



A Publication of the JLBM McChord Field Retiree Activities Office for Air Force Retirees, their spouses and survivors. Department of the Air Force, 100 Joe Jackson Blvd, Customer Service Mall Rm 1001, JBLM McChord Field WA 98438-1114; Phone (253) 982-3214 (Voice Mail 24 hours a day) Fax 253-982-5234. Email – retaffairs@us.af.mil Web Site www.mcchordrao.com Retiree Activities Office: Open 0900-1200 Monday - Friday

McChord Annual Military Retiree Heritage Dinner: Military retirees of all branches of the service, mark your calendars to attend the 2012 Military Retiree Heritage dinner in April! This much anticipated, traditional event is sponsored by the McChord Retiree Activities Office (RAO) and will be held on Saturday, 28 April 2012. No-host social hour begins at 6:30; with dinner at 7 PM. Dinner selections are Prime Rib, Salmon and Vegetarian Lasagna, at the McChord Collocated Club. Dress is dressy casual. Those who wish to wear their military uniform are encouraged to do so. In past years, there were WW II uniforms in the crowd, and accompanying sharing of military stories and experiences!

The McChord RAO has presented this annual banquet for over 30 years; beginning last year, the traditional Dining Out was replaced by the Heritage Dinner. This is a wonderful opportunity to greet old friends and meet new ones. Retirees as well as active duty, their families and friends are welcome. Door prizes are always a nice part of the evening, as well. For an evening of camaraderie and fun, do plan to attend! For more information, please call the RAO, 0900 to 1200 noon, Monday through Friday, [253-982-3214](tel:253-982-3214). For reservations, call or stop by the Club, [253-982-2795](tel:253-982-2795) or [253-982-5581](tel:253-982-5581).

TRICARE Retiree Dental Program: Retirees and their family members are encouraged to attend this year's *Joint Base Lewis-McChord Retiree Appreciation Day on May 18*. A representative for the **TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP)** will be present at this event, so be sure to stop by the TRDP table for important program information.

The TRICARE Retiree Dental Program is available to all military retirees (including gray area retirees) and their eligible family members, un-remarried surviving spouses and their eligible children, as well as MOH recipients and their eligible immediate family members. The program covers cleanings, exams, fillings, root canals, gum surgery, oral surgery and dental accidents on the first day that coverage becomes effective; after 12 months of being in the program, it then covers crowns, bridges, partials, braces and dental implants. (New retirees who enroll within four months after retirement from the Uniformed Services or transfer to Retired Reserve status are eligible to waive the 12-month waiting period for major services; supporting documentation is required)

The Enhanced TRDP provides every enrollee an annual maximum of \$1,200 per person (\$1,000 for Basic Program enrollees), a \$1000 annual maximum for dental accidents and a \$1500 lifetime maximum for orthodontics. It is important to note that the money that the TRDP pays out for preventive and diagnostic services does not count against the annual maximum – those benefits are in addition to the \$1200. Retirees can find more information on the program, as well as enroll 24/7/365, online at trdp.org.

TRDP enrollees realize the maximum program savings (an average of 22%) when seeing a network provider. To find a network provider, as well as utilize the **Consumer Toolkit** to print ID cards, view annual maximum information, see if claims have been paid and sign up for e-mail updates, please visit, (Source: trdp.org.)

Defense bill limits retiree health care increases: President Barack Obama signed the 2012 National Defense Authorization Act on Dec. 31, which contains a critical initiative to help control spiraling health-care costs within the Defense Department.

Section 701 limits annual TRICARE enrollment fee increases for retirees and their family members to an amount equal to the percentage by which retired pay increases that year.

The act also contains critical initiatives to develop counterterrorism initiatives abroad, build the security capacity of key partners, modernize the force and boost the efficiency and effectiveness of military operations worldwide.

The NDAA also includes:

- Section 347 requires DOD to finance an independent assessment of overseas troop basing, advising retention, closure, realignment or establishment of U.S. military facilities outside the United States “in light of potential fiscal constraints on [DOD] and emerging national security requirements in coming years.”

Section 402 reduces authorized Army minimum end strength from 562,000 to 547,000. The other services’ authorized minimum strengths are unchanged, with 325,700 for the Navy, 202,100 for the Marine Corps and 332,800 for the Air Force.

