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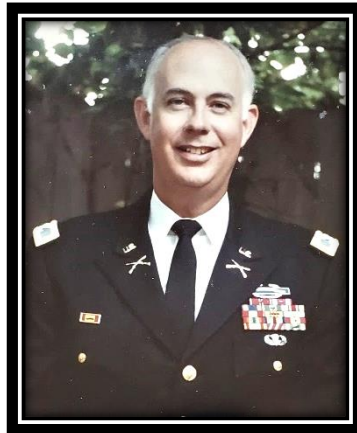
July 2021 Issue – Newsletter to Members

President's Message...

Dear MOAA HA Members,

Greetings...first...Happy 245th Birthday America! I hope that all of you had a safe and Happy 4th of July.

Last month we were honored to have Mr. Steve Volkman, the administrative Office for the FBI Houston Division as our guest speaker. His presentation was excellent and quite informative. As some of you may know, Steve also is a MOAA Life Member and hopefully, we will be able to see more often at our Chapter meetings. This month's featured speaker is Captain (P) Jessica Masters who currently is the Southern Company Commander, Houston area Recruiting Battalion. CPT Masters is a MI officer who recently commanded a MI company at Fort Bragg, NC. and is being posted to Fort Richardson, Alaska this fall where she will be the Deputy G2 for the US Army Alaska.



There are some very good articles in this month's newsletter including a MOAA interview with renowned deep-sea explorer, Commander Victor Vscovo, USNR (Ret), as well as, "A Portrait of a Warrior" video. Speaking of articles and guest speakers, if you would like to submit an article for the newsletter or suggest a speaker for one of our monthly chapter lunch meetings, please do so.

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July...

Upcoming Chapter Events:

Tuesday, July 27th, 2021 @ noon

MOAA HA BOD Meeting

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

Saturday, July 31st, 2021 @ noon

MOAA HA Chapter Meeting

Rudi Lechner's German Restaurant
2503 S Gessner Rd
Houston, TX 77063
RSVP to Rob Ritchie

House Agrees to Boost VA Budget by \$170 Million

June 30, 2021



VA Secretary Denis McDonough speaks during a White House press briefing in March. (Photo by Samuel Corum/Getty Images)

Editor's note: This article by Patricia Kime originally appeared on *Military.com*, a leading source of news for the military and veteran community.

The [Department of Veterans Affairs](#), which has already requested a 10% boost to its fiscal 2022 budget, would receive that and an extra \$170 million under the first draft of a funding bill released June 24 by the House Appropriations Committee.

Under the proposal, the VA would receive nearly \$270 billion, including \$113.1 billion in discretionary spending and \$113.1 billion in advanced funding for veterans medical care for fiscal 2023.

Much of the \$170 million increase would go to health care services, including \$73 million added

to the \$778.5 million request for women's health and \$1 million above the \$13.2 billion request for mental health services.

The bill also would fully fund the VA's construction projects, assistance programs for an estimated 37,200 homeless veterans and rural health initiatives -- all budget items that VA Secretary Denis McDonough said June 23 are important to ensure the safety and health of 9.6 million enrolled veterans.

"This proposed budget allows us to deliver high quality health care and benefits to our veterans, and it does so in large part by enabling the work of great people," McDonough told members of a Senate oversight committee.

[RELATED: Proposed VBA Budget Reflects MOAA-Backed Benefit Improvements]

In the past year, the VA has received more than \$36 billion for COVID-19 relief and recovery, and it could receive up to \$18 billion in the American Jobs Plan for VA health care infrastructure and \$260 million in the American Families Plan for veterans who are parents.

Critics have begun questioning the growth of the VA's budget in the past two decades, which has risen from \$47 billion in 2000 to \$240 billion this year. Two wars have produced the largest number of veterans since the Vietnam era, and the department faces an infrastructure crisis with a \$60 billion backlog in maintenance and construction needs.

Rep. Mike Bost, R-Ill., the ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, and others wrote the House Budget Committee earlier this month, [noting their concerns about the VA's budget](#).

"The Administration's request begs the question: At what point does VA become adequately funded?" the lawmakers wrote. "We believe some level of continued annual increases, above general inflation, would be warranted as long as they were supported by demand and demonstrated as necessary to continue this improvement trend."

Continued on Page 4...

We are always looking for speakers and articles of interest.

