



The Salute Extra



Monthly newsletter of the Portsmouth Area Chapter, an affiliate of the Military Officers Association of America, serving Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Suffolk, Smithfield and Franklin, Virginia, since 1983. Dinner meetings are held the Second Thursday of each month except July and August.

JULY EXTRA

thesalute1@gmail.com

pacmoaa.org

July 2014

EXTRA EDITION from the PRESIDENT

I hope you all are having a good summer. PACMOAA does not usually have a July edition of *The Salute* but we had a lot of information that needed to get out in a timely manner. Both the **July 1st 50th Vietnam War Anniversary Event** and the **13 July annual brunch** need an RSVP. The important articles box below will guide you to additional information in this issue.



Trooper Ken Wright and his wife, Simo-netta, along with their granddaughter, Chele', joined us for the June dinner meeting. Trooper Wright gave an impassioned presentation about the origin of the Buffalo Riders, the origin and history of the Buffalo Soldiers, and the events held by the Buffalo Riders to keep the history alive.

"Founded in 1997, our African-American equestrian team honors and keeps alive the contribution of the Buffalo Soldiers and the Black Cowboys of the Old West, Lest We Forget, Lest We Forget. There are a number of female riders on the team as well.

We are very community oriented in working with inner city youth in teaching them all aspects of horsemanship." from the Buffalo Riders website at www.buffaloriders.org.

"Buffalo Soldiers originally were members of the U.S. 10th Cavalry Regiment of the United States Army, formed on September 21, 1866 at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. This nickname was given to the "Negro Cavalry" by the Native American tribes they fought; the term eventually became synonymous with all of the African-American regiments formed in 1866: 9th Cavalry Unit, 10th Cavalry Unit, 24th Infantry Unit and 25th Infantry Unit." from Wikipedia.

IMPORTANT ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

Rep. Scott Rigell special invitation to event honoring Vietnam War 50th Anniversary !!!!	PG 2
July 13 Summer Brunch!!!!	PG 3
PACMOAA Scholarships	PG 4
MOAA JROTC awards and medals	PG 6
Reports on Congressional luncheon	PG 9
Tricare For Life prescription program!!!!	PG10
Letter from Norb Ryan, MOAA President	PG 6

Trooper Wright also discussed several different ideas of the origin of the name Buffalo Soldiers. One was that the Indians called them Buffalo Soldiers because from the distance they looked like buffalos with blankets over their heads and their skin and hair looked like the buffalos. Another version is that it was a term of respect for the fierce
(Continued on page 3) president



You're invited

to a special event honoring

The 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War

When: Tuesday, July 1st

Where: Virginia Beach Convention Center

1000 19th Street Virginia Beach, VA

Time: 4:00PM - 6:00PM Memorabilia Tables

6:00PM Program

Special Guest

Joe Galloway

Author, We Were Soldiers Once...and Young

Featuring

Fleet Forces Command Band

Please RSVP online at: <http://reprigellevts.eventbrite.com?s=24695063>

For more information please call Bre Kingsbury or Richard Post

Bre.Kingsbury@mail.house.gov or Richard.Post@mail.house.gov

(Continued from page 1) president

fighting ability of the 10th regiment. He also discussed the reasons for the Buffalo Soldiers formation - to make roadways in the west, to put up telegraph poles, and fight in the Indian Wars from 1866 to the early 1890's. It was stressed that they had the least amount of deserters of any group of soldiers. Cathey Williams, the 1st and only female Buffalo Soldier, who served from 1866-1868 was also discussed. Trooper Wright noted that the oldest Buffalo Soldier in our area lives in Chesapeake and is 94 years old. He served as a Buffalo Soldier from 1940 until 1944 when the use of horses for combat was discontinued and the Buffalo Soldiers were integrated in to the regular Army.

