



August 20, 2007

### VA Announces Health Care Center in Harlingen

#### *95 Percent of Drives to San Antonio Eliminated*

WASHINGTON – A new Health Care Center in Harlingen announced today by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will vastly improve care to Valley veterans in South Texas, eliminating the vast majority of trips required by veterans to VA medical facilities in San Antonio. The plans will provide a new VA health care center on the campus of the University of Texas in Harlingen.

The announcement, which came after an independent study on the future needs of Valley veterans requested by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, included plans to expand services by VA health care facilities in McAllen and Corpus Christi.

“Once completed, the new health care center in Harlingen will eliminate about 95 percent of the trips our veterans currently have to make to San Antonio for medical services,” said Bill Feeley, VA’s Deputy Under Secretary of Health for Operations and Management. “This plan will allow us to start providing specialty services to Valley area veterans this year, with even more expansion of services next year.”

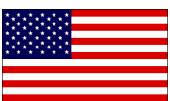
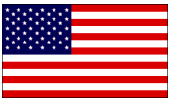
The plans call for increasing the current VA health facility space in Harlingen from 11,700 square feet to nearly 160,000 square feet by 2010. The expansion will begin immediately, with space tripling VA’s current space in Harlingen from 11,700 square feet to nearly 35,000 square feet by December 2007, and then to nearly 56,000 square feet by December 2008.

When the facility is completed, it will provide a full range of expanded services in collaboration with the University of Texas Regional Academic Health Center, including:

Specialty and diagnostic services, such as pharmacy, digital x-rays, CT scans, MRIs and other services; and

Outpatient surgeries, such as cataract removals, diagnostic colonoscopies and prostate biopsies, supported by outpatient operating rooms.

To obtain a copy of the independent study of the health care needs of Valley veterans, please go to this Internet address: <http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/docs/stv-cbm.pdf>



Click on Icon to activate branch of service

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THE 4TH WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH 2007 FOR THE NEXT SCHEDULED MSC MEETING 2:00PM @ THE CAMP MABRY MUSEUM, AUSTIN, TX**

**TRICARE UNIFORM FORMULARY UPDATE**

The Tricare Management Activity announced the following changes to the Uniform Formulary:

- Nexium, which is used to treat heartburn and gastric disorders, has been reclassified as a first-tier medication. First-tier medications (formulary generics) are available at most military treatment facilities at no charge, or for a \$3 co-pay through the Tricare Retail Pharmacy (30-day supply) or the Tricare Mail Order Pharmacy (90-day supply).
- Prevacid, Zegerid, Protonix and Aciphex, are also used to treat gastric disorders and will be reclassified as non-formulary medications effective 24 OCT 07.
- Avodart, a medication used to treat prostate-related problems will move to the third tier on 24 OCT.
- Hypertension drugs Avapro, Avilide, Benicar, Benicar HCT, Diovan, Diovan HCT, Teveten, and Teveten HCT along with cholesterol-lowering medications Anatasta, Tricor, Omacor, and WelChol will be reclassified as non-formulary medications on 21 NOV. The price of non-formulary medications is \$22.

Beneficiaries using the above medications may want to consult with their health care providers about other options including generic equivalents or establishing medical necessity for the third-tier medication if appropriate. If medical necessity is established, the co-payment is reduced to \$9. Third-tier medications are not available at military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacies unless an MTF provider establishes medical necessity and writes the prescription. Medical necessity forms and criteria are available at

[www.tricare.mil/pharmacy/medical-nonformulary.cfm](http://www.tricare.mil/pharmacy/medical-nonformulary.cfm). For a complete list of medications, their formulary status and where they are available, beneficiaries may refer to

[www.tricareformularysearch.org/dod/medicationcenter/default.aspx](http://www.tricareformularysearch.org/dod/medicationcenter/default.aspx). Additional information on the TRICARE Retail Pharmacy and locations, and the TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy can be found at [www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE](http://www.express-scripts.com/TRICARE) or by calling 1(866) 363-8779 for the retail pharmacy or 1(866)363-8667 for the mail order pharmacy. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 10 Aug 07 ++]