Finally, please note that in the newsletter, that our mailing address has changed to Sugar Land, TX.

Respectfully,

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

★★★★★★

MOAA Interview: Record-Setting Deep-Sea Explorer Cmdr. Victor Vescovo, USNR (Ret)

The first book Cmdr. Victor Vescovo, USNR (Ret), ever checked out from a library was Stephen Sears' *Desert War in North Africa*. While the young Vescovo had yet to fully chart his life's course, military history and coordinating strategies would continue to be defining facets.

Recognizing ample funding was second only to insatiable curiosity when it came to expeditions, Vescovo studied economics and defense analysis, eventually making a fortune in private equity that facilitated extracurricular activities like climbing the world's highest peaks. He would also experience different environs during a 20-year career in the Navy Reserve.

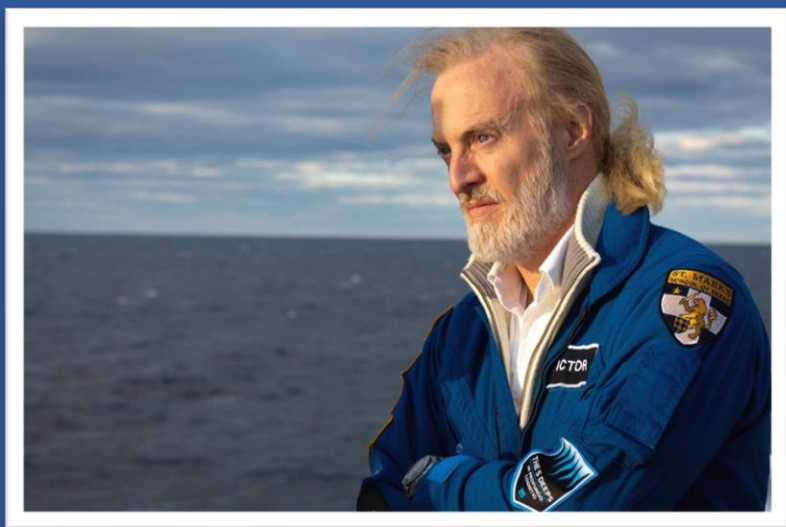


Photo by Tamara Stubbs/Caladan Oceanic
(This article by military culture reporter Tony Ware originally appeared in the August 2021 issue of *Military Officer*.)

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Portrait of a Warrior (Texas Country Reporter)



This is an amazing video:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/IRGWUFEeXZw>

House Agrees to Boost VA Budget

Continued from Page 2...

The new proposal would bolster the VA's women's health budget by nearly 18% from fiscal 2021. The department currently provides benefits and health care to 561,000 female vets. Women are the fastest growing demographic in the veteran population, expected to reach 18% of the group by 2040. Just two decades ago, women made up only 4% of all veterans.

[RELATED: [Here's Why the VA Budget Is Good News for Women, Other Underserved Veterans](#)]

To meet this growing demand, the VA has sought to broaden gender-specific care and reorganize facilities to accommodate women's clinics. Earlier this year, then-President Donald Trump signed the Deborah Sampson Act, which mandated that every VA health facility have a women's health primary care provider.

The proposal also seeks to expand a VA program to deliver wellness services and medical care to vets, known as "whole health." The bill would provide \$84 million for these services, adding \$10 million above President Joe Biden's budget request to expand a program that currently serves roughly 7.4% of VA patients.

The bill also would add \$20 million more in funding for medical and prosthetics research.

Among the programs that would see budget cuts, however, is the VA's new electronic health records system, currently under a "strategic pause" while the department reviews its challenging rollout last year in the Pacific Northwest, and plans moving forward.

According to the bill, \$2.6 billion is marked for continued implementation of the new digital medical records system, which is \$10 million more than it received this year but \$26 million below the VA request.

[RELATED: [A Battle Is Brewing Over the Rising Costs of VA Health Care](#)]

McDonough said June 23 he believes the system is "basically sound" but the VA must invest more in training on the system and supporting those who use it.

A report on the system review will be released the week of June 28, he added.