"The 24th Infantry Regiment saw combat during the Korean War and was the last segregated regiment to engage in combat. The 24th was deactivated in 1951, and its soldiers were integrated into other units in Korea. On December 12, 1951, the last Buffalo Soldier units, the 27th Cavalry and the 28th (Horse) Cavalry, were disbanded. The 28th Cavalry was inactivated at Assi-Okba, Algeria in April 1944 in North Africa, and marked the end of the regiment." from Wikipedia.

More information about the Buffalo Riders is available on their website at www.buffaloriders.org. They have an annual ride to honor the Buffalo Soldiers and the Black Cowboys of the Old West every February and this year was the 15th such event. I first saw the Buffalo Riders in the annual Memorial Day parade in which they participate each year. Trooper Wright mentioned that they will host an event in Franklin on 5 July at the Armory. This was a very interesting and thought provoking presentation and enjoyed by all.

It was also a pleasure to meet both scholarship recipients and their families. More information about them will follow on page 4. Please continue to donate to the scholarship fund to help fund future students going in to ROTC!! Remember our scholarship is different from

MOAA's. Their scholarship only goes to dependents while anyone going into a ROTC program in college is eligible for the PACMOAA scholarship. Your support of this year's scholarships is greatly appreciated and thank you in advance for continued support next year.

Take care, and I hope you all have a safe and happy summer and get to enjoy lots of time with family and friends. I look forward to seeing many of you at the brunch and the September meeting.[]

2014 SUMMER BRUNCH

The Portsmouth Chapter (PAC), the Hampton Roads Chapter (HRC), the Virginia Peninsula Chapter (VIP) of MOAA are hosting a brunch mixer at the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center on Sunday, the 13th of July 2014, from 1100 to 1400hrs. All members are cordially invited to attend. The hotel is located at 2800 Shore Drive in Virginia Beach (<http://www.virginiabeachresort.com/va-beach-resort.html>). Plenty of parking is available at the hotel with a closer entrance to the Tradewinds restaurant on the upper level of parking. The brunch menu can be found at <http://tradewindsrestaurant.com/sunday-brunch.html>.

Cost of the brunch will be \$27.00 each plus tax and gratuity, which will be billed individually by the hotel staff. Cash bar will be available. They will have a piano player as they did last year.

Reservations are required NLT Tuesday, 8 July 2014. Please call or email Sherry Ferki. Come on out and enjoy

(Continued on page 4) brunch

(Continued from page 3) brunch

the scenery, food and camaraderie among our chapter members and meet members from the other local chapters! Hope to see you there!

NOTE: This event was held at the Chamberlain in the past but was a great success at the Virginia Beach Resort Hotel and Conference Center last year.

2014 SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

The Scholarship Committee members (Sherry Ferki, Bob Parker, Lynn Terry and Bob Steorts) met and reviewed the applications for the PACMOAA scholarship. Both students selected have shown dedication and commitment to completing assigned tasks and great leadership abilities. Marissa and Harrison exemplify the characteristics that make great military officers.

PACMOAA wishes to extend congratulations to both of these graduates and best wishes for successful careers as Military Officers!

Marissa Jackson graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School in Portsmouth and will attend ROTC at Longwood University. Her short term goal is to graduate from Longwood with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Biology and to become a nurse in the Army with a long term goal of becoming a physician. Marissa also plans on becoming very involved in community activities after retirement and to open a clinic in her hometown of Hampton. Marissa has been very active in AJROTC (Army JROTC) and positions held include: Squad Leader in 2010, Platoon SGT in 2011, First SGT in 2012 and Battalion Commander in 2013 when she was responsible for 219 cadets. She also participated in the Drill Team and Color Guard. During her 4 years in AJROTC, Marissa received numerous medals and Certificates of Achievement and has vol-

unteered more than 378 volunteer hours with AJROTC. In addition to being very active in AJROTC, Marissa participated in Center of Excellence (Magnet Program), Student Council Association, Interact Club, and represented her school at the American Legion Auxiliary Virginia Girls State program. She also belonged to the National Junior Honor Society



and National Honor Society.