**MILITARY SERVICE COALITION  
MINUTES JULY 25,2007**

Meeting opened with people introducing themselves to the rest of the group.  
 Treasurer's Report: Dale Lyon gave report, \$467. Balance. Please spread the word to send in dues. With the newsletter expenses the money goes fast. Treasurer's report approved.  
 Minutes approved for May and June.  
 Veteran's Affairs: Olie Pope not present.  
 VA Outpatient Clinic: Mr. Tremaine not present.  
 Retired Affairs: Don Hobart not present.  
 Legislative Issues: John Miterko flooded in and not present.  
 Landboard: Jim Mickler spoke about the work John Miterko is doing and legislative issues and said many positive statements about the legislation. Bob Larson agreed and acknowledged Dana Priest as supporting veterans.  
 Reserve and National Guard Affairs: Eva Carwile, Elizabeth Sutter not present.  
 Public Affairs: Tina Schroer discussed retreat Wounded Warriors. Aug 1<sup>st</sup> the retreat will be in Waco area. She passed out flyers for this event. Fort Hood is sponsoring this event. She also passed out VA Advanced Directive Living Will and Durable Power of Attorney for health Care. This is important to have ready in advance just in case veteran or any family member is not able to make decisions. This is good anywhere and she was asked if civilians can use this, Tina said she would check and get back to the coalition with an answer.  
 Dependents and Survivors: June Bell not present.  
 Tricare: Gay Powers talked about the Tricare Reservist Select helping veterans set up what they need. Those coming off active duty need this benefit. She brought up that many of the reservist don't have insurance with their civilian jobs so this is an excellent benefit is especially good even for those not activated. This new program will be activated October 1<sup>st</sup>. The new program is much less complicated.

**Minutes Continued**

President Bob Larson thanked Ms. Powers and said Tricare is working for him and his wife. Ms. Powers said a lot of money could be saved if people would use mail order system for their medication.  
 Landboard Jim Mickler passed out flyer for Free Benefit Fair Saturday Aug 25,2007.  
 A discussion about Nursing Homes came up when Dale Lyon asked about information on this for a friend. A suggestion was made that people take a tour of these facilities to see for themselves.  
 The VA is planning on new nursing homes in Tyler and Houston. Land has been donated in Kerrville and Buda, but these will be considered in the future.  
 Jim Mickler asked everyone to encourage reservists and guardsmen to come to the fair for advice and help. The deployment in this war has particularly hurt reservists and guards. He pointed out that loans made thru the landboard stop interest payments while the soldier is deployed. They just pay the principle during deployment.  
 Pat Riley discussed Vietnam Memorial. He brought a small example of models that will be sold for \$750 to raise money for the memorial. There will only be 1,000 of these made. The artist will confer with Vietnam Vets to make sure it is true and real. Dale Lyon asked where the memorial would be located, answer on Capital grounds. January 31<sup>st</sup> 2008 the ground breaking will happen and it should be completed in 2 years. Texas Association of Vietnam Veterans will be doing fundraising for this memorial.  
 Olie Pope brought up the dedication of the WWII memorial on Aug 15,2007 on the capital grounds near the east entrance. He also announced the funeral for young soldier killed in Iraq will be held tomorrow.  
 Discussion on identity theft and how quick it can happen.  
 Handout was given on information about protecting ones self from this crime.  
 Meeting adjourned 3:13 pm.

## U.S. Military Deaths in Iraq at 3,707

By The Associated Press 08.20.07, 9:20 PM ET  
As of Monday, Aug. 20, 2007, at least 3,707 members of the U.S. military have died since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. The figure includes seven military civilians. At least 3,049 died as a result of hostile action, according to the military's numbers. The AP count is six higher than the Defense Department's tally, last updated Monday at 10 a.m. EDT.

The British military has reported 168 deaths; Italy, 33; Ukraine, 18; Poland, 21; Bulgaria, 13; Spain, 11; Denmark, seven; El Salvador, five; Slovakia, four; Latvia, three; Estonia, Netherlands, Thailand, two each; and Australia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Romania, South Korea, one death each.

The latest deaths reported by the military:  
\_ No deaths reported.