In addition to VA funding, the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Other Related Agencies appropriations bill includes:

- \$228 million for Arlington National Cemetery, including full funding for the site's Southern Expansion project to add 80,000 more burial spots
- \$88.1 million for the American Battle Monuments Commission, \$3.3 million more than the president's budget request, to support continued maintenance and visitor and education services
- \$77 million for the Armed Forces Retirement Home, \$1.7 million above the request to make improvements in safety and care infrastructure

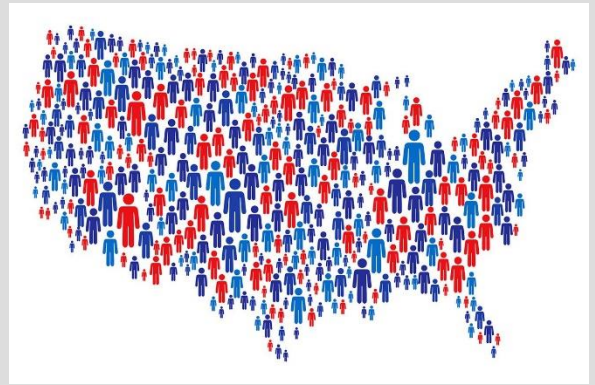
The subcommittee will proceed to the full committee for consideration and additions, followed by a full vote in the House and reconciliation with the Senate -- a process that is supposed to be completed by Oct. 1 but has been delayed as a result of the Biden administration's late release of its budget request in May. ★

Army Officer Needs Your Help for His Veterans and Politics Survey

By: Tony Lombardo

July 06, 2021

(bamlou/Getty Images)



Capt. Joe Amoroso, USA, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 2012. A decade later, after service in the 82nd Airborne and a deployment to Iraq, he will return to West Point as an instructor of American Politics.

But first this MOAA member is wrapping up his Ph.D. at the University of Virginia and could use your help for his thesis.

Amoroso is surveying veterans on political engagement and participation. All veterans are invited to participate. Survey questions will explore voter behavior, perceptions of government, and running for office.

Visit this link to complete this nonpartisan survey: https://virginia.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3eXOYH6srFuLnUi

“What is the interest among veterans?” Amoroso asked in an interview with MOAA. “Is there an appetite for greater participation among veterans? Or are military veterans pretty cautious or concerned about the military being more politicized?”

The findings will no doubt inform Amoroso’s future role as a West Point instructor when he starts next June.

“It’s really important we teach cadets what’s going on in politics, how to engage in politics. But at the same time, how to do their military job with a sensitivity to civil-military relations norms,” Amoroso said. “To put a finer point on it, it’s being politically aware but not partisan.”

Amoroso, a field artillery officer, has spent much of his Army time with the 82nd. As a lieutenant he deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Inherent Resolve and as a captain he commanded the 82nd Airborne Division’s Division Artillery Headquarters Battery.

He is presently assigned to the U.S. Army Student Detachment, out of Fort Jackson, S.C. His return to West Point for a three-year assignment will be special.

“It was a dream for me, even when I was at West Point. I had just the best instructors, and I wanted to come back to do the same thing,” said Amoroso, who grew up near USMA in the Hudson Valley. “My career mentors were teaching in the same department that I’m about to go teach in. Personally, it’s a big deal for me.”

Interested in Taking the Survey?

Amoroso provides the following details:

- Access the survey here: https://virginia.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3eXOYH6srFuLnUi. It will be open through Aug. 9.
- Participation is voluntary. None of the responses will be connected to identifying information.
- The survey will take about 10-15 minutes.
- At the end you can provide an email if you’d like to participate in a follow-on interview.
- The statements and questions included in this study are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, U.S. Military Academy, DoD, or any part of the U.S. government. The University of Virginia maintains no official partnership with MOAA, but we are proud to count Amoroso among our membership. ★

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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!

MOAA Interview: Cmdr. Victor Vescovo, USNR (Ret)

Continued from Page 3...

Despite a firmly land-based background in intelligence and counterterrorism, Vescovo set his sights on the seas and backed the development of a titanium submersible, the DSV *Limiting Factor*, which he has piloted to the deepest points in each of the world's five oceans. Speaking from his home in Dallas, the Texas native shared insights into an explorer's mentality and his latest achievement: surveying a long-lost part of naval history.

