



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

Chapter Newsletter Number 2006-2

April 2006

CHAPTER PRESIDENT CORNER:

On 27 April we held a very useful Board of Directors luncheon meeting. The main topic was to compile a list of worthy organizations to which the chapter can make donations each year if funds are available. We're not a big money making organization, but by the end of each year we have some money (hundreds not thousands) which we could donate to worthy organizations. We will finalize the list at the October BOD and report out our list at the November dinner. If any of you have ideas in this area, contact me or any BOD member between now and the 26 Oct BOD luncheon meeting.

On 11 May I will present the MOAA medal and certificate to one of this year's outstanding JROTC cadets. That cadet and his parents will be introduced at our 16 May dinner. We did this last year and would like it to become an annual event in support of young men and women in our community.

It's time to finalize our annual chapter merit award submission. We will be mentioning our support of Retiree Day, Pare Day, MOAA Scholarships, MOAA Travel, MOAA Financial Planning, the Kansas Council of Chapters, "Give Me 10" member recruiting, bi-monthly dinners and BOD meetings, newsletters, Leavenworth Main Street, museum tours, international officer sponsorship, MOAA magazine articles, JROTC, legislative affairs and membership sustainment. It was a busy year in 2005 and remains busy in 2006.

Thanks for your support. Rich Keller

**MOAA Santa Fe Trail Chapter Calendar for 2006
(as of 30 April 2006)**

- 16 May 06: Chapter Dinner, 1800, Leavenworth Country Club.
Guest Speaker will be Mr. Mike Smith, City Administrator,
Lansing, KS
- 22 Jun 06: BOD Luncheon, 1130, Village Square
- 18 July 06: Chapter Dinner, 1800, Guest Speaker, Leavenworth Country Club
- 24 Aug 06: BOD Luncheon, 1130, Village Square
- 19 Sep 06: Chapter Dinner, 1800, Guest Speaker, Leavenworth Country Club
- 26 Oct 06: BOD Luncheon, 1130, Village Square
- 21 Nov 06: Chapter Dinner, 1800, Elections/awards/2006 Wrap Up/2007 Plans
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Santa Fe Trail Chapter, MOAA, meets for dinner on 16 May 2006 at the Leavenworth Country Club, 455 W. Eisenhower Road, Lansing. Hospitality begins at 6:00 PM; dinner at 7:00 PM. Our speaker for the evening will be Mr. Mike Smith, City Administrator of the City of Lansing.

Please make your reservations with menu choices and check payments to Treasurer Stan Johnson, 1101 Holman, Leavenworth, KS 66048, by not later than 12 May 2006. **If you have not paid your 2006 dues, please add \$15.00 with meal payments.**

Menu (1): Broiled Shrimp w/Eggplant Packet - \$21.00
Menu (2): Spicy Pork Stew w/ Squash Medley - \$18.00

For all: Cucumber Soup and Lemon Tart dessert.
Prices include gratuity. Drinks: Coffee, Ice Tea.

We value your presence. Robert Atkins, Chapter Secretary



MOAA News Exchange

April 26, 2006

[MOAA Offers Free Career Fair](#)

Active duty, former, and retired officers and enlisted servicemembers and their spouses are invited to attend MOAA's free Career Fair on Tuesday, May 2, 2006. Representatives and hiring managers from more than 180 companies in the Washington, D.C., area will be there, and they're anxious to talk to you.

MOAA Career Resources

- [Career Center](#)
- [Career Fairs](#)
- [Today's Officer Magazine Career Information](#)
- [Résumé Critiques, Personal Career Counseling](#)

[Cancer Survivor Hikes to Raise Money for Scholarship Program](#)

Col. Brad Smith, USA, a cancer survivor, plans to hike the Appalachian Trail this summer and fall to raise \$1 million for the American Patriot Scholarship Program.

[Home Sale Savvy](#)

How much do you know about taxes that apply to home sales? MOAA's CFP, Phil Dyer, explains three criteria that can save taxpayers big bucks — if you meet them.

[10 Web Sites Every Military Spouse Should Know](#)

Military spouses often find themselves having to know a little something about practically everything at any given time.

[Virtual Commissary Expands Product Selection](#)

The months of May through July are full of gifting opportunities. The Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) has just made it easier for shoppers to purchase and ship gifts from the comfort of their homes.

