



The Santa Fe Trail Scout  
 Santa Fe Trail Chapter  
 Military Officers Association of America  
*Serving the Military Community of Leavenworth County and Vicinity in Kansas*

Chapter Newsletter Number 2005-3

June 2005

**VA DISABILITY COMMISSION GEARS UP**

Nearly two years ago, defense bill conferees agreed to establish the Veterans Disability Benefits Commission in connection with their approval of concurrent receipt legislation. It is chartered with studying VA benefits that “compensate and assist veterans and their survivors for disabilities and deaths attributed to military service.”

The Commission held its first meeting on 9-10 May 2005. Of the 13 members of the commission, seven must hold a valor decoration of the Silver Star or higher. To date, 11 members have been appointed. The panel is chaired by Lt. Gen. James T. Short, USA-Retired.

The commission must report to the president and Congress with 15 months of its first meeting. In conducting its work the group will evaluate and assess the laws and regulations that determine eligibility for disability and death benefits; assess compensation rates for such benefits based on average impairment of earning capacity; and compare federal disability benefits with those provided by state governments and the private sector.

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**SANTA FE TRAIL CHAPTER MOAA**

**VOLUNTEERS**

**IF YOU ARE WILLING TO VOLUNTEER FOR THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMS PLEASE PUT YOUR NAME BELOW OR E-MAIL THE CHAPTER SECRETARY AT “ROBERTA664@YAHOO.COM” OR MAIL THIS TO COL BOB ATKINS 421 OSAGE, LEAVENWORTH 66048 OR CALL BOB AT 913-772-8176.**

**INTERNATIONAL OFFICER SPONSOR** \_\_\_\_\_

**SCHOLARSHIP ASSISTANT** \_\_\_\_\_

**CGSC STUDENT DINNER SPONSOR** \_\_\_\_\_

**BLOCK CAPTAIN FOR RIVERFEST (10 SEP)**\_\_\_\_\_

**JROTC POC**\_\_\_\_\_

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**OPERATION INTERNATIONAL**

"Operation International is a program of the Leavenworth-Lansing Area Chamber of Commerce. This program fosters international understanding and creates a rich cultural diversity by providing civilian sponsors for the international officers attending the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Operation International's goal today remains as clear and simple as it was when first founded in 1952: to provide a warm welcome to the international officers and their families on their arrival in the Leavenworth-Lansing community and to sustain that hospitality throughout their year with us. As a volunteer effort Operation International sponsors benefit greatly from the cultural exchange provided; often finding the beginning of lifelong friendships with their sponsored international officer. Anyone interested in the sponsorship program, please contact Connie Brown, 913-682-1355 or [lu@kc.rr.com](mailto:lu@kc.rr.com). We need your support.

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**JULY 19 DINNER MEETING**

Santa Fe Trail Chapter, MOAA, meets for dinner on 19 June 2005 at the Leavenworth Country Club, 455 W. Eisenhower Road, Lansing. Hospitality begins at 6:00 PM, dinner at 7:00 PM. Our entertainment for the evening will be provided by Mr. Bill Worley, a well known impersonator of famous people.

Please make your reservations with menu choices and check payments to Treasurer Stan Johnson, 1101 Holman, Leavenworth, KS 66048, by not later than 15 July 2005.

**If you have not paid your 2005 dues please add \$15.00 with meal payments.**

The following menu choices are available: (1) Chicken salad, Pasta Salad and Egg Salad: \$18.00. (2) Shrimp Salad, Pasta Salad and Egg Salad: \$18.00, Gratuity included. All: Soup: Consommé Madrilène; Dessert: Sorbet. Drinks: Coffee, Ice Tea.

