls upon the President and Congress to take further favorable actions toward the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as Hanoi increases efforts to provide the fullest possible accounting for US personnel still missing in Vietnam or in areas of Laos and Cambodia it controlled during the Vietnam War.
- That "fullest possible accounting" is defined as turning over live prisoners, repatriating remains of those killed in action or who died in captivity, or providing convincing evidence when neither is possible.

Issue: MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE STANDARDS

The American Legion has always supported quality of life features for members of the Armed Forces, their dependents, military retirees, and survivors as people are the foundation of our Nation's fighting forces. Without highly qualified, dedicated men and women, even the most sophisticated weaponry will not provide the deterrent force necessary for this nation to remain at peace. Military compensation is only one factor in the quality of life equation as to whether good service members and their families remain in military service: Other major factors include fair treatment, career stability, regular promotions, adequate quarters, adequate health care, commissaries, and day care facilities, all of which ease the numerous sacrifices that are demanded of service member. The American Legion urges Congress and the Department of Defense to support and fund quality of life features including, but not limited to, the following:

- military pay comparability for the Armed Forces and regular increases in the Basic Allowances for Housing (BAH); renovation and construction of military quarters and increased funding for child day care centers and pay raises must be competitive with the private sector; adequate medical, mental, and dental health services; also improve funding to support morale, welfare, and recreational facilities;
- non-privatized exchanges and commissary facilities, and the Defense Commissary Agency (DECA) and its functions should be retained and not relegated to the military services; preserving an attractive retirement system for the active and reserve components;
- oppose any changes to the military retirement system, whether prospective or retroactive, that would violate contracts made with military retirees and that would undermine morale and readiness;
- requiring the Services perform mandatory physical examinations, without waivers, for all separating and retiring servicemembers within 90 days of separation from service; full funding concurrent receipt of military retirement pay, and VA disability compensation as well as Special Compensation pays for disabled military retirees; that the Survivor Benefit Plan/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (SBP/DIC) offset be eliminated;

- TRICARE for Life and the TRICARE Senior Pharmacy program for Medicare-eligible military retirees, their dependents and military survivors, should be adequately funded; regular cost-of-living adjustments to military retirement and increased death gratuity payments; and
- whenever a Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) is conducted, certain base facilities such as base medical facilities, commissaries, exchanges and other facilities be preserved for use by active duty, reserve forces personnel, military retired veterans and their families.

Issue: IDENTIFYING NATIONAL INTERESTS BEFORE COMMITTING MILITARY FORCES AND ASSETS

The United States Constitution clearly defines the duties and responsibilities of the branches of government relating to defense of the nation. There is no greater responsibility of a government than to protect its population and infrastructure. The War Powers Resolution of 1973 requires the President to advise the Congress and American people what national security interest is served by committing U.S. forces to combat in a sovereign nation. The United States is currently under significant economic and budgetary constraints which has the potential to negatively impact the ability of the military to protect the nation. It has been shown repeatedly an uninformed and uninvolved public will quickly lose confidence and deny support for military operations they do not understand.

- The American Legion supports the War Powers Resolution of 1973 (50 U.S.C.1541-1548).
- The American Legion, in keeping with its founding principle of a strong national security, calls on the President of the United States, in compliance with the War Powers Resolution of 1973, to inform the American people and Congress of the critical national interests served by committing U.S. armed forces or military assets to hostile action.
- Before committing military forces and assets to hostile action, specific goals, overwhelming force levels necessary to accomplish the goals, parameters identifying when the specific goals are met, and realistic costs in national treasure must be identified and articulated to the American people and the Congress.
- The American Legion defines hostile action as any action where the use of lethal force is authorized, imminent, or implied to accomplish a military objective within the borders of a sovereign foreign nation.
- The American Legion encourages Congress to once again establish itself as the oversight mechanism as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States in Article 1 Section 8, "The Powers of Congress."

Issue: MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY STANDARDS

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced beginning in January 2016, all military occupations and positions will be open to women, without exception. For the first time in U.S. military history, the secretary said women will be able to contribute to the Defense Department mission with no barriers at all in their way as long as they qualify. Even more importantly, the military services will be better able to harness the skills and perspectives that talented women have to offer. With this new integration, there are valid concerns about the physical demands required of soldiers to qualify and service in the combat arms: Army and Marine Corps infantry, armor, artillery, Army Special Forces and Navy Seals.

- The American Legion strongly believes that the Department of Defense and all branches of the military services must maintain the current physical and mental requirements and qualifications for acceptance into military service that have created the best and most respected military in the world.
- The American Legion also believes that the mental and physical qualifications of all military personnel, regardless of gender or age, should be held to a single duty position specific standard depending on Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) and not be amended without Congressional authority.
- The American Legion requests the Congress of the United States to hold extensive and in-depth hearings on Military Leadership Diversity Commission Recommendation 9 eliminating the “Combat Exclusion Policies for Women,” and the DOD’s Review of Laws, Policies and Regulations Restricting the Service of Female Members in the U.S. Armed Forces since Congress and only Congress can codify the elimination of the “combat exclusion clause for women.”
- The American Legion believes that without such Congressional hearings and oversight there exists the distinct possibility that changes will be made to lessen the current standards or set a double standard, one for men and one for women, for the sake of accommodating personnel for “social experiments,” therefore, reducing our nation’s military effectiveness.

