



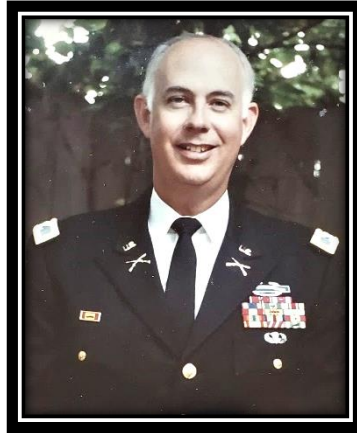
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January 2022 Issue – Newsletter to Members

## President's Message...

Greetings Friends,

Happy New Year to all. First, I am happy to report that Our Chapter enjoyed a very good year in 2021. We added quite a few new members; received the MOAA's National 5-star Level of Excellence award for the second year in a row and received MOAA's Communications Excellence award primarily due to our wonderful publisher Kathy Frank. Additionally, we were able to stabilize our finances thanks to all of you. This in turn enabled the Chapter to increase our outreach to the Houston veteran community. I am sure that we will be able to build on this foundation for another great year in 2022.



The next Chapter meeting will be Saturday January 29th at Kelly's Country Cookin' in Stafford. Our guest speaker will be Chief Warrant Officer Dave Weaver. Dave is the President of the Houston Regional Veterans Chamber of Commerce. This should be a great insight into the business side of our Houston Veteran Community.

Once Again, best wishes for a wonderful happy new year for all of 2022.

Respectfully,

Rob

Robin P. Ritchie, COL, Infantry, USAR (Ret)



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## January...

### Upcoming Chapter Events:

**Tuesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022 @ noon**

**MOAA HA BOD Meeting**

Rudi Lechner's German Restaurant  
2503 S Gessner Rd  
Houston, TX 77063

**Saturday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022 @ noon**

**MOAA HA Chapter Meeting**

Kelly's Country Cookin'  
11555 W. Airport Blvd.  
Meadows Place, TX 77477  
RSVP to Rob Ritchie

# Military Pay Debate Could Lead to Biggest Raise in 20 Years

JANUARY 12, 2022

Troops saw a 2.7 percent pay raise on Jan. 1, but the coming debate over the size of the 2023 pay raise could put even more money into those service members' pockets.

Military families have seen consistent salary boosts in recent years, with increases of at least 2.5 percent annually since 2018. The 2022 raise means about \$790 more a year in pay for junior enlisted troops, about \$1,400 more for senior enlisted and junior officers, and more than \$2,600 extra for senior officers.

The pay raise is based on a federal formula called the Employment Cost Index which tracks private sector wages. With the exception of three years in the mid-2010s, that has served as a baseline for all pay discussions, and lawmakers in several cases have voted to go even higher.

## **[RELATED: MOAA's Legislative Priorities for 2022]**

The ECI calculation for next year's pay formula is 4.6 percent, up significantly because of increased inflation and wages across the country.

The president is expected to offer his recommendation for the 2023 pay raise in late February as part of the annual federal budget process. House and Senate lawmakers will spend much of the rest of the year debating that mark as part of their spending deliberations.

If that becomes the pay increase for 2023, it will be the highest boost for troops since 2003.

But lawmakers could go even higher.

In October, House Armed Services Committee ranking member Mike Rogers, R-Ala., said that the issue of military pay will be a top priority in next year's budget debate, to include "significantly increasing compensation and benefits packages, particularly for enlisted personnel." Committee Chairman Adam Smith, D-Wash., later echoed those remarks.

Congress has done targeted pay raises for the military in the past, typically when service leaders have faced recruiting and retention challenges.

## **[RELATED: 2023 Could Bring Largest Military Pay Raise in Decades. But Is It Enough?]**

But going above the ECI formula for pay raises can be costly. This year's 2.7 percent pay raise adds about \$1.4 billion in personnel costs to the military budget. A 4.6 percent boost next year would be about \$2.5 billion more, totals that some Pentagon planners say cuts into training and modernization efforts.

Outside advocates have argued the opposite, saying that investments must be made in military pay to ensure that troops aren't lured into the private sector by better wages, thereby hurting readiness.

