



# The Story of the FRA



# The Voice of Sea Services Personnel

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No organization lobbies more effectively on behalf of active duty, reserve and veteran Sea Services personnel than FRA. The Association understands the needs of enlisted personnel and has served as their voice on Capitol Hill for more than 90 years. FRA was the first organization to exclusively represent the interests of enlisted personnel before Congress and remains committed to bringing their perspective to lawmakers on Capitol Hill.

As a leading organization in The Military Coalition, FRA works closely with 35 other military and veterans' organizations on important personnel issues. In addition to direct representation in Congress, the Association sponsors legislative seminars across the country to better inform Sea Services personnel, reservists, retirees and veterans about governmental actions that affect them and what they can do to protect their interests.

The FRA is also your homeport for solving career problems and is your direct link to the Departments of Defense (DoD), Homeland Security (DHS) and Veterans' Affairs (VA) and other government agencies having oversight of your benefit programs and your current and future security. The Association stands ready to serve you and your family to include caring support and assistance in times of trouble or distress.

Those interested in supporting the Association or receiving additional information should contact FRA's National Headquarters by calling 1-800-FRA-1924, visiting us at [www.fra.org](http://www.fra.org), or sending an email to [fra@fra.org](mailto:fra@fra.org).

## Credits

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Special thanks to Bob Nolan, whose *Brotherhood of the Sea* provided the authoritative history of the FRA from its inception in 1919 through 1989 and was the source for much of the information in this document.

Others who contributed significantly to this project are: Joseph Barnes, Ed Huylebroeck, Mack McKinney, Shane Gooding, Fred Klinkenberger, Lauren Armstrong and John Davis.

# Introduction

FRA has been working to preserve and protect benefits and quality-of-life programs for Sailors, Marines, Coast Guard personnel since 1924. The Association gives voice to its members' concerns and, as a result, continues to generate significant improvements for military personnel and their families.

This publication outlines many of the Association's successes over the past eight decades that demonstrate FRA's longstanding commitment to the men and women who wear the cloth of our nation. It chronicles the grassroots lobbying efforts aimed at improving the living and working conditions for our members and their shipmates. And most importantly, it highlights FRA's legacy of loyalty, protection and service that still resonates today.

The coming years will be especially challenging for FRA as it works to protect current and former service members' benefits and quality-of-life programs. As the war in Afghanistan winds down and DoD adapts to arbitrary sequestration-related budget cuts, it's increasingly difficult to sustain and adequately fund major pay and benefit enhancements enacted since 2000. In addition, the number of veterans seeking VA treatment and rehabilitation continues to grow, creating the need for increased VA support and associated funding. Congress must balance the need for weaponry and force-protection measures with its commitment to keep the promises made to today's service members and those who served in the past. As a result, efforts to transfer the cost of DoD and VA healthcare programs to retirees and veterans will undoubtedly continue.

While FRA is steadfast in the fight to protect and/or enhance quality-of-life and earned benefit programs, we cannot do it alone. Members must stay informed and voice their individual concerns to their elected officials when specific benefits are threatened. Collectively, service members — both past and present — can protect earned benefits.

I invite you to learn more about our prestigious organization, explore our history, and be actively involved in charting our future. Familiarize yourself with our success story, share it and invite others to join our efforts.

In Loyalty, Protection and Service,



Joseph L. Barnes  
National Executive Director, Emeritus (2002-2013)

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*NOTE: More detailed information on our legislative advocacy efforts and successes is available in the annual reports from the chairman of the National Committee on Legislative Service, which are included as part of FRA's annual resource CD and available at [www.fra.org](http://www.fra.org).*

# FRA Timeline

1919 1921 1923 1924 1925 1927 1930 1931 1932 1934 1935 1937 1938 1940

1919: Chief Yeoman Robert W. White and Chief Gunner's Mate Carl H. McDonald are the first enlisted personnel to testify before Congress. They present the enlisted perspective on military pay legislation.