Issue: FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Members of The American Legion, as veterans of wartime service in the defense of liberty, have a special concern for maintaining peace with freedom and recognize that a strong U.S. foreign policy is vital in that regard. The official concern of The American Legion stems from that part of the Preamble to the Constitution of The American Legion which states: "We associate ourselves together ... to make right the master of might; to promote peace and goodwill on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy."

The American Legion believes that the following objectives should be incorporated into U.S. foreign policy in order to maintain peace with freedom while preserving and promoting democracy:

- Recognition that the U.S. has great and multiple responsibilities as a leader of the Free World.
- Dedication to achievement of world peace with freedom, secured by a peace through strength posture.
- Support for a global fight on multiple fronts to end the scourge of terrorism.
- Support for democracy and human rights in other countries when such is consistent with U.S. national interests and national power.
- Participation in essential collective security alliances, provided our allies contribute their fair share.
- Negotiation of equitable, verifiable arms control agreements, which improve U.S. national security.
- Opposition to the spread of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons or long- range ballistic missiles which may be used by terrorists, terrorist organizations, communists or aggressor nations.
- Determined opposition to international terrorism and drug trafficking.
- Support for responsible international organizations that are consistent with U.S. sovereignty and serve U.S. national interests.
- Participation in an increasingly interdependent Free World trading system based on fair and equitable trading practices.
- Recognition that the President must be the chief architect of U.S. foreign policy as envisioned in the U.S. Constitution, while Congress performs important functions of advice, oversight and funding.
- Support for the appropriate resources to promote and protect U.S. vital national interests world-wide.

Issue: ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION POLICY

Immigration and Customs Enforcement estimates that there are 11.5 million illegal immigrants who currently reside within the U.S. The Department of Homeland Security, Office of Audits stated that each year more than one million aliens attempt to illegally enter the United States without proper documentation or enter legally and violate the provisions of their visa. Aggressively tracking foreign nationals is a deterrent to terrorist activities and failing to effectively utilize the available systems and technology to track illegal aliens threatens the security and future of the U.S.

- That The American Legion urges Congress to adopt an immigration reform policy which emphasizes border security against those individuals attempting to enter this country illegally and internal tracking of all resident aliens and illegal immigrants.
- The American Legion opposes legislation that would result in the granting of amnesty and legal residency, in any form or by any name, to illegal immigrants currently in the United States.
- The American Legion encourages the federal government to provide the needed resources to enforcement agencies tasked with curtailing illegal immigration in this country and encourage the Congress of the United States to mandate that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Student and Exchange Visitor Information System continue and be aggressively administered by the responsible agency of the federal government.
- The American Legion encourages the Congress of the United States to provide agencies of the federal government with the necessary resources to track the arrival and departure of foreign nationals to the United States.
- The American Legion encourages a thorough background check and interview for each candidate for a U.S. visa prior to issuing said visa.
- The American Legion encourages Congress to authorize and fund the securing of the borders and points of entry in the United States by: construction of physical barriers; hiring a sufficient number of U.S. Border Patrol Agents; federalization of National Guard troops to assist border security operations; searching all vessel and their cargo arriving at our seaports; enforcement of existing laws and passing of new laws to reduce the illegal immigrant population; and the funding of the Department of Homeland Security to ensure its effectiveness in securing borders of the United States.

Issue: MILITARY COMMISSARIES

The Defense Commissary (DeCA) is an agency of the United States Department of Defense (DoD) that operates more than 245 commissaries worldwide. Commissary privileges help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve our country. Without commissary savings, pay compensation for active duty and military retirees would be less competitive with the civilian sector. Retired as well as drilling Reservists and National Guardsmen are now authorized to use the commissaries and their access should not be restricted.

Any effort to reduce or dismantle the integrity of the military commissary system would be seen as a serious breach of faith with a benefit system that currently serves as a mainstay for the active and reserve components, military retirees and military survivors, military personnel involuntarily discharged or released from active duty, and 100 percent service-connected disabled veterans and others.

- The American Legion urges the Department of Defense and Congress to continue full funding of the military commissary system and to retain this vital non-pay compensation benefit system which is essential to the morale and readiness of the dedicated men and women who have served, and continue to serve, the national security interests of the United States.
- The American Legion opposes any efforts to institute “variable pricing” or to privatize the military commissary system or to reduce discounts or to dismantle or downsize the Defense Commissary Agency.

Issue: DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE MILITARY RETIREMENT SYSTEM

The July 2011 Defense Business Board study recommended significant changes in the current military retirement system. Many of these same recommendations were made by the 1978 Presidential Commission on Military Compensation.

The 1978 report from the Congressional Budget Office addresses the significant risk to maintaining a viable volunteer force if dramatic changes to the current system are made.