The latest identifications reported by the military:

- \_ Army Sgt. Princess C. Samuels, 22, Mitchellville, Md.; died Wednesday in Taji from indirect enemy fire; assigned to the Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas.
- \_ Army Spc. Zandra T. Walker, 28, Greenville, S.C.; died Wednesday in Taji from indirect enemy fire; assigned to the 4th Battalion, 227th Aviation Regiment, 1st Aviation Cavalry Brigade, 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas.
- \_ Army Staff Sgt. Paul B. Norris, 30, Cullman, Ala.; died Thursday of non-combat causes in Balad; assigned to the 401st Military Police Company, 720th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas.
- \_ Army Spc. Kamisha J. Block, 20, Vidor, Texas; died Thursday of non-combat causes in Baghdad; assigned to the 401st Military Police Company, 720th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas.
- \_ Army 1st Lt. Jonathan W. Edds, 24, White Pigeon, Mich.; died Friday in Baghdad of wounds from an explosive and small-arms fire; assigned to the 2nd Battalion, 69th Armor Regiment, 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Fort Benning, Ga.

Army Capt. Michael S. Fielder, 35, Holly Springs, N.C.; died Sunday in Baghdad of non-combat causes; assigned to the 248th Medical Detachment, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 44th Medical Command, XVIII Airborne Corps, Fort Bragg, N.C.

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## U.S. SOVEREIGNTY UNDER SEIGE

### PREMEDITATED MERGER

Secrecy reigns as SPP agenda moves forward  
Leaders of 3 North American nations discuss integration plans

**August 21, 2007**

**By Jerome R. Corsi**

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MONTEBELLO, Quebec – For a meeting about a secretive partnership among the heads of state of the United States, Canada and Mexico who have been reluctant to share with the public the details of the plan, the seclusion of Montebello, Quebec, is ideally situated. The Fairmont Le Chateau resort, where U.S. President George W. Bush, Mexico's President Felipe Calderon, and Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper are meeting to discuss the Security and Prosperity Partnership, is literally in the middle of the rural Quebec woods. At 4:30 a.m. today, SPP security workers began shuttling journalists by bus from Ottawa on the hour-long trek in the dark through the Canadian countryside.

The resort itself has been surrounded by a double security fence – chain link on the outside perimeter and what appears to be a thick-mesh wire barrier dotted with live security cameras. Within the compound, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police are clearly in command, and busloads of heavily armed Sûreté du Québec, the provincial police, have been dispatched throughout the compound. Military presence, both U.S. and Canadian, also is evident, although low-key. When Bush arrived yesterday, Harper greeted him by commenting on his Secret Service detail, noting in the live feed over an open mike, that, "You really travel with a small army, don't you." Bush, looking strained, laughed and responded that the setting for the meeting was beautiful.

Even within the compound, the press is limited to a specified area, with no apparent access to the SPP working group meetings, except for an occasional photo op with the three national leaders. Today's agenda began with a closed-door meeting the three leaders held with the North American Competitiveness Council, the 30 multi-national North American companies selected by the Chambers of Commerce in each respective state to advise the SPP working groups how to follow their business agenda.

The U.S. Department of Commerce has set up the NACC to serve as the chief policy adviser to the 20 SPP trilateral working groups that have been "integrating" and "harmonizing" North American administrative laws and regulations across a wide spectrum of public policy issues. Press photographers were allowed in the room as the session began, to take the customary photos for worldwide distribution.

For full story:

[http://worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=57255](http://worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=57255)

## Remains may be those of airman

By Sam Quinones

August 21, 2007

A hiker preparing a book on an ill-fated World War II-era plane that crashed in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park found the remains of a man believed to be a crew member on that flight, authorities said Monday. The remains were found Wednesday, 150 feet from those of another airman, discovered inside a Sierra Nevada glacier in 2005, said Fresno County Coroner David Hadden.

The hiker "was there to look for evidence in the glacier of the crash," Hadden said. Last winter's light snowfall and the warmer than normal weather melted the ice around the remains, making them more visible. "It looks like his head was just resting on the rock," said Debbie Brenchley, the first Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park ranger on the scene Friday after the body was found. "You can see he has a wool sweater on and a white collar and a ring on." The remains were being taken to the Fresno County morgue Monday.

Haddon said his office was awaiting the arrival of an anthropologist from the U.S. Joint POW/MIA Acting Command in Hawaii. Then, he said, "we'll be doing a thorough examination" to determine the body's identity. On Nov. 18, 1942, an AT-7 navigational plane took off from an Army air base in Sacramento on a training flight. It was caught in a blizzard and disappeared. Five years after the crash, a hiker on 13,710-foot Mt. Mendel found wreckage and clothing from the flight.