Q. Pressure Drop ... Limiting Factor. What's in a name? Tell me the story behind christening your crafts.

A. The names of all my vessels are actually taken from science fiction. One of my favorite science fiction authors was a Scottish author named Iain Banks, and he had a series of novels ... broadly called the *Culture* series. And to make a long story short, some of the main characters are actually artificial intelligence-governed vessels in space. They're enormous. And they are smarter than human beings. And they have very distinct personalities. And they name themselves, and they often give themselves unusual names.

So the names of all my vessels are taken from that series. So, *Pressure Drop*, *Limiting Factor*, *Little Rascal*, *Xenophobe* — those are all names from the series as a bit of an homage to that author. Elon Musk did the same thing for his drone ships that actually received the rockets that land at sea; they are also named after ships from that series.

Q. How did working in military intelligence help you navigate the pain points of an expedition?

A. Planning and executing a military mission is very similar to planning and executing a major mountain climb or a major ocean dive. A lot of it is about intelligence collection on the front end. ... Then there's the planning. As all who have served in the military know, we plan, and then we plan some more, and then we plan even more. The best people in the military are those that can adapt from a plan and take in information in real-time and adjust immediately.

Across all these different things I've done, I've tried to apply those principles, and they've worked pretty well. I very much value my military experience, because it helped prepare me for some of the extreme situations. In the military, the consequences are severe: People die if you make the wrong decisions. In a way, it gives you a good perspective for these other things, where the stakes aren't quite as severe. You don't take it too seriously, and you just work the problem.

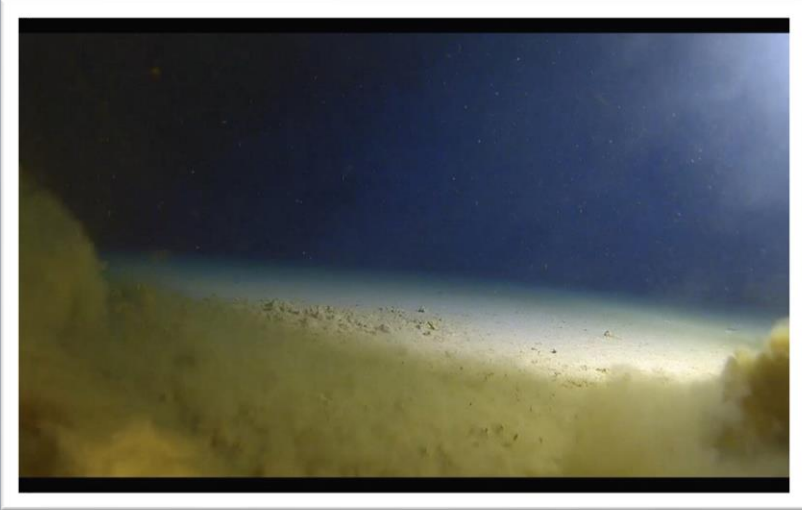
Q. Let's talk about the most striking and stressful things about being on a deep-sea expedition.

A. Obviously, the first time down to the bottom of Challenger Deep [the deepest known point in the Earth's oceans] was pretty special. Technologically, we had all these mathematical models, we've done all this testing that said I should be fine, but until you actually do go down to the bottom of the ocean in a prototype submersible, in the back of your mind there's always something saying, "I hope all the math is right, because even the best engineers in the world can fail." But it did work out well.

Continued on next page ...

MOAA Interview: Cmdr. Victor Vescovo, USNR (Ret)

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The view from the bottom of the Mariana Trench. (Photo by Caladan Oceanic)

So actually reaching the bottom of the ocean that first time was a very special moment. And on that same dive ... within the first 15 minutes, I'm cruising along the bottom, and out of the corner of my eye I saw a very sharp angle. And nature doesn't do sharp angles. Sure enough, there was a piece of human contamination on the bottom of the sea floor, which is really kind of a gut punch. You would expect a completely pristine environment all the way down there, and it wasn't.

So that was a little bit of the world telling me that, you know, we probably need to be better custodians of the Earth that we live on.

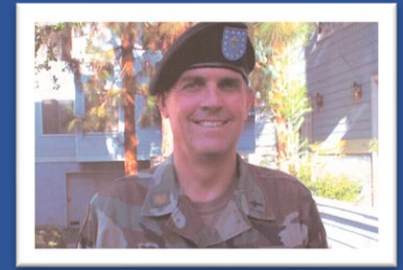
[MORE MOAA INTERVIEWS: [Capt. Dale Dye, USMC \(Ret\)](#) | [Astronaut Col. Shane Kimbrough, USA \(Ret\)](#)]

Q. Even after diving to the five deeps, did locating the wreck of the USS *Johnston* (DD-557) in the Philippine Sea hold special resonance for you?