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**FROM THE KANSAS COUNCIL PRESIDENT**

Your Kansas Council held its second quarter meeting on June 18, 2005 at Fort Riley, Kansas. We had a very good meeting and had a special guest with us for the day, Colonel Jim Pauls, Deputy Director of Council/Chapter Affairs, MOAA National in Alexandria, Virginia. The meeting was hosted by the Flint Hills Chapter with the meeting being held in the Conference Center on Fort Riley. We had an excellent presentation to open the meeting about Fort Riley's current status and what is anticipated

in the future what with all the realignment that will be taking place over the next couple of years. Kansas has a lot of good things happening as it pertains to military build-up at both Fort Riley and Fort Leavenworth. We will be visiting this subject more in the near future.

Colonel Pauls gave a presentation on a new membership drive that MOAA National will be conducting in the fall of this year. The membership at National has been on the decrease over the past couple of years for various reasons. If our organization is to maintain its position as the strongest military lobbying group in Washington, D.C., we must keep our membership on the increase. It is primarily due to the efforts of MOAA that the increased benefits we have received were enacted. Those of us who benefit from TriCare for Life can thank the efforts primarily of MOAA. National MOAA is asking each chapter to recruit at least 10 new members for National. If you are reading this article and are not a member of National MOAA please consider joining the National organization. It will be the best \$24 you ever spent. You will be hearing more about the program from your Chapter as more details become available. Of course, getting new members for the National organization will also, for the most part, result, in new members for each of our Chapters. Let's see if we can put Kansas over the top and start our recruiting efforts now.

I am very excited about a new initiative the Council approved at our meeting. Our webmaster, CWO-3 David Kennedy, USMC, Ret made a presentation about the design of an independent Kansas Council website. Our Council will have its own website, separate and apart from using the MOAA National site. This web page will provide anyone who visits the site the information they need to become a member of any one of our Chapters. We will provide links to all our Chapter websites and provide them with information about who to contact for additional information. It will also provide us a tool for passing out information to our membership throughout the state and become a place for legislative alerts. Dave is working on getting the website on line and we will notify all the Chapters when it is activated. Once this site is up and running we hope all of you will visit the site and please let us know what you think of it.

All our Chapters are doing exciting things and becoming more vibrant all the time. There are still many more things to accomplish especially for those serving on active duty and in the Guard and Reserve. We do need to try and enlist more of those folks into our Chapters. It is just great to hear at our meetings all the different things that our Chapters are involved in and it provides the opportunity for all our Chapters to exchange ideas.

Our next Council meeting will be hosted by the Santa Fe Trail Chapter, Leavenworth, Kansas and we all look forward to another exciting gathering.

Harry Malnicof  
Major USMC(Ret)  
President, Kansas Council

## MOAA SANTA FE TRAIL CHAPTER 2005

### Calendar

(As of 24 June 2005)

19 July 2005	Chapter Dinner, 1800, Guest entertainer, Country Club
13 August 2005	Pair Day, Fort Leavenworth
13 August 2005	Kansas Council of Chapters Meeting, Fort Leavenworth, 1100
25 August 2005	BOD Luncheon, 1130, Village Square
10 September 2005	Riverfest Block Captains, Leavenworth Main Street, 0600
20 September 2005	Chapter Dinner, 1800, (Guest Speaker), Country Club
27 October 2005	BOD Luncheon, 1130, Village Square
15 November 2005	Chapter Dinner, 1800, Elections/awards/2005 wrap up/2006 plans

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A banner for MOAA featuring the organization's logo on the left, which includes the text "MOAA Military Officers Association of America One Powerful Voice®". To the right of the logo is a photograph of the United States Capitol building. Overlaid on the right side of the banner is the text "Legislative Update" in a large, white, sans-serif font. At the top left of the banner is a dark blue bar with the text "MOAA Home Page" in yellow, and at the top right is a red bar with the text "Join MOAA" in yellow.

**June 24, 2005**

[Issue 1: Senate Defense Bill Stalled.](#)

It may be after mid-July before the Senate takes up the FY2006 Defense Authorization Act and possible SBP, concurrent receipt and Reserve health care improvements.