Four airmen were killed: Cadet Leo Mustonen, 22, of Brainerd, Minn.; Cadet Ernest Munn, 23, of St. Clairsville, Ohio; Cadet John Mortenson, 25, of Moscow, Idaho; and 2nd Lt. William Gamber, 23, of Fayette, Ohio. In October 2005, Mustonen's ice-covered remains were found on Mt. Mendel.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/printedition/california/la-me-airman21aug21.1.1948015.story?coll=la-headlines-pe-california&ctrack=1&cset=true>

## Letter sent concerning dependents for VA claims

Subject: VA needs to change dependency rule

I have contacted my Congressman in reference to the fact that a grandchild can be considered a dependent under IRS and SS rules but not under VA rules. It is a fact that grandparents are raising their grandchildren more often. Even if a grandparent has guardianship or a court ordered Conservatory managership VA will not allow that child(ren) to be recognized as a dependent. They insist the child must be legally adopted.....that is expensive. Most grandparents that I know hope that the child's parents will take responsibility at some point so they avoid the finality of adoption. By changing this not only will the grandparents have a little more income to help in the raising of the child but some children would be eligible for educational and health benefits. If you agree this should change and be in line with the other federal agencies please contact your congressman.

## Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2007

The Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2007 would allow the receipt of both military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation with respect to any service-connected disability (currently, only a disability rated at 50 percent or more). The proposed legislation (S. 439 and H.R. 303) would make individuals who were retired or separated from military service due to a service-connected disability eligible for the full concurrent receipt of both veterans' disability compensation and either military retired pay or combat-related special pay.

<http://capwiz.com/military/issues/bills/?bill=10192011>

## NEW STATE LAW HELPS FOR DISABLED VETERANS

The newly renamed Texas Facilities Commission (formerly The Texas Building and Procurement Commission) along with the Comptroller will help oversee the implementation of a new state law. It's designed to give preference to disabled veterans whenever the state purchases goods and certain agricultural products.

SECTION 3.11. Sections 2155.444(a), (c), and (e), Government Code, are amended to read as follows:

- (a) The commission and all state agencies making purchases of goods, including agricultural products, shall give preference to those produced or grown in this state or offered by Texas bidders as follows:
- (1) goods produced or offered by a Texas bidder that is owned by a service-disabled veteran who is a Texas resident shall be given a first preference and goods produced in this state or offered by other Texas bidders shall [equally] be given second preference, if the cost to the state and quality are equal; and
  - (2) agricultural products grown in this state shall be given first preference and agricultural products offered by Texas bidders shall be given second preference, if the cost to the state and quality are equal.
- (c) In this section:
- (1) "Agricultural products" includes textiles and other similar products.
  - (1-a) "Service-disabled veteran" means a person who is a veteran as defined by 38 U.S.C. Section 101(2) and who has a service-connected disability as defined by 38 U.S.C. Section 101(16).(2) "Texas bidder" means a business:
    - (A) incorporated in this state;
    - (B) that has its principal place of business in this state; or
    - (C) that has an established physical presence in this state.
  - (e) The commission and all state agencies procuring services shall give first preference to services offered by a Texas bidder that is owned by a service-disabled veteran who is a Texas resident and shall give second preference to services offered by other Texas bidders if:
    - (1) the services meet state requirements regarding the service to be performed and expected quality; and
    - (2) the cost of the service does not exceed the cost of other similar services of similar expected quality that are [not] offered by a [Texas] bidder that is not entitled to a preference under this subsection.

## SBP BASICS UPDATE

When a military retiree dies their retirement pay stops. This means that the surviving spouse will be left without a substantial income source. If you are considering retirement you need to give serious thought to how you can protect your spouse from the hardships caused by the loss your retirement pay. One option available to you is the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). This is an insurance plan that will pay your surviving spouse a monthly payment (taxable annuity) to help make up for the loss of your retirement income. The plan is designed to protect your survivors against the risks of your early death; your survivor outliving the benefits; and inflation. At retirement, full basic SBP for spouse and children will take effect automatically if you make no other valid election. You may not reduce or decline spouse coverage without your spouse's written consent. This means you will have to have your spouses input in the decision and his or her signature is required. If you are divorced or not married than any future spouse can be signed up within one year of the marriage.