A. We basically had to do a massive open-source intelligence collection effort to try and figure out where the wreck was. After two unsuccessful dives, we did find the debris field. Then, because the *Limiting Factor* has an unlimited depth rating, we were able to follow it down slope and we found the front two-thirds with that hull number, 557, clear as day, verifying it was indeed the *Johnston* [which had been lost in 1944].

It was very special for me as a Navy officer, because anyone that has studied the Navy history of World War II knows what the USS *Johnston* did under its captain, **Ernest Evans**, was just extraordinary. The first Native American in the Navy to be awarded [posthumously] the Medal of Honor, the man, without hesitation, turned his Fletcher-class destroyer to take on not just the greatest battleship ever constructed, the *Yamato*, but three other battleships and all the other cruisers and destroyers escorting. To find that wreck and to document the condition that it was in was a privilege. ★

Chaplain's Corner...



DUTY, HONOR, COUNTRY

Most of us enjoy reading mystery books or watching mysteries on TV. We get a bit of encouragement when we've figured out the plot and guessed where the author or actors are going with it. Our lives are not a mystery but rather an adventure. Since I will address Honor with this month's Chaplain's Corner the mystery for next month is solved.

Honor is taking the high ground. Soldiers understand immediately how important that is. Honor is the intrinsic motive to address the adventure of our lives with truth in our words and actions. It involves much more than blind loyalty since we keep our eyes wide open to the facts and features of the world around us. God has given us the ability to communicate, live, breathe and act with freedom.

That freedom is not unbridled however. Honor addresses and directs our freedoms. God has also given us the ability to think, feel and respond to our circumstances and conversations. God has emphasized love, kindness and respect in His Scriptures. He spends a great deal of time teaching us to respond with our hearts when determining what to do. Our conscience and our upbringing help show us how to respond with our heart as to what is true, honorable and good.

Once we establish our character of trust, honor and truth that Honor, however, can be lost. A single adverse decision, one impulsive action, a little white lie once discovered will tarnish our character. Granted, many of those indiscretions may be tolerated by others but they are seldom forgotten. God will not tolerate our indiscretions but He does love us with His Unconditional Love and Forgiveness. He holds us accountable, just as our peers and others do. His forgiveness is true and part of His Universal Grace. It is always available. It requires our repentance and our asking for that forgiveness. He accepts that request and forgives us. The problems which arise from our indiscretions with others are not always forgiven by them immediately, if at all.

It takes a lot of courage (and sometimes a lot of guilty feelings) to ask forgiveness from others. When we wrong them, their response is usually frightening as we consider asking their forgiveness. In addressing honor as part of our character requesting forgiveness guides the restoration of that honor. It involves setting our pride, fear and actions aside. This enables restoring truth and honesty as part of our character. We talk a lot about "burying the hatchet". Being brave enough to ask forgiveness from those we have wronged takes not just the courage to bury the hatchet but to give it to the offended party. The risk involved in asking forgiveness of another means the hatchet is in their hands. I am thankful that we are created in the image of God and not that He is in our image.

The bottom line is--Keep your honor intact--but allow God to direct your lives and give you the courage to act and speak and ask forgiveness when your heart directs you to do so.