1921: Chief Yeoman George Carlin conceives an association dedicated to monitoring all legislation that impacts enlisted personnel. Carlin is considered the father of the FRA.

1923: The Association's Constitution and Bylaws Committee determined membership eligibility for the new organization. The document stated, "a shipmate is a shipmate, regardless of race, creed or color."

1925: FRA adopts its cardinal principles of "Loyalty, Protection and Service" as its official motto. FRA's constitution was amended to admit career members of the US Marine Corps into the Association.

1925: The Association holds its first national convention in the place of its birth — Philadelphia.

1924: FRA is chartered on 11 November in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1927: FRA gains accreditation to represent shipmates in hearings before the Veterans Bureau.

1930: FRA-proposed legislation is enacted that authorizes a death gratuity benefit of six months basic pay to the estates of recalled Fleet Reservists who subsequently die on active duty.

1931: Delegates at FRA's National Convention authorize a name change for the Association's bi-weekly news publication. *Naval Affairs* was the precursor of our monthly *FRA Today*.

1934: FRA regained two-thirds of the 15-percent pay cut authorized in the Economy Act of 1933. The remaining 5 percent was restored in 1935.

1932: FRA is successful in exempting enlisted personnel from Depression-era pay cuts that deferred pay for federal employees by 8 to 20 percent.

1935: FRA was successful in obtaining eligibility for Navy retirees and Fleet Reservists to receive emergency care in veterans' hospitals in areas where military facilities were not available. The Association also secured the right to outpatient care for Fleet Reservists and their families in areas adjacent to Navy yards and stations.

1937: The Association advances legislation that authorizes commissary privileges for military widows.

1938: FRA-backed legislation is enacted that allows free medical care at military facilities for members of the Fleet Naval Reserve and Fleet Marine Corps Reserve.

1940: FRA gains 11 new branches.

1941 1942 1946 1947 1948 1949 1950 1952 1954 1955 1956 1957 1958 1959

1941: FRA-endorsed legislation increasing peacetime widow's and dependents' pensions is enacted.

1942: Because of World War II, the Association holds no national convention as most of its members and all of its National Headquarters staff are serving on active duty. FRA membership continues to grow.

1946: The Association is successful in establishing equity in disability compensation for disabled peacetime veterans with their wartime counterparts. Peacetime disability rates increase from 75 to 90 percent of the wartime rates.

1947: The Navy, Marine Corps, Army and Air Force are combined into a single Department of Defense. Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal becomes the first Secretary of Defense.

1948: Legislative updates appear in Naval Affairs to keep members up-to-date of FRA's advocacy efforts on their behalf.

1949: Career Compensation Act of 1949 authorizes new basic pay scales; increased allowances and special pays; a more generous reenlistment bonus; a new disability retirement system; and other pay and quality-of-life enhancements.

1950: FRA first proposes legislation to provide a survivor benefit program as part of the military retirement system.

1952: The Association successfully defeats efforts to increase commissary prices by 18 to 20 percent.

1954: Vice President Richard M. Nixon is the keynote speaker at FRA's National Convention in San Diego, California.

1955: FRA has one of its most successful years, opening 22 new branches and increasing membership by nearly 6,000 shipmates.

1956: FRA sponsors the Mrs. US Navy Contest to honor the contributions of Navy wives to their husbands' careers. In addition to the coveted title, Beverly Jean Ellis (wife of Shipmate Alfred Ellis and member of LA FRA Unit 60) wins a 1956 Oldsmobile, \$2,000 in cash and a tour of the United States.

1957: Legislation is enacted that expands Social Security to include active duty military personnel.

1958: FRA-proposed legislation authorizes two additional senior enlisted pay grades (E-8 and E-9) to enhance retention.

1959: George L. Carlin, FRA's founding father, joins the staff of the Supreme Commander.

# FRA Timeline (continued)

1960 1963 1964 1970 1972 1973 1974 1975 1977 1980 1985 1986 1987

1960: President Harry Truman drops by FRA's National Convention to greet shipmates at Seattle's Olympic Hotel.