The pay raise debates on Capitol Hill should begin in earnest in March and April. ★



*IronHeart/Getty Images*

*This article by Leo Shane III originally appeared on Military Times, the nation's largest independent newsroom dedicated to covering the military and veteran community.*

# VA Tests New Automated System That Could Speed Up Claims Decisions

JANUARY 19, 2022



*Master Sgt. Stephen J. Caruso/Air Force Editor's note: This article by Patricia Kime originally appeared on Military.com, a leading source of news for the military and veteran community.*

**Department of Veterans Affairs** officials are hoping a new automated system that helps render decisions on disability claims will accelerate the process and decrease the backlog of claims applications.

The automated system being considered by the VA has proven to shorten the disability claims review process from 100 days to two under certain circumstances and conditions, according to the agency.

A pilot run of the VA Automated Benefits Delivery System, launched in December, looked at claims filed by veterans seeking upgrades to their disability ratings for hypertension and cut 98 days from the process for those with complete files.

VA officials said the program is part of a plan to address 260,000 current disability claims, including 59,000 that are older than 125 days and are considered backlogged.

"We saw an opportunity to look at our traditional disability claims process and see how we can better leverage the data we have ... to introduce business-process automation," explained Rob Reynolds, acting deputy undersecretary for the VA's Office of Automated Benefit Delivery, during a press conference with reporters Tuesday.

The system takes electronic or paper claims and uses algorithms to determine whether the file contains enough data and information to render a decision. It then weighs the information against the rules that govern disability claims and makes a recommendation whether to approve or disapprove the claim.

The system's recommendation is reviewed and validated by a rating veterans service representative. If at any time the system decides that more information is needed -- the veteran needs a comprehensive medical exam or more data is required to render a decision -- the claim is sent to a claims reviewer for traditional processing, Reynolds said.

"The algorithm is pulling the necessary data we need. The rater is the final decision maker," he said.

After the pandemic began, the number of backlogged claims rose from 70,000 to 211,000. While the VA reduced that to roughly 180,000 by mid-2021, the number grew again as veterans applied for benefits under an expansion of covered conditions, including illnesses related to Agent Orange and airborne pollutants.

VA Secretary Denis McDonough said Tuesday that the department has hired more than 1,000 new claims processors and plans to hire roughly 1,000 more by the end of spring. The department is paying its personnel overtime to process claims, and working with the National Personnel Records Center and National Archives to digitize records needed to make claims decisions.

*(Continued on Next Page...)*

## VA Tests New Automated System...(Continued from Previous Page)

The new automated system could further accelerate the process.

"The initiative has the potential to dramatically reduce the time it takes to process individually," McDonough said.

With the program proving successful for hypertension claims, the department is now building algorithms to assess other common conditions in veterans, including asthma, sleep apnea and prostate cancer, Reynolds said.

The goal is to add three new conditions per quarter, he said. But, Reynolds added, at no point in time will the decisions be left up to the system and the algorithms.

"We will ensure that our employees continue to supervise and validate the rules associated with the automation, the algorithms, to ensure that all statutory regulatory and procedural guidance are adhered to and [they] have the ultimate decision control for the process over the claim," he said.

The VA is anticipating that more post-9/11 veterans will be filing claims in the future. The department announced last August it planned to add three conditions -- **asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis** -- to the list of conditions fast-tracked for health care and disability compensation and **is reviewing more illnesses as possibly related to exposure to burn pits** and other pollution in deployed settings.

Decisions on several respiratory cancers and constrictive bronchiolitis are expected this year.

McDonough urged veterans thinking about filing a disability claim to do so, despite the backlog.

"Please, please submit your claims," McDonough said. "I promise you that we will stop at nothing to work through this backlog and get you timely access to the benefits." ★



# Retirees: Renew Your Expired ID Before Jan. 31

By: Kevin Lilley  
JANUARY 05, 2022



*A security guard checks an identification card at the main Fort Benning, Ga., gate in April 2020. (Photo by Patrick Albright/Army)*

Retirees and their dependents who've been able to use expired Uniformed Services ID (USID) cards as part of COVID-related deadline extensions need to renew those cards by month's end.

The extension applies only to beneficiaries holding cards with expiration dates between Jan. 1, 2020, and July 31, 2021. Currently serving members and their dependents had until Oct. 31, 2021, to renew their cards, while retirees and their dependents will have until Jan. 31. Please note: If your ID card is not expired, this extension does not apply to your card and you are not required to renew.