Marissa was also very involved in a variety of other school activities: running a mentoring program in a middle school from 2010 to 2014, Treasurer of the Center of Excellence Scholars in 2011, President and Recording Secretary for the Reuse Reduce and Recycle Club in 2012, Personal Secretary for a private school academy the summer of 2012 and Vice President of the Center of Excellence in 2012. While being very active in AJROTC and in school, as well as working about 30 hours per week, Marissa

(Continued on page 5) scholarships

(Continued from page 4) scholarships

still maintained an outstanding GPA while taking two difficult dual enrollment courses in her senior year for which she received both high school and college credits. It is always a pleasure to recognize and reward such a highly motivated and involved student.

Harrison Burkett graduated from Green-



briar Christian Academy in Chesapeake and will attend ROTC at Radford University. His short term goal is to graduate with a degree in Criminal Justice and then to follow his family's military legacy of service - his paternal grandfather served in 3 wars in the Army and Air Force, one paternal uncle was a career Army helicopter pilot, two maternal uncles had tours in the Army and Air Force, and his dad is an Air Force physician with 24 years of service. Harrison has shown great leadership skills in sports in his position as Captain of the varsity football team and varsity track teams, both indoor and outdoor. He participated in these

sports from 2010 to 2014. He has participated in community service activities each year such as being a Chesapeake Shelter Team member and participating in High School Service Days at the Community Park Clean up and Senior Center. Harrison has also been an usher at his church for 7 years.

I have had the distinct pleasure of knowing Harrison for over 6 years and my personal interactions have been truly outstanding. This young man has tremendous character and respect for those he encounters rarely seen in young men today. Harrison is a person of extremely high integrity, courage and commitment, which are vital assets in our military and nation. He always displays confidence and kindness as is demonstrated through his service in the doorkeeper (usher) ministry of our church.... Based on my 20+ years of military service, I find the qualities in Harrison to be beyond some of the senior personnel I have led and this is a true testament to his maturity and caring spirit. He has outstanding personal character and an unwavering dedication to being fair and doing what is right. He has demonstrated to me that he has the drive, determination, and ability to quickly grasp and master any challenge he encounters.

This excerpt came from a reference letter from Montini B. O'Neal, Lt Col, USAF (Ret.).

Marissa Jackson and her Mom, MaryLee Greene, were able to attend the dinner . Harrison Burkett attended along with his parents, Edwin and Lisa Burkett, as well as his brother, Alexander. It was a pleasure to meet both scholarship recipients and their families and to spend time with all of them.

Once again, congratulations to these most deserving graduates. Best wishes for much success in their college and their military careers.

ABOUT THE MOAA JROTC AWARD

Over the years PACMOAA has sponsored MOAA JROTC Awards in Portsmouth, Chesapeake and Suffolk. It is time for *The Salute* to provide the membership with more detailed information concerning the award and the qualities of the recipients.

The presentation of a MOAA JROTC award is an excellent way for chapters to gain exposure in the community and, at the same time, foster a positive military recognition among the youth of the community. Accordingly, it has always been the desire of MOAA National that the medals be awarded by the local chapter and not the national organization. All of the military services that sponsor senior or junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs (i.e., the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps) have officially approved the MOAA ROTC medal. No more than one award may be made each year in any JROTC unit. The recipient is selected by the unit commander. However, when an award is being sponsored by a local chapter, final approval rests with the chapter. The program is entirely voluntary; no MOAA chapter is under any obligation to award MOAA ROTC medals to ROTC and/or JROTC units in its locality.

GUIDELINES FOR MOAA JROTC MEDAL

1. **AWARD** - Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) ROTC medal.
2. **DESCRIPTION** - The award consists of a red, white and blue ribbon 1 3/8 inches in width with a bronze disc pendant 1 5/8 inches in diameter and a matching service ribbon (these items are in a presentation case), a certificate of presentation and certificate folder.
3. **PURPOSE** - The purpose of the MOAA ROTC medal is to recognize an outstanding ROTC cadet or midshipman or JROTC cadet in

his next-to-last year in the program, who shows exceptional potential for military leadership (exceptional academic achievement in the case of the Marine Corps JROTC Program). The medal may not be used for any other purpose.