- Section 512 of the act creates a new member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which currently includes the Army and Air Force chiefs of staff, the chief of naval operations and the Marine Corps commandant. The new member will be the chief of the National Guard Bureau, who will have responsibility for “addressing matters involving non-federalized National Guard forces in support of homeland defense and civil support missions.”
- Section 526 extends voluntary separation pay and benefits authority, formerly set to expire Dec. 31, to the end of 2018. Section 530 converts the high-deployment allowance from mandatory to authorized. The allowance currently pays \$100 a day, in addition to all other pay and allowances, to a deployed service member who has been deployed 401 days or more out of the preceding 730 days.
- Section 702 sets mental health assessment requirements for service members deployed for contingency operations. The act calls for a series of assessments: one within 120 days before deployment; another during the period between 90 days after a deployment begins and 180 days after it ends; a third within a year after the deployment ends; and a fourth between 18 months and 30 months of redeployment.

The act states assessments are intended to “identify post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal tendencies, and other behavioral health conditions ... in order to determine which such members are in need of additional care and treatment for such health conditions.” Assessments are not required for service members “not subjected or exposed to operational risk factors during deployment in the contingency operation concerned,” the act states.

Section 954 affirms that DOD “has the capability, and upon direction by the president may conduct offensive operations in cyberspace to defend our nation, allies and interests,” subject to the law of armed conflict and the War Powers Resolution. President Barack Obama acknowledges “serious reservations” about parts of the act, particularly provisions that regulate the detention, interrogation, and prosecution of suspected terrorists.

“I have signed the act chiefly because it authorizes funding for the defense of the United States and its interests abroad, crucial services for service members and their families and vital national security programs that must be renewed,” Obama said in a statement released Dec. 31. For more retiree news and information, please visit

www.retirees.af.mil. (Source: *Air Force Retiree News Service*)

TRICARE Home Delivery Pharmacy: The TRICARE pharmacy home delivery program already fills over 1 million prescriptions a month, and a recent reduction on co pays for generic prescriptions gives many beneficiaries an even greater incentive to receive their regular medications by mail. TRICARE beneficiaries can now get generic prescriptions without a co pay. Ideal candidates for the pharmacy home delivery program include those with several regular maintenance medications for conditions such as hypertension and diabetes who already fill their 90-day generic prescriptions at a local pharmacy. For more information, visit the [TRICARE website](http://www.tricare.mil). (Source: *Military.com Benefits*)

Expanded Traumatic Injury Benefits: Servicemembers who suffer severe injuries to the genitourinary organs will now be eligible for Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection (TSGLI). TSGLI provides a one-time payment to Servicemembers sustaining certain severe traumatic injuries resulting in a range of losses, including amputations; limb salvage; paralysis; burns; loss of sight, and other traumatic losses. The first payments for genitourinary losses will be made to eligible Servicemembers and Veterans on Dec.2, eligibility for these new losses will be retroactive to injuries incurred on or after Oct. 7, 2001, the beginning of the Global War On Terror. For more information on all of the TSGLI eligibility requirements, or to apply for a TSGLI payment, Servicemembers and Veterans should go to www.insurance.va.gov/sgliSite/TSGLI/TSGLI.htm or contact their branch of service TSGLI Office (contact information available at above link). *(Source: Military.Com Military Report)*

Is Sequestration Real or Political Brinkmanship? Not long ago, Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), Chair of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, wrote an editorial for Military.com's '[The Passdown](#)' in which he explained his concern that the reality of sequestration – the congressionally mandated cuts that will automatically occur later this year due to the Joint Select Committee's failure to find \$1.2 trillion dollars in deficit reductions – is about hit home for veterans.

The first line of Miller's article reads, "As it stands right now, sequestration of government programs is imminent." Hard to say that is anything less than definitive. Miller's concern goes beyond the issue of how this will impact our national defense; Miller is worried that an ambiguity in the law could be used by the Office of Management and Budget to cut as much as two percent from the VA's Healthcare budget.

Chairman Miller wrote that the sequestration law was updated in 2010 with the intent to ensure VA's budget would be shielded. But the OMB seems to be ignoring the intent of the revision.

According to my sources both Chairman Miller and Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), Chair of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, have contacted the OMB asking if they intended to touch the VA budget. Neither has received an answer; it is as if the OMB has gone darkened ship.

Rep. Miller has gone as far as to ask President Obama to exempt the VA from sequestration. The Congressman says that to date he has not been given a formal response other than a statement by an OMB representative, who stated "...the administration will provide sequester implementation guidance later in the year."

The OMB leaves a lot of room for speculation. Perhaps keeping their plans close to the vest is the OMB's best means of leveraging Congress to find a solution, without actually coming out and threatening veteran services. After all, fear works. Last year the government used the fear of a government shutdown with its associated late military paychecks and limited VA services to help reach yet another "Continuing Resolution."

BTW – I think we can look forward to that happening again later this year.

The truth is, military servicemembers, veterans, and their families are getting tired of being used as political pawns in a game of budgetary chicken, they want no part of it. Most feel it is about time to take military pay and veteran's services off the table for good and stop using fear tactics to achieve political goals.