[Rock Lobster](#)

A group of pilots in Vietnam longs for good food from home. So one of them embarks on a daring search and recovery mission to find the main ingredient of an American favorite.

Healthcare

[Health Fees Up \\$1,000?](#) Administration and Defense leaders are seeking to impose large health care fee increases on military retirees and families. Read why the plan is unfair and unwise, and find out what you can do.

Member Offer

[MOAA Exchange](#)
MOAA has a new easy-access online store. Visit the MOAA Exchange today!

Interactive

[Discussions](#)
Learn from each other. Share your ideas, thoughts, and experiences on MOAA Councils and Chapters, career transitions, National Guard/Reserve time, and other topics.



Legislative Update

April 28, 2006

[Subcommittee Would Hike Pay, Not Fees.](#)

The House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee defense bill draft would stop most health fee increases, and increase manpower and pay raises, among other things.

[Gregg Amendment Cuts \\$1.9 Billion from Military Personnel.](#)

This week, the Senate approved a proposal to pay for Homeland Defense improvements by cutting almost two billion dollars from military personnel programs in the Iraq/hurricane supplemental appropriations bill.

[Committee Examines "Financial Friendly Fire."](#)

This week, a House hearing focused on the impact of Army overpayments and subsequent debt collection actions on servicemembers and their families.

[MOAA Hosts VA, DFAS Discussion of Survivor Issues.](#)

Representatives from the VA and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service met with MOAA this week to discuss ways to ease problems of survivors affected by deduction of VA benefits from Survivor Benefit Plan payments.

Subcommittee Would Hike Pay, Not Fees

On April 26, the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. John McHugh (R-NY), offered Congress's first formal response to the Pentagon's plan to significantly raise TRICARE fees for retirees and survivors under age 65, starting this fall.

That response was a resounding "no."

The subcommittee approved legislative provisions that would bar any increases in fees for TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Standard or TRICARE Reserve Select (the new coverage for drilling Guard and Reserve members and families) at least through the end of 2007.

The Defense Department's budget proposal for FY2007 envisions raising retired officers' TRICARE Prime enrollment fees by 200% and total fees for TRICARE Standard by nearly 300% over the next two years, with somewhat smaller increases for retired enlisted members. Earlier this year, the Pentagon raised TRICARE Reserve Select premiums by

8.5%, and planned similar annual increases in the future.

Chairman McHugh said the subcommittee was unanimous in believing the DoD-proposed fee hikes were too much, too fast. The panel proposed convening a special commission to review health care cost growth and alternative options to hold down costs and avoid such large cost-share increases for beneficiaries.

The subcommittee didn't make any recommendation concerning Pentagon-proposed changes in pharmacy copays. The Pentagon plan would reduce the beneficiary copay for generic drugs from \$3 to \$0 in the mail-order system, but would raise copays for drugs bought through retail stores from \$3 to \$5 for generics and from \$9 to \$15 for brand-name drugs.

McHugh said the pharmacy copay issue would be addressed by the full Armed Services Committee in early May.

The committee also recommended the following actions:

Manpower Levels – Sustain the same 30,000 troop-level increase the Army was allowed for FY2006 and add an extra 1,000 for the Marines above the 2006 level. Restore the full strength of 350,000 for Army National Guard, vs. the 333,000 proposed in the Defense budget. Reduce Navy manpower authorizations by 12,000 and Air Force strength by 23,000.

Pay Raise – Authorize a 2.7-percent across-the-board military pay raise on January 1, 2007 vs. the 2.2-percent raised proposed in the Defense budget. This would be one-half percentage point larger than private sector pay growth, continuing Congress's seven-year effort to close the "comparability gap" between military and private sector pay. The subcommittee also endorsed a Pentagon proposal for additional "targeted" increases for certain mid-career and senior enlisted members and warrant officers, to be effective April 1, 2007.

Recruiting and Retention – Add \$100 million more for Army recruiting and retention bonuses; \$59 million for Air National Guard bonuses; and raise the ceiling of special pay for Selected Reserve health care professionals in critical wartime specialties from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

Casualty Assistance Programs – Require expanded returning funeral honors for military personnel who die in combat, reform the physical evaluation board process, authorize DoD to provide assistive technology devices to injured members, and direct better identification, treatment, and documentation of traumatic brain injuries.