4. **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA** - The cadet or midshipman must:

- a. Be in the next-to-last year of the JROTC program. (Customarily in his junior year)
- b. Be in good academic standing.
- c. Be of high moral character.
- d. Evince a high order of loyalty to his unit, school and country.
- e. Show exceptional potential for military leadership.

5. **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR THE MARINE CORPS JROTC PROGRAM**

Somewhat different eligibility criteria apply to the Marine Corps JROTC Program. In that program the cadet must:

- a. Be in the upper 10 percent of his high school class.
- b. Have an "A" average in MCJROTC academic subjects.
- c. Be holding a cadet officer billet.
- d. Be nominated in his junior year.[]



PACMOAA SPONSORED MOAA JROTC AWARDS FOR 2014

Program	Director	Presenter and Cadet
CHESAPEAKE HIGH SCHOOLS		
DEEP CREEK AFJROTC	COL William Etchison	COL Steve Turner USAF (Ret) Cadet Christian Carver
GREAT BRIDGE AFJROTC	MAJ Kevin Gore	COL Steve Turner USAF (Ret) Cadet Dylan Insel
INDIAN RIVER AFJROTC	COL Thomas Martin	COL Steve Turner USAF (Ret) Cadet Christopher Jukes
OSCAR SMITH AFJROTC	COL Mike Helsabeck	COL Steve Turner USAF (Ret) Cadet Dylan Corey
WESTERN BRANCH AFJROTC	COL Mike Kloski	COL Steve Turner USAF (Ret) Cadet Alexis Lupton
GRASSFIELD AFJROTC	LTC Gordon Strong	COL Steve Turner USAF (Ret) Cadet Charles Remig
PORTSMOUTH HIGH SCHOOLS		
CHURCHLAND MCJROTC	LTC Paul Pratt	CDR Peg Cicirelli USCG (Ret) Cadet Captain Nicholas Flanagan
I.C. NORCOM NJROTC	CWO2 Joseph Redwood	CWO3 Karl Wilson USA (Ret) and LCDR Dolly Cherrington USN (Ret) Cadet Ensign JaNia Smiley
WOODROW WIL- SON AJROTC	LTC Chailendreaia Dickins	MAJ Sherry Ferki USA (Ret) Cadet Marcella Barnes
SUFFOLK HIGH SCHOOLS		
LAKELAND AFJROTC	MAJ Dale Blake	MAJ Dale Blake Cadet Quashon Skinner
NANSEMOND RIVER AFJROTC	LTC Alvin Odom	N/A
KING'S FORK AFJROTC	LTC Alfred Harris	COL Hal Hostetler USA (Ret) and Cadet 1LT Martin Padilla
FRANKLIN AJROTC	LTC Linwood Wright	MAJ Sherry Ferki USA (Ret), CWO5 Joseph Bush USMC (Ret) and CAPT Bob Parker USN (Ret) Cadet CPL Jacob Tatum
SMITHFIELD AFJROTC	LTC Peter Badoiam	COL Steve Turner USAF (Ret) Cadet Cole Wooster

CHURCHLAND HIGH SCHOOL HONORS 16 MCJROTC CADETS

By CDR Margaret Cicirelli USCG (Ret)

On May 29, led by LtCol Paul Pratt and GySgt Larry Nash, 16 Cadets in the Marine Corps Junior ROTC (MCJROTC) program at Churchland High School received a total of 26 awards of recognition for accomplishments for their achievements while in the MCJROTC Program. Churchland's JROTC program is one of only two MCJROTC programs in the Hampton Roads area. It has been in existence for 45 years.