To answer the headline question... **Yes.**

VA Expands Claims Program: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced the release of 68 new forms that will help speed the processing of Veterans' disability compensation and pension claims. These disability benefits questionnaires (DBQs) guide physicians' reports of medical findings to be used by the VA. DBQ's can be found at VA's [Disability Benefits Questionnaires webpage](#). Veterans may file a claim online through the [eBenefits website](#). Servicemembers may enroll in eBenefits using their Common Access Card at any time during their military service. Veterans may also enroll in eBenefits and obtain a Premium account in-person or online depending on their status. *(Source Military.com Veterans Report)*

Veterans Employment Website: The U.S. Office of Personnel Management's Government-wide Veterans Employment Website at www.fedshirevets.gov/ is a critical component of the Federal Government's strategy for the recruitment and employment of Veterans. *(Continued on next page)*

In partnership with the Departments of Defense, Labor, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, and other Federal agencies, the Department of Veterans Affairs hopes that this website will be the preeminent source for Federal employment information for Veterans, transitioning servicemembers, their families, Federal HR professionals and hiring managers. For more information, visit the FedshireVets.gov website at www.fedshirevets.gov/.
(Source: *Military.com Veterans Report*)

Veterans Help Line Goes National: A veteran-to-veteran hot line established six years ago in New Jersey to provide crisis counseling and prevent suicides among the state's military servicemembers has been expanded nationwide. Vets4Warriors is a 24-hour-a-day help line is staffed by nearly 40 specially trained veterans. It is administered by the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey at the school's Piscataway campus. The toll-free hot line is 1-855-VET-TALK. More information about the program is available at the Vets4Warriors website at www.vets4warriors.com. (Source: *Military.com Veterans Report*)

Washington State Veteran's Benefits: The state of Washington provides several veteran benefits. This section offers a brief description of each of the following benefits; Veteran Housing Benefits, Veteran Financial Assistance Benefits, Other State Sponsored Veteran Benefits, Washington Veteran Housing Programs, and the Homeless Veterans Program

WDVA provides outreach services for homeless veterans in Puget Sound. These services are designed to assist homeless veterans to become employable and reintegrated back into the labor market. Services include needs assessments, enrollments in appropriate programs, shelter and transitional housing placements, employment and training support services.

Eligible homeless veterans are provided with case management services and financial support to meet the needs of housing, transportation, food and clothing. The primary strategy for WDVA homeless veteran's services is to promote job readiness development to improve homeless veteran's competitiveness in the employment market. Homeless Veterans Reintegration Project (HVRP) (Continued on next page)

The HVRP offers a structured, individually designed case management plan to make veterans employable and secure by providing, housing, food, transportation, living stability and employment support services.

Visit the [Washington State Dept. of Veterans Affairs](http://www.wa.gov/veterans) website for contact information and benefits assistance.

State Veterans Homes

The Washington Veterans Home at Retsil, the Washington Soldiers Home and Colony near Orting, provide high quality, long-term nursing and assisted-living care for honorably discharged veterans. The newly opened Spokane Veterans Home serves 100 residents needing long-term nursing care. All homes are Title 19 (Medicaid) certified.

Residents at each home receive comprehensive, no-cost medical benefits, prescription drug benefits and 24-hour nursing care.

Licensed medical staff, including registered nurses (RN), licensed practical nurses (LPN) and certified nursing assistants (CNA) provide personal care specifically tailored to each individual.

Visit the [Washington State Dept. of Veterans Affairs](http://www.wa.gov/veterans) website for contact information and benefits assistance.

Washington Financial Assistance Programs

Veterans Estate Management Program

The Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) Veterans Estate Management Program offers protective payee services for veterans and family members who are incapable of managing their own financial affairs. By assuming custody of the individual's finances, the department ensures basic needs -- such as housing, food, clothing and medical care are provided.

The WDVA director is authorized to provide protective financial services to veterans and beneficiaries deemed in need of assistance. These services may include the following:

Fiduciary appointment by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs;

Representative payee appointment by the Social Security Administration; or

Act as an executor of a veteran's estate. (Continued on next page)

Visit the [Washington State Dept. of Veterans Affairs](#) website for contact information and benefits assistance.

Other Washington State Veteran Benefits

PTSD Counseling Services

The Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Program attempts to create community-based avenues to counseling service that are less formal in nature, offering the highest level of confidentiality possible. Services provided throughout the program include individual, couples, family, and veteran group counseling. Some contractors offer group services to women veterans and spouses of veterans. Veterans may be referred to specialized inpatient or outpatient treatment offered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers or Vet Centers within Washington State.