DoD officials announced in September they planned **no further extensions**. The existing extension applies only to ID cards that expired during the above period.

## [RELATED AT MOAA.ORG: [ID Cards](#)]

Cardholders can begin the renewal process **at DoD's online ID card office**. That site allows beneficiaries to:

- Find a nearby Real-Time Automated Personnel Identification System (RAPIDS) ID card office and make an appointment.
- Update your ID card information and contact details.
- View or renew family member ID cards.

Get answers to some frequently asked questions on the ID process **at this link (PDF)**. For further guidance or to report a problem, contact the Defense Manpower Data Center at (800) 538-9522.

## Stay Informed

It's more important than ever to make sure you're in the know and your military benefits are protected.



# Arlington Cemetery Update: New Law Needed to Stop Unfair Eligibility Changes

By: Mark Belinsky  
JANUARY 04, 2022

The [president recently signed](#) the FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), and while the bill contains [many MOAA-supported provisions](#) designed to protect and expand your earned benefits, it does not contain language that would halt [proposed eligibility changes](#) at Arlington National Cemetery (ANC).

The FY 2019 NDAA required a plan to ensure ANC operations would continue “well into the future,” and DoD interpreted this as a directive to reduce eligibility. The draft rule change is pending as part of the federal rulemaking process; if enacted, the hardest hit will be Vietnam and Cold War-era veterans who have planned on this benefit for decades. It was not the original intent of the 2019 NDAA to end this benefit for elderly veterans.



Section 38 at Arlington National Cemetery (Photo by Elizabeth Fraser/Arlington National Cemetery)

**[TAKE ACTION: [Ask Your Lawmakers to Preserve the National Cemetery Benefit](#) | [Meet MOAA's New Legislative Action Center](#)]**

A House Armed Services Committee (HASC) [report on this year's NDAA](#) expresses the committee's concerns regarding proposed eligibility changes and “directs the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to submit a report to congressional defense committees no later than March 1, 2022, on potential locations of the next national cemetery.”

Legislation is still required for a [halt to ANC eligibility changes](#). The joint DoD-VA report to designate the next national cemetery that will afford full military honors can set the foundation for language in the next NDAA.

While a halt to eligibility changes was not included in the most recent NDAA, it was proposed as a Senate amendment. This issue will require continued advocacy as the HASC report is pending.

## Finding a Long-Term Fix

Before ANC was an operational cemetery, servicemembers were buried at what's now known as the United States Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. When the home was running out of room during the Civil War, ANC was designated as the next location. As ANC reaches capacity, it makes sense to pick the next location rather than end the benefit.

Consider using MOAA's toll-free line to the U.S. Capitol switchboard – 866-272-MOAA (6622) – to connect with your legislators' offices. Be sure to use your own words and experiences when speaking with staffers and asking for their support. Letters from MOAA and The Military Coalition (TMC) can help guide your conversation.

**[READ THE LETTERS: [MOAA](#) | [TMC](#)]**

The coalition, which represents nearly 5.5 million members of the uniformed services community, works to preserve benefits for the uniformed services; MOAA is proud to serve in a leadership role throughout the coalition. As the report to Congress is pending on ANC, MOAA and the coalition will continue to advocate for a long-term solution. You can stay up to date on this and other MOAA advocacy goals at [MOAA.org/2022goals](https://www.moaa.org/2022goals). ★

## 2022 Officers

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*We need YOU...  
to remain a  
MOAA HA Member!*



*Debating whether to renew your chapter membership?*

*Talking to a potential new member?*

Benefits to belonging to a chapter:

- Camaraderie and Connections: when you attend chapter functions, actively serve on a committee, or take a prominent leadership role, you forge lasting ties with other MOAA members.
- Community Involvement: Membership provide opportunities to contribute to your community in a variety of ways, from providing scholarships to local students, to supporting causes that support wounded warriors and their families.
- Legislative Advocacy: We advocate for the entire military community-all ranks. Members play a critical role in advancing legislation in both Austin and Washington, D.C. This grassroots advocacy is key to MOAA achieving its legislative goals.

Chapter dues reminders will be emailed/sent out in November to those members needing renewal. We are on a calendar year for our chapter dues.