Cadet Captain Nicholas Flanagan led the Awards being received. Cadet Flanagan received the Officer Leadership Medal, the Military Officers' Association of America JROTC Medal, the Best Drill Cadet Award (Gold), and the Marine Corps Honor Graduate Award. (see photo above with Margaret Cicirelli)

Cadet Kevin Pacheco received the MCJROTC Outstanding Cadet Medal, the Sons of the American Revolution Medal, the Best Drill Ca-

det Award (Silver) and the JROTC Top Gun Award.

Cadet Christian Fish was awarded the American Legion Bronze Medal for Military Excellence while Cadet Christopher Justice received the American Legion Bronze Medal for Scholastic Excellence.

Cadet Tykeem Thomas received the Fleet Reserve Association Outstanding Cadet Award; Cadet Arlantarnesia William was presented with the Non-Commissioned Officer Leadership Medal.

Cadet Julian Prince garnered the Reserve Officers' Medal as well as the Iron Cadet Award and Cadet Rachel Hayes received the Scottish Rite JROTC Medal.

Cadet Kieonte Daughtry received the National Sojourner's Medal as well as Best Overall First Year Male Cadet Award; Cadet Tyler Sipos was awarded the American Veterans Medal and the Best Drill Cadet Award (Bronze); Cadet Avery Harrell was presented with the Military Order of the World Wars Bronze Medal and recognized as the Best Overall First Year Cadet/Female.

Cadet Asia Jones received the Woman Marine Association Ribbon, while Cadet Lavell Everett received the Daughters of the American Revolution Medal, Cadet Nicholas Steimling, the Daedalian JROTC Achievement Award; Cadet Troy Agayan the Veterans of Foreign Wars JROTC Medal and Cadet Antony Sanders the Military Order of the Purple Heart.

The above achievements were for leadership, citizenship, scholastic achievements, dependability and good character, plus many more virtues needed today and in the future.

In addition to the awardees, six cadets were recognized as joining two active duty Armed Forces after graduation. Cadets Troy Agayan and Jacob Moreno will join the United States Army while Cadets Nicholas Flanagan, Bobby Houck, Kevin Pacheco and Neshia Williams will proudly don the uniform of the United States Marine Corps. []

VCOC HOSTS 29TH ANNUAL CONGRESSIONAL EVENT

Washington DC - May 20th 2014: Eighteen regional chapters and the State Council representing over 4000 active and retired military officers in Virginia held a Congressional Appreciation Luncheon in the Russell Senate Office Building. Besides exchanging information on items of current interest, the primary purpose of the event was to honor the thirteen members of the Virginia Congressional delegation for their efforts and continued loyal support of the U.S. Military Community and the Armed Forces: active duty, reserves, National Guard, retirees, veterans, surviving spouses and family members

Speakers at the event included Senator Mark Warner as well as Congressmen Randy Forbes, Bobby Scott, Gerry Connally, Rob Wittman, Scott Rigell, Eric Cantor, Bob Goodlatte and Frank Wolf who was also singled out for an "Outstanding Legislator Award". Also honored at the event was retired Vice Admiral Norb Ryan, MOAA President, who was presented



MOAA President, VADM Norb Ryan Jr., USN (Ret), addressing the VCOC Congressional lunch.

with a "Minuteman Award", recognizing his efforts over the past year to further the various issues and initiatives that MOAA has advocated on behalf of all servicemembers.

Virginia Council President, retired Army Colonel Victoria Revilla, characterized the event as a "100% success" adding that "we owe a debt of gratitude to our esteemed Virginia legislators. Regardless of party affiliation, they have demonstrated a strong conviction that support for our servicemembers is high priority."

Colonel Steve Turner USAF (Ret)
1st Vice President VCOC

VCOC CONGRESSIONAL LUNCHEON
by COL Hal Hostetler USA (Ret)
PACMOAA Legislative Rep.

Shirley Barker, Karl Wilson, Steve Turner, and I left for Washington, DC at 0530 hrs. We picked-up Alice Taves in Vienna, VA on the way to join other VCOC chapter representatives at the Russell Senate Building near the



(FRONT ROW left to right) Alice Taves, Shirley Barker, Dolly Cherrington David, Dailey and Hal Hostetler.
(BACK ROW left to right) Steve Turner and Karl Wilson

Capitol. We were met there by Dolly Cherrington who had traveled the day before.