If you do not decline SBP you will be required to pay a monthly premium. If a marriage ends, the SBP premium payments are stopped when the retiree notifies DFAS. Premiums and benefits are based on the base amount or benefit level that you elect. Your base amount can be any amount from full coverage down to as little as \$300 a month. Full coverage is based on your full retired pay meaning your spouse will receive 55% of your retirement pay. If you select lesser coverage then your spouse will receive 55% of your elected base amount. A surviving spouse's SBP annuity is reduced when they reach age 62 and become eligible for Social Security. This is called the Social Security offset. In the past the offset reduced the SBP annuity to 35% of the base amount. Fortunately the NDAA of 2005 established a phase out of the offset. This will increase the SBP offset percentage from the present 50 to 55% effective 1 APR 08. Categories of coverage are:

- Spouse Only: Eligibility for this requires that a surviving spouse be a widow or widower who was married to a retiree at the time of his or her enrollment; or, if not married at the time of enrollment, was married to the deceased retiree for at least one year prior to the retiree's death; or, if not married at time of enrollment and was not married to the deceased retiree for at least one year prior to death, was the parent of issue by that marriage. Spouse coverage applies not only to the spouse a member has at time of enrollment, but also automatically to any subsequent spouse the member might acquire, unless the member elects to decline coverage for a subsequent spouse within one year of the date of marriage (concurrence of the subsequent spouse is not required, but that spouse will be notified of the member's declination).
- Spouse (or Former Spouse) and Child: SBP protection is expanded to cover an eligible child or children if there is no surviving spouse, or if a surviving spouse subsequently dies or becomes ineligible to receive benefits due to remarriage before the age of 55. Thus, if there is a divorce or if the spouse dies before the retiree, the full annuity will be paid to the eligible surviving child or children in the same manner as if the member had elected Child Only coverage.
- Child Only: This option provides an annuity only for dependent children regardless of whether a member is married or not at time of enrollment (although a married member's spouse must concur with a child only election). Children remain beneficiaries until age 18 or age 22 if a full-time, unmarried student. Children mentally or physically incapable of self-support remain eligible, while unmarried, for as long as the incapacitation exists. A member with no dependent children at time of eligibility to elect coverage may elect coverage for a child subsequently acquired, but the child must be added within one year of being acquired (born, adopted, etc.).
- Former Spouse: A member who has a former spouse upon becoming eligible to elect a survivor annuity may elect coverage for a former spouse. If the member has more than one former spouse, the member must specify which former spouse is being covered. An election for a former spouse prevents payment of an annuity to a current spouse. A former spouse who was not a member's former spouse on the date a member became eligible to participate in SBP must have been married to the member for at least one year in order to be named as a former spouse beneficiary.
- Insurable Interest: A member who does not have a spouse or dependent child when eligible to make a program election may elect to provide coverage for a person with an insurable interest in the member (such as, a business partner or parent). DoD defines an insurable interest as a natural person who has a reasonable and lawful expectation of financial benefit from the continued life of the participating member, or any individual having a reasonable and lawful basis, founded upon the relation of parties to each other, either financial or of blood or affinity, to expect some benefit or advantage from the continuance of the life of the retired member. If the election is for a person who is more nearly related than a cousin, no proof of financial expectation is required. An election for insurable interest coverage, for other than a dependent made by a member retiring on or after 24 NOV 03 under a military disability provision, who dies within one year after being retired due to a cause related to the disability for which retired, shall be voided and any premiums paid for that coverage will be paid to the person to whom the annuity would have been paid.

Like your retirement pay the SBP annuity is protected from inflation. Each year when retired pay gets a COLA, so does the base amount, and as a result, so do premiums and annuity payments. Meaning that your premiums and annuity payments will increase with the COLA. These increases are determined by the previous year's Consumer Price Index and averages approximately 2.5%. For specific costs on your election refer to <http://www.military.com/benefits/survivor-benefits/coverage-cost-and-benefits>. NOTE: Survivors should report retiree deaths to the DFAS casualty office at 1(800) 269-5170. Faxes can be sent to the office at 1(800) 469-6559. [Source: NCPOA Don Harribine 2 Aug 07 ++]