Annual renewal is \$30 for one year, \$20 for each additional year paid with renewal. Surviving Spouse \$15 initial membership; \$10 annual renewal.

Membership Application on the last page!



## Welcome to 2022

"Where has the time gone?" is how many of the Christmas letters which we received began. Yep, it's another new year. Folks our age seem to realize that each year passes faster and faster. I tell friends that 1 year is a long time for a five year old. One year is 20 percent of their lifetime. At age 60 it takes 12 years to get to 20%. That's my "Theory of age relativity". But, that's only a theory. The reality is that another year is passed and each of us has gained another year of experiences. What experiences have we gained and how have we acted and reacted to those experiences? All of us have been impacted by Covid, by negative and positive circumstances through which we have lived in 2021. Our nation's politics have turned upside down, the economy seems to be muddling through and our health is as whatever it is for our current lives. Covid seems to have strained many relationships both to our health and to our mental states. Some have adapted to the solitude and sacrifices others have had varied levels of difficulty with them.

The Apostle Paul give us much to think about in his four chapters of Philippians. In the new year I'd like to reflect on Chapter One with regard to how he faced his circumstances. In Verses 3-7 Paul states regarding the Philippian Church:

"I thank my God every time I remember you...Because of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now. Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel all of you share in God's grace with me." (NIV)\*

Paul is writing from the perspective of his faith. His writing is to friends who understand him and whom he loves. God has given us the gift of love, communication and relationships. All of us experience both triumphs and difficulties. We all have people who love us, and whom we love. Our human love and understanding for one another support us. That love and understanding is a reflection of God's love and support. Our faith gives us an understanding of that love and support that's why our religion and faith is of eternal importance. Hopefully, our faith, whether we are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or another religion will allow us to better understand our reactions and decisions to the circumstances which we experience.

Though Paul's experiences were 2000 years ago they are also beneficial to us now. He is also writing in the midst of indefinite danger to himself and others. He gives us both eternal as well as a contemporary perspective as a response. The eternal perspective is that he knows he is in God's hands. The contemporary response is that he accepts what is/and what will occur. The Apostle in the writing above relies on his love and faith in God and his relationships to the Philippian people so that he could courageously face his circumstances.

Yes, this is a Christian writing, Paul was in prison and he didn't know what the outcome would be. He did know that his faith in God would get him through the trial. Faith for us in America is an individual understanding and belief. My hope for the new year is that each of us can look both back and forward to experiences in 2022 and our expectations for 2022. Look at those experiences in the light of your faith to discover how you responded and seek the changes that you may need to experience the fullness of life that we have been given. Understand that we are in God's hands and that He will guide us to an understanding of His will for our lives.

\* New International Version

~ *David Essells, USAF, MAJ, RET*



## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL FORM

### MOAA's Core Mission

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is the country's leading organization protecting the rights of uniformed servicemembers and their families. MOAA's constituents proudly hail from every branch of the uniformed services. To them, we have made the same promise that they have made to their country: Never Stop Serving.

MOAA's greatest mission is to improve the lives of those who serve and their families, which is achieved largely through the tireless advocacy efforts taking place in our nation's capital. For more than 90 years, MOAA has supported legislation that benefits the uniformed services community and has remained equally vigilant when fighting to stop legislation that threatens our livelihood. The larger our numbers, the greater our voice. For more detailed legislative actions see [MOAA | Take Action Center \(quorum.us\)](http://quorum.us)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print)                      Last                                      First                                      Initial                                      Rank

Branch \_\_\_\_\_ Status \_\_\_\_\_ MOAA Nat'l ID \_\_\_\_\_ \*

Spouse's First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. for Directory \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dues:** Regular Membership – \$30 first year; annual renewal \$30 (Discount for multiple years if paid with renewal: \$20 for each add'l. year **paid with renewal**)  
Surviving Spouse – \$15 first year; annual renewal \$10 (same discount for multiple years)

#### Chapter Assistance Fund

\$100.00     \$50.00     \$25.00     Other \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to MOAA-HA and mail to:

MOAA-HA  
PO Box 18372  
Sugar Land, TX 77496



For more information, call COL Robin Ritchie, 713-818-0408

*\*If not a MOAA national member, another benefit of chapter membership is the opportunity to become a national MOAA member at the BASIC LEVEL for free! If you would like to do so, please indicate here:*

YES     NO

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_