We heard remarks from seven of Virginia's eleven Congressional Representatives along with Senator Warner. All of them touched on the Veterans Administration (V.A.) debacle. Congressmen Wittman, Rigell, Forbes, Goodlatte, Cantor, Conally, Wolf, and Scott were included.

(Continued from page 9) Congressional lunch



Hal Hostetler again had the honor of introducing Congressman Bobby Scott.

Representative Scott and his aide, David Dailley, joined us for lunch at our table. Besides the V.A. issue, other subjects included veteran hiring, anti-Christian movements in Nigeria and elsewhere, the national debt, strengthening defense, the threat to commissaries, and entitlement reform.



Karl Wilson discussing current events with an unidentified VCOC representative.



Rep. Frank Wolf was recognized as our most outstanding legislative supporter of the year. He is a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Virginia's 10th district.

Overall it was a great 13 hour day, as we arrived home about 1830 hrs. We had enjoyed a Cracker Barrel breakfast north of Richmond on the way up and a short McDonald's break coming home. Check with any of the team for their personal observations. Plan to join us next year.[]

TRICARE FOR LIFE BENEFICIARIES & THE MAIL ORDER PHARMACY PROGRAM !

The new mail-order pharmacy pilot program requires TFL beneficiaries living in the U.S. to fill select maintenance medications through the TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery OR a military Medical Treatment Facility (MTF) pharmacy. Be on notice, if one of your medications is covered by the program and you have NOT switched to Home Delivery or a military pharmacy after TWO refills, you will be responsible for 100% of the drug cost, if you continue to receive your prescription from a retail pharmacy. This mandate applies only to a group of brand name maintenance medications; those you always take on a regular basis.

Generic medications are exempt from the mail order requirement, but can be filled this way for free. The mail-order pharmacy delivery lowers costs for both beneficiaries and DoD. A 90-day refill of generic medication is free through the mail-order pharmacy, but costs \$5 per 30 day refill at a retail drug store. For brand name medications the cost is \$13 for a 90 day refill through mail-order versus \$17 for a 30 day refill at a retail store. You also will not have to wait at the no cost MTF pharmacy.

To transfer your medication from a retail pharmacy to mail-order Home Delivery system or have questions concerning the status of your prescriptions call 1-877-882-3335. You may want to switch and manage on-line, but it is highly recommended that you establish your on-line account using this same number.

Once you have established an account your doctor can fax your prescriptions to 1-877-895-1900. Yet another win-win.

May 12, 2014

Q: How long does it take to set up an account with the mail-order system?

A: You should allow two to three weeks between registering for mail-order and the first delivery of medication.

Q: How can I use the mail-order pharmacy if I need medication right away?

A: The initial prescription fill can be made through a military or retail pharmacy. The mail-order system is only for refills. Emergency or temporary medications such as pain relievers, antibiotics, etc. would still be filled in retail or military pharmacies.

Q. How would I start using the mail-order system?

A. You start by registering with the system. That can be done on-line, but many prefer to talk to a real person by phone at 1-877-363-1303. You'll need a 90-day prescription from your doctor, vs. the 30-day prescription normally provided through retail stores. If you already have a 30-day supply of medication, you can mail or fax the 90-day prescription to Express Scripts, or the Express Scripts agent can help you have an existing 90-day prescription transferred to the mail-order system. If it's a new prescription you've never used before, take the 90-day prescription to the retail or military pharmacy and ask for a 30-day supply, then call the mail-order agent to have the prescription transferred to the mail-order system so you'll receive your first delivery in a couple of weeks.

Q: What happens when I use up the refills?

A: The mail-order system provides you a reminder when it's time to order a refill (by email if you signed up online) or when a prescription will expire. At your request, the mail-order agent will contact your doctor to get the prescription renewed.