**TRICARE PRIME TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT:** Tricare Prime beneficiaries referred by their primary care manager for specialty services at a location more than 100 miles from their provider's location may be eligible to have their reasonable travel expenses reimbursed by Tricare. Beneficiaries must have a valid referral and travel orders prior to traveling, and file a travel claim upon their return. This can be requested at the military treatment facility (MTF) or from the Tricare Regional Offices (TRO) if the doctor is a Tricare network provider. Beneficiaries will receive a briefing on the entitlement process, coverage, and their responsibilities at the MTF or from the TRO point of contact. Reasonable travel expenses are the actual costs incurred by the beneficiary when traveling to their specialty provider. Costs include meals, gas, tolls, parking, and tickets for public transportation (i.e., airplane, train, bus, etc.). Beneficiaries must submit receipts for expenses above \$75. The MTF or TRO will provide the beneficiary with specific instructions on how and where to submit his or her travel entitlement claim. Government rates are used to estimate the reasonable cost. Beneficiaries are expected to use the least costly mode of transportation. Costs of lodging and meals may be reimbursed up to the government per diem rate. This benefit does not apply to travel expense for specialty care experienced by active duty uniformed service members, or active duty family members residing with their sponsors overseas, which are reimbursed by other travel entitlements. For more information on the Tricare Prime Travel Reimbursement, refer to [www.tricare.mil/factsheets](http://www.tricare.mil/factsheets). [Source: Tricare News Release 8 Aug 07]

**TRICARE PROVIDER TAX CREDIT:** The leadership of the state of Oregon took a giant step forward in their unprecedented efforts to help Tricare beneficiaries receive the health care they deserve. A bill-signing ceremony was part of the fanfare surrounding the legislation, which features a tax incentive package that encourages health care providers to support military families by participating in Tricare, the health care plan for the uniformed services, retirees, and their families. The incentives include a one-time tax credit of \$2,500 for new providers in the Tricare system, plus an additional annual credit for treating patients enrolled in Tricare. It also creates a deduction from federal taxable income in the first two years of a provider's participation in the Tricare system. TriWest Healthcare Alliance, the managed care support contractor for the Tricare benefit in Oregon and 20 other western states, applauded the efforts of Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski and the Oregon legislature.

TriWest has been conducting a proactive campaign to enlist state governors in their service area to support active duty, retiree and Guard and Reserve families by encouraging physicians to accept patients with Tricare. With the encouragement and support of state leadership, the Oregon War Veterans Association and the Oregon Medical Association, TriWest Healthcare Alliance has increased the Tricare provider network in Oregon by 35% since the fall of 2004. There are currently more than 9,000 providers serving the 65,000 Tricare beneficiaries in Oregon. Maj. Gen. Elder Granger, Deputy Director, TMA said, "Increased availability of health care providers will become even more important as an improved Tricare Reserve Select (TRS) health care program launches this fall." TRS offers a premium-based health care plan to National Guard and Reserve members. Starting 1 OCT 07, all eligible members of the Selected Reserve will be able to purchase health care coverage under the new TRS and all will pay the same low monthly premium. The current TRS plan, which remains in effect through 30 SEP, has a complex three-tier system requiring activation in support of a contingency operation, among others, to qualify for the lowest monthly premiums. Members of the Selected Reserve can refer to [www.tricare.mil](http://www.tricare.mil) for more information on the improved TRS program. [Source: Tricare News Release 8 Aug 07]

**DEPLETED URANIUM UPDATE 04:** In the wake of an Iraqi official in blaming America's use of depleted uranium (DU) munitions in its 2003 "Shock and Awe" campaign for a surge in cancer there, the Defense Department is facing an OCT 07 deadline for providing a comprehensive report to Congress on the health effects of such weapons. The report is required by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007, which President Bush signed into law last year. The request for the study is an outgrowth of claims by Iraq war veterans that exposure to depleted uranium and other toxic substances there has negatively affected their health and that, therefore, their illnesses should be recognized as war-related and the treatment covered by the Veterans Administration. Currently, the State Department's Web site says fears about adverse health effects of DU, are "unwarranted," and it lists worries about DU under a section called "identifying misinformation." The site says the American military uses the material in ammunition to take advantage of its unsurpassed ability to penetrate armored vehicles, and it cites four separate studies -- by NATO, the Rand Corporation, the European Commission, and the World Health Organization -- that found no evidence of adverse health effects from depleted uranium.

