

April Social

On April 27th, The Chapter came together and listened to our guest speaker, Cmdr. Stacey Mersel (USCG), the Deputy Sector Commander for United States Coast Guard Sector.



Cmdr. Mersel discussed the challenges associated with the largest sector in the Coast Guard and

reviewed the subordinate units and missions for which she and the Sector are responsible. (Safety, public welfare, environmental, search and rescue, port security, vessel oversight, etc.)



We are so appreciative of her taking the time to discuss the Coast Guard's wide ranging responsibilities with the Chapter!

May Social

The President of MOAA, LtGen Dana Atkins, USAF (Ret) will join us at our May Social. LtGen Atkins active duty posting was Alaskan Command, Alaska NORAD Region, Joint Task Force Alaska

and 11th Air Force at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska.

- Date: May 25
- Day: Thursday
- Time: 6 p.m.
- Location: Coast International Inn.

Please mark on your calendar and look for our invite (to be out in the next week or so) to join us in welcoming LtGen Atkins back to Alaska!

Storming The Hill

The Captain Cook Chapter again participated in the annual Storming The Hill event hosted by MOAA National.



We are fortunate to have representatives very supportive of military issues and we were able to meet personally with Senator Murkowski and Congressman Young, as well as with Senator Sullivan's staff.



This year, MOAA presented three issues (although there are always many potential issues to discuss, they limit it to three to avoid information overload and to maximize retention). These issues are briefly discussed below:

➤ *End Sequestration & Its Harmful Defense Cuts*

The return of sequestration in FY 2018 will force billions in cuts from DoD's budget even as threats in Iraq, Syria, North Korea, China and Russia pose increasing threats to our national security.

The 2011 Budget Control Act cut \$500B from defense. Following the already-agreed-upon \$487B cuts proposed by the Pentagon, the total impact would be \$987,000,000,000 (~\$1T).

Defense leaders have categorically stated that sequestration threatens pay, benefits, & end strength, putting our national security at risk.



If sequestration returns, it will require dramatic cuts that DoD cannot afford. Services have been forced to reduce flying hours, cancel deployment of ships and reduce force structure during this time of war.

In the past few years DOD has sought cost reductions in personnel and health care accounts, and then the unthinkable happened: the Budget Control Act capped budgets significantly lower than already steep reductions.

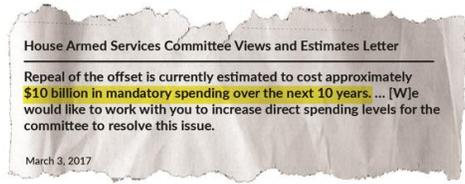
Debt reduction is a national priority, but MOAA does not believe the nation should balance the budget on backs of troops and families.

➤ *Eliminate the "Widows Tax" (SBP-DIC Offset)*

The Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) is a DoD insurance-like benefit purchased by retirees which provides a portion of retired pay upon retiree's death. There is automatic coverage in the event of active duty death. Retired pay stops when the service member dies.

Dependency & Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is a VA benefit paid when service caused the death of the member (which can happen shortly or years after retirement). A flat payment (about \$15,000/yr) is made for all grades.

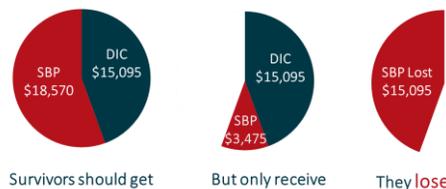
Current law requires deduction of DIC from SBP, which typically wipes out most or all of SBP. Approximately 63,000 survivors are affected by the governing laws – those most affected by our nation's wars. The cost to correct this legal oversight to our nation would be ~\$1B per year.



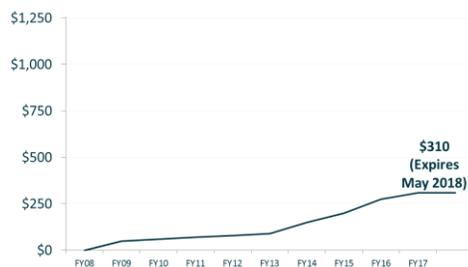
The Veterans' Disability Benefits Commission found the two benefits are paid for different reasons:

- 1) SBP: Member purchased insurance
- 2) DIC: Indemnity payment for service-caused death

DIC Should be added to SBP, not subtracted from it!



As partial compensation, Congress passed the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) which compensates \$310/month of the offset, but is due to expire in May of 2018.



MOAA's position is that we should fully repeal the SBP-DIC offset. At a minimum and absent full repeal, we should extend current SSIA benefits with incremental increases to assist affected survivors. Increases need to eventually equate to the offset, thus paving the way for repeal.

An SSIA extension would cost significantly less, than full elimination of the Widow's Tax. It would cost roughly \$250M/yr to extend SSIA at the \$310/mo level plus an additional \$75M/yr for every \$100/mo more.

MOAAs request was to ask legislators to sponsor and support the following legislation:

- 1) Representative Joe Wilson's Bill: H.R. 846
- 2) Senator Bill Nelson's Bill: S. 339



Storming The Hill Issue Working Group

➤ *Oppose Disproportional TriCare Fee Hikes*

The 2017 NDAA launched sweeping reforms for TRICARE and the Military Health System. Many of these reforms have resulted in new fees for beneficiaries. As in previous years, we

expect DoD will continue to try and get beneficiaries to pay more.

Our (MOAA) position is that the current fee structure is fair in value, and that the proportion of costs borne by beneficiaries and the cost absorbed by the government is fair. The current system considers the extended service and sacrifice of the currently serving and career force and their families.

MOAA believes that beneficiaries' fees should not rise faster than does their compensation, and that the annual percentage fee increase should not exceed the annual retired pay COLA percentage.