Q. What happens if my medication gets

lost in the mail or otherwise doesn't arrive before my existing supply is about to run out?

A. If you are low or out of your medication and need immediate assistance, contact Express Scripts Customer Service at (877) 363-1303. Express Scripts can issue an override that will allow you to pick up your prescription at the retail pharmacy or send you a replacement order.

Q. I get my prescriptions from a military hospital or clinic pharmacy. Will we have to sign up for mail-order refills and stop going to the base?

A. No. You can still get refills through military pharmacies if you choose. The restriction on maintenance medication refills for Medicare-eligibles only applies to retail pharmacies, not military pharmacies.

Q. Some nursing homes do not accept mail-order pharmacy refills. How will I get my prescription?

A. Nursing homes are exempt from the mail-order requirement.

Q. My prescription cannot be filled through the mail (i.e. narcotics). Will I still be able to fill my medication at a retail location?

A. Yes. Exemptions will be granted for certain drugs and on a case by case basis.

Q. I live in a location in which temperatures routinely climb over 100 degrees. Won't drugs lose their potency if they ride around in a hot mail truck all day or sit on a porch or in a mailbox?

A. Express Scripts officials say the temperature issue is mainly a longer-term storage concern. Sitting in a delivery vehicle or mailbox at higher temperatures won't cause a loss of potency for most drugs. The ones for which that could be an issue are mailed in special temperature-controlled packaging and closely tracked to delivery.[]

A LETTER FROM MOAA PRESIDENT

Dear members and friends of the military community,

In recent days, we've seen a barrage of information (and misinformation, in many cases) about how national health reform legislation might affect currently serving and retired servicemembers and their families.

Now that President Obama has signed the initial legislation into law, I want to lay out for you what we know.

The biggest question on our members' minds has been: "How will passage of national health reform legislation affect me?" For members under age 65, based on what we know so far, the answer appears to be, "Not much, if at all."

There are some changes to Medicare, but it remains to be seen what the real impact of those may be over time. The most significant of them is likely to be some reduction of availability of Medicare Advantage HMOs.

In the meantime, MOAA has prepared answers to the most-frequently asked questions that we hope you'll find useful.

Unfortunately, there already are messages flying around the internet to the effect that "I heard this will end TRICARE" or "This will force military people to buy other coverage." That's simply not true. If you get such messages, please help educate the senders with MOAA's answers.

As MOAA has said from the beginning, everyone we've talked to in the Administration or the House or the Senate, of either political party, supports protecting military and VA beneficiaries from adverse effects associated with national health reform.

Just to be sure, MOAA and loyal members like you generated more than 100,000 messages to Congress urging protection of the unique military and VA health benefits and protection against any taxation of those benefits. And your voices were heard.

In as clear an indication of that as anyone could ask for, the House unanimously passed separate legislation explicitly citing TRICARE as "qualifying health coverage" for purposes of the new law. The Senate is working now to pass the same legislation. VA care and TRICARE For Life already were explicitly designated in law. That means eligible beneficiaries of those programs won't be subject to financial penalties that can be imposed on people who don't have qualifying insurance.

That said, let's be clear on another key issue.

Can anyone guarantee that there will never be any unfavorable changes to military and VA programs? No.

Do we know for sure how all the details will play out? No.

There's always a potential for unintended consequences, and there's always the potential for new initiatives to arise (see below). But if you were worried that national health reform legislation is somehow aimed at whacking military beneficiaries' health coverage, that's just not so.

Frankly, we think the much more significant issue for Medicare – and for the military community and the rest of America -- is what proposed changes will be recommended by the new National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform that's supposed to report by Dec. 1 on options to reduce the national debt.

You have my personal pledge that MOAA will continue to be vigilant as implementation of national health reform proceeds – and as the new debt commission proposals become known – and your association will continue to do everything in our power to protect your interests and your service-earned health benefits.

All the best,

VADM Norb Ryan Jr., USN (Ret)
MOAA President

THAT'S A WRAP FOR JULY