In the attempt to slow the growth in military personnel costs, The Department of Defense 2013 Budget Request calls for the creation of an independent commission to study the military retirement system.

The Murray-Ryan Bill and the Bipartisan Budget Act 2013 were passed with the devastating cut to Military COLA included, though no input was received from the Department of Defense or the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC).

On February 12, 2014, under tremendous pressure from the military community, Congress overwhelmingly voted 95-3 to repeal the COLA cut for all military members who joined prior to January 1, 2014 and President Obama signed the repeal into law.

On January 29, 2015 the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission submitted to the President and the Congress of the United States the recommendations to modernize the Uniformed Services compensation and retirement system. Requirement for Implementation Plan: The Fiscal Year 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA FY2016) (Public Law 114-92), section 635, requires the Secretaries of the Uniformed Services to submit to the congressional defense committees the plans to implement a modernized retirement system effective January 1, 2018. This report is submitted by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) in fulfillment of the requirement on behalf of and with the full participation of the Uniformed Services.

On March 25, 2015, The American Legion gave testimony before the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Committee on Armed Services, United States House of Representatives which states, "The American Legion does not support this (MCRMC's Modifying the Military Retirement Plan) proposal; there are too many questions about the implementation and concerns about how service members would be affected; however given that approximately four out of five (81 percent) service members do not serve the full 20 years in the military, it is worth examining possible solutions and measures which could provide some retirement benefits to those service members who depart from military service before the '20 year cliff.'"

- Any changes to the existing military retirement system may violate contracts made with military retirees and currently serving military personnel, and would undermine morale and readiness.
- The American Legion opposes any changes to the current military retirement system which reduces the incentive for enlistment or re-enlistment.

Issue: OPPOSE TRICARE FEE INCREASES

The American Legion recognizes the debt owed to the entire military retirement community for their sacrifices and hardships endured in honorable military service to this nation. Administration and defense leaders are seeking to impose very large health care fee increases on military retirees and their families. The proposed fee increases are inappropriate and out of line with career servicemembers' unique sacrifices. Military medical and retirement benefits must be markedly better than civilian benefits because they are primary offsets for decades of extraordinarily arduous service conditions. Military retirees' careers entailed unique and arduous service conditions few other Americans are willing to endure for 20 or 30 years including hazardous duty, service in foreign countries, often in hostile environments, extended family separations, just to mention a few. The Pentagon's next budget is likely to contain instituting enrollment fees for TRICARE for Life. The current fiscal realities dictate certain financial concessions may have to be made by our citizens but to unfairly burden America's military retiree families any further is unconscionable.

- Those who point to the disparity in cost between civilian and military health insurance, and hint at unfairness, simply do not appreciate the huge premiums already paid by the selfless service and sacrifice of our servicemembers and their families.
- The American Legion sees this proposal as an erosion of quality of life earned benefits from a grateful nation for honorable military service.
- The American Legion is strongly opposed to proposed hikes in premiums and or enrollment fees being paid by enrollees in the military's health insurance program known as TRICARE.
- The American Legion urges Congress to decisively reject unjust proposed increases in the military retirees' TRICARE enrollment fees, deductibles, or premiums.

Issue: OPPOSE IRAN NUCLEAR DEAL

The American Legion views nuclear weapons development and proliferation a critical threat to national security. Allowing Iran to develop or acquire a nuclear weapon would destabilize the entire Middle East and pose an eminent threat to Israel. The Iran Nuclear Deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a non-binding executive agreement which was signed in Vienna on July 14, 2015 between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council: China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States, and Germany (also known as the P5+1) along with the European Union that allows Iran to retain its nuclear infrastructure.

- Under the JCPOA, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors will be faced with a stipulated 24-day notification and appeal period when requesting access to Iran's military facilities, undeclared sites or suspected sites—thereby possibly allowing Iran to hide, remove or transport nuclear-weapon materials and operations.
- Not all verification and monitoring mechanisms are defined in the JCPOA; important verification and monitoring mechanisms have been defined in agreements made solely between the IAEA and Iran separate and apart from the JCPOA and these same verification and monitoring agreements remain undisclosed to Congress or the Administration for review.
- Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iran were extinguished in 1980 and therefore U.S. citizens are prohibited from being on the IAEA inspection team in Iran.
- The JCPOA removes a United Nations embargo prohibiting conventional weapons exports to Iran in five years and ballistic missile technology in eight years; ending the conventional-weapons embargo would permit Russia to sell ballistic missiles to Iran which have the capability to reach Israel and overseas targets.
- By lifting U.S. and international sanctions in accordance with the JCPOA, an estimated \$100 billion dollars will be released to Iran which may be used to fund terrorism against Americans, American interests and allies.
- The American Legion urges Congress not to lift any sanctions in connection JCPOA until such agreement is amended by including all verification and monitoring mechanisms as well as including a provision stipulating unconditional access to every aspect of Iran's nuclear program—whether declared or undeclared—to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency and that these amendments are ultimately agreed to in a timely manner by Iran and the P5+1.
- The American Legion believes the United States of America should be prepared to exercise all options, up to and including military action, in the interest of preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.