Dependent School Support – Authorize \$50 million in assistance for schools located near military installations, plus an additional \$15 million for schools that gain additional students because of base realignments and closures.

Gregg Amendment Cuts \$1.9 Billion from Military Personnel

The raid on military personnel funds continued this week as the Senate voted to approve Sen. Judd Gregg's (R-NH) plan to take almost two billion dollars out of military personnel programs in the wartime supplemental appropriations bill (H.R. 4939).

Gregg's amendment proposed diverting the military personnel money to fund more aircraft, boats and personnel for Department of Homeland Security and Coast Guard border patrol needs.

MOAA strongly opposes such efforts to "rob Sergeant Peter to pay Paul." It's a scandal that military personnel accounts are being used as a piggy bank to fund weapons and other programs – even while the Nation is at war and the 1% of the population that's wearing a military uniform is doing 99% of the sacrificing in that war.

The Pentagon is already drawing down manpower levels, cutting people programs, and trying to raise retiree health fees to free up money for weapons programs. The Armed Services Committees disagree with many of those cutbacks, and are already struggling to find ways to add back funds for health care and National Guard manpower.

Now comes this latest effort, on the supplemental appropriations bill that's intended to make up wartime budget shortfalls for the current year.

A country at war has to find ways to pay for that war...but it's Congress's responsibility to do that without sticking the ones doing the fighting with an even bigger share of the bill.

Leave the military personnel accounts alone, for [Sergeant] Pete's sake.

Visit MOAA's Web site (<http://capwiz.com/moaa/home/>) and click on the "Don't Rob Military Personnel Accounts" link to send your legislators a MOAA-suggested message.

Committee Examines "Financial Friendly Fire"

On April 27, House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) held a hearing on the impact of Army overpayments and subsequent debt collection actions on servicemembers and their families. Davis categorized aspects of the military finance process as "badly broken."

The committee heard disturbing testimony from three soldiers who continue to experience debt collection problems long after leaving active duty for drilling Guard/Reserve or civilian status. Davis expressed his frustration over these soldiers' persistent military pay problems, which mirrored problems highlighted in a Government Accounting Office (GAO) report released that morning.

A GAO auditor testified to the Committee that nearly 1,300 separated Army soldiers who were either injured or killed during combat operations in Iraq or Afghanistan had been charged with over \$1.5 million in military debts. Most of the debt was related to problems such as the Army's failure to stop combat pays for soldiers in medical hold status.

Mr. David Patterson, Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), who also testified before the Committee, apologized to these members and families and led a discussion among other witnesses of several initiatives aimed at improving accuracy of military pay to injured soldiers and preventing the causes of indebtedness.

DoD and Army officials expressed their commitment to solving the pay problems. They said they've taken action on 70 of the 84 GAO recommendations so far, but acknowledged that some problems persist.

MOAA Hosts VA, DFAS Discussion of Survivor Issues

MOAA was pleased to host representatives from the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) and the VA on April 26 for a discussion of problems being experienced by Survivor Benefit Plan annuitants who are also eligible for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) from the VA.

Current law requires deduction of DIC (which is paid when the member's death was caused by a service-related condition) from any SBP annuity. Because the two are paid by different agencies and because survivors typically are unaware of the deduction requirement, many SBP/DIC widows find themselves in an administrative nightmare of back payment issues that can have serious financial consequences for them.

MOAA has encountered several cases in which survivors received a large retroactive DIC check from the VA, then a large bill from DFAS to recoup years of undeducted amounts from SBP, and then a later lump-sum refund of SBP premiums from DFAS for the share of SBP that they will no longer receive.

The VA and DFAS representatives were sympathetic and interested in trying to find reasonable solutions. They indicated they're taking some steps to improve communication – such as providing better information on the deduction requirement. They also were frank in acknowledging the problems of having 50 separate VA area offices communicate with DFAS and the challenges of changing a highly automated DFAS system that is already struggling with recent SBP and concurrent receipt changes.

For the VA, MOAA suggested consolidating DIC/SBP processing responsibilities in a smaller number of the best-performing regional offices to improve consistency and timeliness of communication with DFAS. For DFAS, MOAA suggested consolidating recoupment and refund notices to survivors to reduce confusion and allow the survivor to deal with a single notice of the net recoupment or refund rather than getting a large bill and later a large refund.

The VA and DFAS representatives agreed to bring those proposals and others back to their agencies for discussion.

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