~ *David Essells, USAR, MAJ, RET*

June Chapter Luncheon Photos

Rudi Lechner's – June 26, 2021



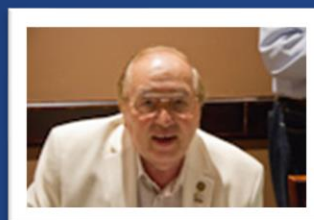
Steve Volkman, Guest Speaker



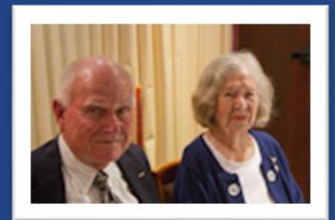
Rob Ritchie



Joe Willoughby



Dan Gutierrez



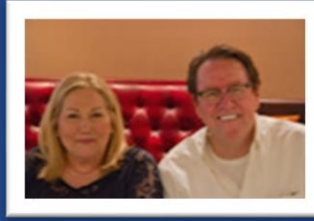
Robert Jayne & Guest



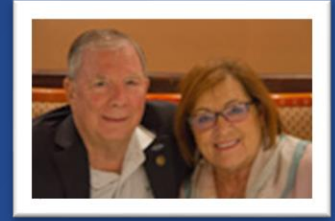
**Rollins & Pat
Collins**



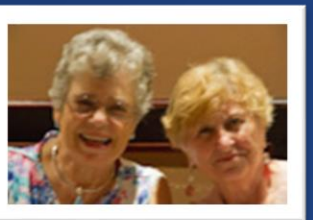
Carol Hebert



Kathy & Richard Frank



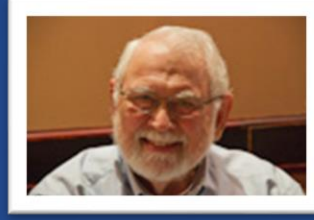
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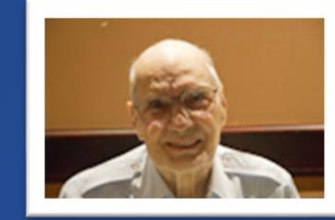
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Chamberlain**



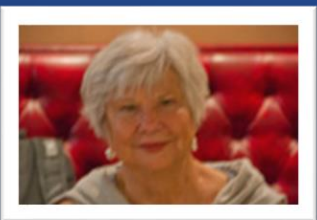
Judith Thomas



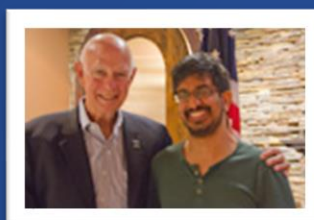
Vernon Gillette



John Brodak



Kay Willoughby



**Dean Solomon
Previous Guest Speaker**



Why a COLA Spike Could Put Retirees' Pay Adjustment at Risk

By: Kevin Lilley
June 30, 2021
IronHeart/Getty Images

Visitors to [MOAA's COLA Watch](#), one of the most-viewed pages at MOAA.org, have seen a skyrocketing graph the last few months. It points to the potential for a large cost-of-living adjustment in future retiree pay, but it also presents an unwelcome opportunity for the erosion of your earned benefits.

First, the graph: The May monthly figure for the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W), released in June, was 4% above the FY 2021 baseline. That's the largest increase above the baseline since MOAA began its current method of tracking the index in 2016 – we even had to change the graph's axis to accommodate the size of the spike.

If that number continues its upward climb to the end of the fiscal year, it could join 2008 (5.8%) and easily surpass 2005 (4.1%) as the largest increases since 1990. And it would mean a significant boost to retiree pay and other benefits indexed to the CPI-W (Social Security, most notably) – but there's a catch.

MOAA has fought an ongoing battle to prevent Congress from altering this equation by either de-linking the retired-pay increase from CPI-W entirely or using some other calculation, such as "[Chained CPI](#)." A significant increase like the one projected would provide a tempting target.

[RELATED: [Here's Why COLA Is a Battlefield for Your Earned Benefits](#)]

Why? Any changes this year could be masked by the increase itself. If the CPI-W dictates a 5% increase, for example, Congress could cut that to 3% and proclaim, accurately, that it had provided the largest retiree pay bump since 2011. That may seem significant to those outside the uniformed services community, but retirees would see an immediate erosion in their earned benefit – their retired pay would not keep pace with rising prices, and their quality of life could suffer.

MOAA's Response

It falls to MOAA and other veterans advocacy groups to remind Congress of the impact these decisions make immediately on individuals ... and the even more pronounced impact they have when compounded over time. While shaving 2 percentage points may not seem significant, especially as lawmakers deal with other budget issues and a rising debt, it could mean hundreds or thousands of dollars per year less than a military retiree had budgeted – and had earned through service.

MOAA continues its work on the Hill to drive this point home with lawmakers and their staffs. In addition to monthly updates at [MOAA.org/colawatch](#), visit MOAA's [Advocacy News page](#) for any news on this and other issues critical to your benefits. ★

TRICARE Pharmacy Reforms: How MOAA Is Working to Improve Your Coverage

By: Karen Ruedisueli – April 28, 2021

The TRICARE benefit should protect military families with comprehensive health care coverage. That is why MOAA continues efforts to improve how TRICARE deals with Tier 4/non-covered drugs.