We were very gratified at the familiarity of the legislators and their staff with these important issues and are very appreciative of the time they spent with us as well as their obvious concern during our discussions.

Defense News

US, Iraq discussing long-term US presence: The US and Iraq are discussing the possibility of keeping several thousand US troops in Iraq after the fight with the Islamic State concludes, officials say. The talks reportedly are in the early stages. The Associated Press (5/5)

Russian bombers accompanied by fighter jets intercepted by US near Alaska: For the first time since 2014, US fighter jets this week intercepted two Russian bombers accompanied by

a pair of Russian fighter jets off the coast of Alaska. Recent interceptions in the international air space near Alaska have been of unaccompanied bombers. The Hill (5/4)

House health care bill's potential impact on veterans unclear: It's unclear how the health care bill passed by the House on Thursday would affect veterans, with Republicans saying it would have little impact while Democrats say it could threaten their access to medical care. The battle over health care reform now moves to the Senate. Military Times (tiered subscription model) (5/4)

Scaparrotti: More troops needed in Europe as Russia deterrent: More US troops are needed in Europe to counter aggressive moves by Russia, according to US European Command chief Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti. "In order to have the posture that is both credible and of the right composition, we need more armored forces ... to make sure that we do have a force of enough size that enables us to deter Russia," he said in testimony before a Senate appropriations subcommittee. The Hill (5/2)

Defense spending boost increases US lead over other nations in military funding: Military spending got a big boost in a budget compromise discussed Tuesday by President Donald Trump and Republican leaders. The

resolution gives the Defense Department an additional \$25 billion, stretching US defense spending far beyond that of any other country. CNBC (5/2)

House, Senate bills look to shorten VA appeal wait times: The House and Senate are considering measures that would speed up the VA appeals process. Both bills look to streamline the process veterans have to go through to appeal VA benefits decisions, which currently takes an average of five years. Military Times (5/2), The Hill (5/2)

Missile defenses need to be fortified, admiral says: The US needs to strengthen its missile defense systems as tensions rise over North Korea and its growing weapons capabilities, US Pacific Command chief Adm. Harry Harris says. "We have to look at North Korea as if Kim Jong Un will do what he says," he said in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee. The Hill (4/26)

Accountability office created at VA: An executive order signed by President Donald Trump has established the Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection at the VA. "With the creation of this office, we are sending a strong message: Those who fail our veterans will be held, for the first time, accountable," Trump said. The Associated Press (4/27)

Nearly 6,000 troops to deploy to Europe, Afghanistan: The Army will send more than 5,700 troops to Europe and Afghanistan in the next few months. Most will head to Europe in the fall as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve, while about 1,700 troops will be deployed to Afghanistan in the summer. Army Times (4/27)

US test-launches unarmed ICBM in California: An unarmed Minuteman III ballistic missile was test-launched today at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. Such launches are important in demonstrating US nuclear capabilities, said 30th Space Wing Commander Col. John Moss. CBS News/The Associated Press (4/26), The Hill (4/25)

Physiological incidents spur review of T-45, F/A-18 jets: The Navy has ordered a 30-day review of incidents involving T-45 and F/A-18 jets, saying pilots have experienced physiological episodes while flying them. AIN Online (4/25)

Bills seek to expand telehealth services for veterans: A bipartisan group of lawmakers has reintroduced bills to expand telehealth services for veterans. "We should continue to find new ways to connect veterans with the providers that they need, no matter their physical location," said Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif., a sponsor of the House bill. Military Times (4/25)

Medal of Honor

Sergeant Dakota Louis Meyer, USMC



Sgt. Meyer deployed to Fallujah, Iraq, in 2007 as a scout sniper with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions in Afghanistan during his second deployment in Kunar Province with Embedded Training Team. On September 8, 2009, near the village of Ganjgal, Meyer learned that three Marines and a Navy corpsman, who were members of Meyer's squad and his friends, were missing after being ambushed by a group of insurgents. Under enemy fire, Meyer entered an area known to be inhabited by insurgents and eventually found the four missing servicemen dead and stripped of their weapons, body armor and radios. With the help of Afghan soldiers, he moved the bodies to a safer area where they could be extracted. During his search, Meyer "personally evacuated 12 friendly wounded and provided cover for another 24 Marines and soldiers to escape likely death at the hands of a numerically superior and determined foe." Sgt. Meyer is the second youngest living Medal of Honor recipient, the third living recipient for either Operation Iraqi Freedom or

Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan and the first living Marine in 38 years to be so honored.

2016/17 Calendar of Events

General dates of interest are noted below. Membership meetings are generally on the 4th Thursday of each month except as noted.

May 25: Dinner Social
 Jun 14: Army Birthday
 Aug 4: Coast Guard Birthday
 Sep 18: Air Force Birthday
 Sep 21: MOAA First Dinner of Season
 Oct 13: Navy Birthday
 Oct 26: Dinner Social
 Nov 10: Marine Corps Birthday
 Dec 1#: Christmas Social
 Jan 25 (2018): Dinner Social TBD
 Feb 22: ASYMCA Salute to the Military
 Mar 2#: Dinner Social
 April ##-##: MOAA Storming the Hill
 Apr 2#: Dinner Social

Contact Information

Please share this newsletter with active duty, Guard, Reservist and retired Officers you know and encourage them to join. Contact information below:

- E-mail: c2burton@gci.net
- Phone: (907)570-1027
- Address: 1143 M Ct.
Anchorage, AK 99501
- Annual chapter dues: \$25; on or about January of each year, on-line payment may be made at <https://chapterdues.moaa.org/Membership.aspx> or a check payable to Captain Cook Chapter.
- Chapter site: www.MOAA-AK.COM



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