Washington State offers several other benefits including special license plates, returning veterans transition assistance, reduced public transportation fees, reduced fee hunting and fishing licenses, and more. [Visit the Washington State Veterans Affairs website to learn more.](#) (Source: WSDVA)

Veterans Get Risky Painkillers: Stars and Stripes reports that a new study has found that recent U.S. War veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) along with physical pain are often prescribed Morphine and similar powerful painkillers. Subsequent suicides, other self-inflicted injuries, and drug and alcohol overdoses were all more common in veterans with PTSD who received these drugs. The Department of Veterans Affairs paid for the study, which is based on VA health care data. An abstract of the study is available on the [Journal of the American Medical Association website](#). (Source *Military.com Veterans Report*)

VA's Latest Research on Pain Management: The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA's) latest research on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and pain management shows PTSD is a complex condition that cannot be treated solely by drugs. That is why VA research is trying to improve behavioral therapies and pain treatments. Read more at VA's Vantage Point Blog at www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/6060/ptsd-and-pain-management-vas-latest-research/. (Source *Military.com Veterans Report*)

Manage Your VA Health Care Online: Newest feature includes access to DoD Military Service Information. My HealthVet is a free, online personal health record. It is available 24/7, wherever there is Internet access. If you are a VA patient and have completed the In-Person Authentication process, you can:

- participate in Secure Messaging with your primary health care team members
- view key portions of your DoD Military Service Information
- get your VA Wellness Reminders
- view your VA Appointments
- view your VA Labs
- view your VA Allergies.

Veterans discharged after 1979 can access their Blue Button military work records, including the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) codes, pay details, service dates, deployment, and retirement periods.

You can use the VA Blue Button to view, print, or download your health data currently in your My HealthVet account. You can share this information with your family, caregivers or others. It puts *you* in control of *your* information stored in My HealthVet. **Learn more about:**

[Military Service Information](#)

[Secure Messaging](#)

[VA Blue Button](#)

[In-Person Authentication](#)

If you have questions please contact the My HealthVet Coordinator at [your VA facility](#). (Source: Department of Veterans Affairs)

Proposal to Gut Commissary Dead for Now: A congressional proposal to combine the commissary and exchange systems under one, self-supporting retail store is likely dead for now, but could easily pop-up again next year, said a lobbyist who was been working against the issue.

The measure, most recently floated by Oklahoma Republican Sen. Tom Coburn, would have required the disassembly of the Defense Commissary Agency, known as DeCA, which now provides military shoppers with steep discounts on groceries in exchange for a five percent surcharge. If the bill became law, groceries would instead be provided under the military exchange model, which offers products for retail prices competitive with off-base stores but does not charge sales tax.

The three current exchange systems – the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, Marine Corps Exchange and Navy Exchange – would also be combined under the same new system. Unlike the commissary system, which receives an annual appropriation from Congress of about \$1.3 million, the exchange system is currently self-sustaining.

Coburn had offered the measure as an amendment to the 2012 Defense Authorization Act, which funds Defense Department activities. The amendment was not included in the final version of the bill and has not been attached to any other legislation.

The idea to combine the commissary and exchange systems was originally floated as a cost savings measure by the Congressional Budget Office, tasked with finding cost efficiencies within the federal budget. Analysts found that combining the programs would give the government a net annual savings of about \$1 billion by 2016. They said that Congress could make up for the additional cost of groceries to active duty families under the new system by issuing a \$400 annual grocery stipend.

But opponents of the legislation warned that any such measure would effectively gut the commissary benefit, leaving shoppers paying about thirty percent more for their groceries. The annual stipend to active duty servicemembers would come nowhere near covering the higher cost of groceries under the new system, they said. In addition, retirees, surviving family members, National Guard members and Reservists would be forced to cover the cost increase on their own. *(Source Military.com)*

RAO VOLUNTEERS NEEDED: Do you need something extra to help you fill the hours in your days? The McChord Retiree Activities Office has an ongoing need for volunteers. The RAO desk is staffed by retirees and dependent volunteers. Our hours of operation are 0900 to 1200 hours Monday through Friday. You can volunteer for a shift one day a week, one day a month or as many days as you like. Volunteers assist retirees by, providing directions, answering phones and researching questions from fellow retirees their spouses and widows. Volunteering can be extremely enjoyable; it is satisfying knowing that you have helped a fellow retiree or survivor with their needs. We host a business luncheon at the McChord Club on the second Thursday of each month. We also hold a semi-formal diner as well as a picnic and Christmas party annually. Feel free to stop by and check out your RAO or call and volunteer at (253) 982-3214 or e-mail us at retaffairs@us.af.mil. *(Source: McChord AFB Retiree Affairs)*