Recently, MOAA has urged the Defense Health Agency (DHA) to re-evaluate Dexilant as a Tier 4 drug and has asked Congress to require an appeals process for drugs excluded from TRICARE coverage.

TRICARE used to cover all Food and Drug Administration-approved medications, placing them in one of three tiers – Generic, Brand Name and Non-Formulary – with varying copays for beneficiaries. Now, drugs the DHA categorizes as “Tier 4/non-covered” are excluded from coverage under TRICARE – they aren’t covered at retail pharmacies or through the TRICARE Pharmacy Home Delivery program, and they cannot be obtained at military treatment facility (MTF) pharmacies.

[MORE ABOUT TRICARE: MOAA’s 2020-21 TRICARE Guide]

What is the origin of this TRICARE pharmacy program change? Congress included a provision in the FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act allowing the DoD Pharmacy and Therapeutics (P&T) Committee, which resides in the DHA, to identify drugs to be excluded from TRICARE coverage. The P&T Committee may recommend, and the DHA director may approve, exclusion of a drug determined to provide very little or no clinical effectiveness.

While DHA has categorized relatively few drugs as Tier 4, MOAA believes there is already one drug – Dexilant – that has been moved to Tier 4 in a way that does not align with congressional intent to limit Tier 4 drugs to those with little to no clinical effectiveness.

Dexilant is a proton pump inhibitor indicated for the treatment of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and the maintenance of healed erosive esophagitis. Approximately 19,000 TRICARE beneficiaries were taking Dexilant when it was moved to non-covered status.

[IS YOUR PRESCRIPTION COVERED? Check TRICARE’s Formulary]

Since Dexilant was moved to Tier 4, we have heard from numerous MOAA members and other TRICARE beneficiaries about how this decision has negatively impacted them. Most tried other prescription and non-prescription alternatives that have not worked as well as Dexilant or have left symptoms unchecked.

MOAA research suggests TRICARE’s non-coverage of Dexilant is out of step with commercial plans and other government payers. According to Dexilant’s manufacturer, Takeda Pharmaceuticals, Dexilant is covered by approximately 80% of commercial plans, 70% of Medicare Part D plans, 70% of fee-for-service Medicaid and 45% of managed Medicaid plans.

We have provided beneficiary feedback and coverage comparisons to DHA and urged officials to restore Dexilant to the TRICARE formulary. The P&T Committee included a reassessment of Dexilant coverage on its February 2021 agenda; we are waiting to learn the results of that meeting.

Coverage Appeals

Charges for Tier 4/non-covered drugs do not count against the catastrophic cap, exposing TRICARE beneficiaries to unlimited financial risk from non-covered prescription drugs. In addition to pushing for Dexilant to be reinstated to the TRICARE formulary, we have urged Congress to require an appeals process that would allow TRICARE beneficiaries to make the



Photo by Airman 1st Class
Marcus M. Bullock/Air Force

Continued on next Page...

TRICARE Pharmacy Reforms *Continued from previous page...*

to make the case for coverage of Tier 4 drugs because of medical necessity.

We believe DHA has the authority to implement an appeals process, so legislation may not be necessary. We continue to advance this issue with DHA and the Armed Services Committee staff in both chambers to achieve an appeals process for Tier 4 drugs.

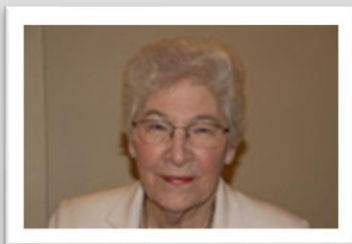
At a minimum, TRICARE coverage should align with that of high-quality commercial plans. The extraordinary challenges and sacrifices associated with military service should earn a comprehensive health care benefit. We will continue our efforts to ensure TRICARE beneficiaries are protected from unexpected coverage gaps.

MOAA is tracking member communications on Tier 4 and using them to drive advocacy efforts. Are you taking a drug that has been moved to Tier 4/non-covered status? Please share your experience at legis@moaa.org. ★



Surviving Spouse Corner

Judith Thomas
Surviving Spouse MOAA Liaison
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Sunday, July 4, 2021

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