[Issue 2: DoD Finalizing SBP Open Season Guidance.](#)

MOAA has learned some early details on how DoD plans to give retirees options to enroll in or upgrade SBP coverage now that Congress has significantly improved SBP by phasing out the age-62 "widows tax."

### Issue 3: VA Admits \$1B Vets Budget Shortfall.

Congressional leaders of both parties are upset at learning the Administration's budget submission for VA health care is \$1 billion less than required to maintain current health services.

### Issue 4: House OKs Flag Amendment.

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives voted to approve a constitutional amendment that would allow Congress to ban desecration of the U.S. flag.

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## **Issue 1: Senate Defense Bill Stalled**

Senate leadership concerns over the potential for a long list of contentious amendments has led them to delay action on the FY2006 Defense Authorization Act (S. 1042) until at least mid-July.

The defense bill frequently attracts more than 200 amendments, but senators' concerns over base realignment and closure (BRAC) issues created heightened concerns that protracted debate over BRAC amendments could tie up the Senate for an extended period. In the past, leaders have sought an agreement to limit amendments before bringing the bill to the floor.

Even knowledgeable staffers were reluctant to say when the Senate leaders may agree to bring the bill up for action. In response to MOAA's request for a "best guess," one staffer offered, "My ouija board, which may be wrong, says the week of July 19."

The delay means House and Senate leaders probably won't even start working out the differences between their respective bills until shortly before the month-long August recess. Considering that they haven't finished the Defense bill until December in three of the last four years, anyway, it's hard to say how much the current delay will affect the bill's final enactment.

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## **Issue 2: DoD Finalizing SBP Open Season Guidance**

MOAA has learned that the Pentagon's Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) open season implementation plan is nearly ready and hopefully will be available to the public in late July. The open season –which will begin October 1, 2005 and last through September 30, 2006 – will give non-enrolled retirees a chance to enroll and provide their spouses a significantly improved SBP benefit. Legislation approved last year (which also authorized the open season) will phase out the current SBP age-62 benefit reduction by April 2008 – effectively providing lifetime SBP annuities of 55% of covered retired pay.

Official publicity will be primarily through uniformed service retiree newsletters and the Armed Forces Information Service. Notices will also be included with retirees' December retired pay statements and in the DFAS newsletter that accompanies the statement. MOAA and other Military Coalition associations will also spread the word in our

publications and Web sites.

During the one-year open season, current non-participants will be able to elect any coverage they could have elected when previously eligible (generally on retirement from the active force or after receiving a Reserve 20-year retirement letter). Those currently participating in SBP at less than maximum levels may increase their coverage. The exception is that previous SBP participants who exercised an option to terminate SBP enrollment will not be allowed to re-enroll.

Open season enrollees will have to pay all back premiums from the date of retirement plus interest, either as lump sum or in 24 monthly installments. Members will also begin paying the same monthly premiums they would have been paying at this point if they had enrolled in SBP when first eligible.

Open enrollment fee amounts are currently being finalized. Members who enroll during the open season and pay the back premiums and interest will receive credit toward 30-year paid-up SBP coverage as if they had enrolled when first eligible.

To enroll, members must apply by filling out a hard copy form that will be available on the DoD Web site (the site location is not yet available). The Defense Department is developing a calculator to help open-season enrollees figure their individual buy-in fees and monthly premiums.

Service personnel officials will be provided with the calculator, and Retiree Activity Offices at bases and stations will receive instruction on the new enrollment process. Spousal concurrence will not be required for open season enrollment in most cases, since any change is an upgrade over what the spouse has now. However, Reserve Component SBP elections for anything less than full and immediate coverage will require written spousal concurrence.

The effective date of enrollment will be the first day of the first month after the date DFAS receives the open season enrollment application. DFAS will notify the member to confirm the effective date of the election, the buy-in cost and the prospective monthly premiums. Members will have 30 days from the date on the DFAS notification letter to change their minds and cancel the election, if they choose.