Even so, worries persist. According to Rep. Jim McDermott [D-WA 07] who pushed for the report from the Pentagon, "There are countless stories of mysterious illnesses, higher rates of serious illnesses, and even birth defects. We do not know what role, if any, DU plays in the medical tragedies in Iraq, but we must find out." In contrast to soldiers who have lost limbs to explosive devices in Iraq, who qualify for Traumatic Servicemembers Group Life Insurance injury benefits of up to \$100,000, veterans with unexplained cancers don't get benefits because cancer is a disease and not a war wound. On 23 JUL 07, Iraq's environment minister blamed at least 350 sites in Iraq being contaminated during bombing with depleted uranium weapons for about 140,000 cases of cancer there and for between 7,000 and 8,000 new cases each year. A U.N. Environment Program report states that depleted uranium poses little threat if spent munitions are cleared from the ground. However, no major clean-up or public awareness campaigns have been reported in Iraq, the report added. [Source: New York Sun R.B. Stuart article 6 Aug 07]

**RETIREE ANNUAL COLAS UPDATE 01:** Military retired pay rises each year to ensure that inflation does not erode the purchasing power of retirees. These cost-of-living adjustments, known as COLAs, match the annual increase in Social Security benefits. They become effective each 1 DEC and first show up in January paychecks. The foundation for the COLA adjustment is the Labor Department's Consumer Price Index, a measure of the cost of certain categories of goods and services that is updated monthly. There is one overall CPI, as well as a variety of more specific indexes. The index upon which the retired pay COLA is based is called the CPI for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers, or CPI-W. The rate of inflation may rise and fall throughout the year, but the exact increase in retired pay is based only on the average inflation rate over the last quarter of the fiscal year that runs from Oct. 1 to Sept 30. The size of the increase is equal to the difference between the average inflation rate in that quarter and the average inflation rate in the same quarter of the previous fiscal year. For the purposes of military retired pay, this means the only months in which inflation matters are July, August and September. So far this fiscal year inflation rates have been OCT 06 (-1.1), NOV 06 (-1.2), DEC 06 (-1.0), JAN 07 (-0.8), FEB 07 (-0.3), MAR 07 (0.8), APR 07 (1.5), MAY 07 (2.3), & JUN 07 (2.4). Thus, if the last the month's CPI-W rates were to be used to compute the 2008 COLA we would be looking at an increase of 1.5 + 2.3 + 2.4 divided by 3 which equates to 2.1%. Service members who retire in a given fiscal year receive a partial COLA for that year only, based on the date of their retirement. They receive the full COLA in subsequent years. The retired pay COLA technically is not automatic; Congress must formally approve it each year. To track CPI-W yourself go to [www.armytimes.com](http://www.armytimes.com) and click on "Retirement Tracking your COLA". [Source: Army Times Aug 07]

**YOUR LEGISLATIVE &  
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Among its provisions are tax breaks related to military personnel.

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The MSC consists of representatives from each of the following organizations: Air Force Association, American GI Forum, American Legion Posts 76 – 83 – 326, Austin Community Eagles, Austin Navy League, Austin Retired Officers Association, Bergstrom/Austin Community Council, Capitol City EX-POW's, Catholic War Veterans, China-Burma-India Veterans Assoc., Jewish War Veterans, Disabled Am. Veterans, DAV – Chapter 4, 173, & 219, Lone Star Special Forces Assn., Fleet Reserve Association & Auxiliary, Military Affairs Council of Austin Chamber of Commerce, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Military Order of World Wars, National Sojourner, Assn of the United States Army, National Assn for Uniformed Services, Austin/Navy/Marine Retired Activity Office, Non-Commissioned Officers Assn., National Guard Assn. Of Texas, Pearl Harbor Survivors Assn. Of Austin, Paralyzed Veterans Assn., Reserve Officers Assn., Austin Retired Chiefs Society, Retired Officer's Wives Club, Texas Assn. Of Vietnam Veterans, Austin Military Officers Assoc. of America (AMOOA), Texas Retired Officers Assn., Texas State Guard Assn., Texas Veterans Foundation, The Lonestar Group, Veterans For Change, Veterans of Foreign Wars District 28, VFW Travis County Council, Veterans of Foreign Wars Travis County Council Honor Guard, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Ladies Auxiliaries of Posts 1309 2010 2527 3377 4009 4475 4476 5254 6115 6525 6795 8200 8313 856 8587 8787 8906 8925 9078 10427, Volture Locale 175, 303<sup>rd</sup> Bomber Group Ass'n, Special Ops Team Texas, Tejanos in Action, BPOE #201 of Austin, and the Vietnamese American of Austin Texas, Vietnam Veterans of America, Texas Women Veterans.

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