To guard against "death-bed" enrollments, applicants will have to survive and pay premiums for 24 months for the survivor to receive SBP coverage. If the member dies before the end of 24 months, all paid premiums and the enrollment fee will be refunded. MOAA will provide further details once the Pentagon finalizes and releases the open season form, instructions, and fee schedules.

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### **Issue 3: VA Admits \$1B Vets Budget Shortfall**

Earlier this year, House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee chairmen resisted calls by Democrats and veterans' groups for significantly bigger plus-ups in veterans' health care funding, after receiving repeated assurances by VA leaders that such extra

increases weren't needed.

This week, all of those leaders had egg on their faces when Secretary of Veterans Affairs R. James Nicholson acknowledged that mistakes in budget preparation actually left the VA budget \$1 billion short of the amount needed to continue current VA health services.

Fortunately, Congress still has time to fix the shortfall. Although the House already has passed its version of the FY2006 Veterans/Quality of Life Appropriations Bill, the Senate is still working on its counterpart bill. Leaders in both chambers indicated their intent to get it fixed.

House Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Steve Buyer (R-IN) called for quick action to determine the real funding needs, and Senate Committee Chairman Larry Craig said, "We in Congress must fix this financial problem."

The acknowledgement was vindication for military and veterans groups and others who had complained that the budget submission wasn't sufficient to meet veterans' needs.

Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), an Appropriations Committee member who led efforts to add \$1.9 billion in extra VA funding, was particularly critical at a Thursday news conference, asserting that the Administration was reluctant to make the sacrifices necessary to meet health care commitments to veterans. Significantly, Chairman Craig appeared with her at the conference and agreed with many of her criticisms of the VA budget development process.

Hopefully, Hill leaders of both parties will now step up to the plate and ensure the VA gets the needed funding increase.

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## **Issue 4: House OKs Flag Amendment**

On Wednesday, the House voted 286-130 to approve a constitutional amendment (H.J. Res. 10, sponsored by Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham, R-CA) that would allow Congress to pass a law banning physical desecration of the U.S. Flag.

The House has passed similar resolutions four previous times over the years, but each time the Senate has failed to approve the measure by the required two-thirds vote. Last year, the Senate did not vote on the measure.

A similar amendment in the Senate, S.J. Res. 12, sponsored by Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT), is currently under review in the Senate Judiciary Committee. The committee plans to hold a hearing after the July Fourth recess. It's uncertain whether, after the last election, supporters have gained the necessary 67 favorable votes in the Senate. Previous votes all came up several short of that requirement. If approved by the Senate, the measure would then have to be ratified by three quarters of the states (38) within seven years to become part of the Constitution.

MOAA, based on a resolution approved by more than 90% of our membership, supports

House and Senate approval of the proposed Flag amendment so that the issue may be referred to the states, where the people can make the final decision on the issue.

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**SANTA FE TRAIL CHAPTER  
THE MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA**

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP & INFORMATION CHANGE FORM

**Mail to: LTC Stanley Johnson, 1101 Holman, Leavenworth, KS 66048**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enroll Me as a New Regular Member   | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Address or Information change ONLY</u>    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enroll Me as a New Auxiliary Member | <input type="checkbox"/> <u>Dues payment &amp; Information Update</u> |

Please print or type

Dues \$15.00 per year

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Last Name	First Name	Middle	Grade	Name of Spouse

_____	_____	_____
Street Address	Apt. #	Phone Number

_____	_____	_____	_____
City	State	Zip + 4	SSN/Service Number

**PLEASE CHECK APPROPRIATE BOXES:**

**STATUS**

**SERVICE**

Member of National MOAA?     Yes     No

If YES, your card number, please: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's Grade (If Widow(er)): \_\_\_\_\_

Your Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_

Active Duty: from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

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

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_ (if applicable)

- Active Officer
- Retired Officer
- Former Officer
- Widow(er)

- Male
- Female

- Army
- Navy
- Air Force
- Marine Corps
- Coast Guard
- NOAA
- Pub Health Service