1963: A banner year for FRA — The Association creates an organized system for launching grassroots letter-writing campaigns, drafts successful legislation to increase Basic Allowance for Quarters (BAQ) by 18.5 percent, supports implementation of cost-of-living adjustments, and adds 28 new branches.

1964: FRA receives 25,000 responses to its Military Retirement Hospital Rights questionnaire and distributes results to Congress. Additionally, Former President Harry Truman is named an Honorary FRA Shipmates.

1970: FRA welcomes Coast Guard personnel and women as members.

1972: FRA plays major role in the enactment of the Widow's Equity bill, the precursor of today's Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP).

1972: FRA sponsors the Navy's first Sailors of the Year competition, a tradition that continues today.

1974: FRA celebrates its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

1973: The US military becomes an all-volunteer force.

1975: The Association opposes unionization of the US military.

1977: FRA conducts White Hats Panel to bring the enlisted perspective on pay and benefits to members of Congress.

1977: The Association successfully defeats Administration plan to alter the military retirement system.

1980: FRA's warning that combat readiness will decline if "hemorrhage of talent" continues results in 11.7-percent pay increase in 1980, with follow-on increase of 14.3 percent in 1981.

1986: FRA plays key role in restoring full COLA for military retirees.

1987: FRA sponsors "Sound Off to Congress" program, soliciting input from enlisted personnel across the country.

1985: FRA becomes a founding member of The Military Coalition when laws threaten to significantly cut military retired pay. The Association is one of 12 military and veterans organizations that band together to reverse the potential loss of 22.5 percent in cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) over a seven-year period.

1991 1996 1997 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008

1991: The Association dedicates its new National Headquarters at 125 N. West Street in Alexandria, Va.

1996: FRA becomes federally chartered as part of the FY 1997 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 104-201).

1996: FRA unveils its presence on the World Wide Web (<http://fra.org/fra>), offering legislative, membership and administrative information to shipmates.

1997: With support from FRA National Headquarters, Shipmate Garrette W. Peck III is finally awarded the Silver Star and Purple Heart for actions as a Lance Corporal with the Ninth Marines in Vietnam.

1999: FRA's campaign to repeal the military's REDUX retirement plan pays dividends. The FY 2000 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) allows service members to accept the High-3 retirement plan or elect the REDUX plan and receive a \$30,000 lump sum Career Status Bonus. The measure also contains significant active duty pay raises and housing allowances, all of which are FRA-endorsed initiatives.

2000: FRA releases study on career enlisted pay scales and recommends additional pay reform for mid-career and senior enlisted personnel. Seven other enlisted associations endorse the study and recommendations.

2001: TRICARE for Life (TFL) become effective on 1 October, providing rich medical and pharmacy benefits to military retirees over age 65.

2001: FRA and The Military Coalition successfully oppose administration proposals that would force military retirees to choose between VA and DoD healthcare services.

2002: The FY 2003 NDAA authorizes combat-related special compensation (CRSC) for disabled retirees wounded in combat. Although not the full concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability compensation FRA endorses, it is a significant first step toward it.

2003: Concurrent receipt payments are authorized for military retirees whose service-connected disability ratings are 50 percent or higher. The payments will be phased in over a 10-year period. CRSC eligibility is expanded to cover certain retirees with 10 to 40 percent disability ratings.

2004: In FRA's 80<sup>th</sup> year, the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) is reformed to eliminate the offset experienced by survivors when they become eligible for Social Security benefits. The offset is phased out over a 3.5-year period. Additionally, the implementation of concurrent-receipt provisions was accelerated for military retirees with disability ratings of 100 percent.

2005: FRA and TMC are successful in blocking new and higher fees for military retirees seeking medical care. Proposals to impose a \$250 enrollment fee and double pharmacy fees for veterans in Priority Groups 7 and 8 were defeated, as were DoD's efforts to impose enrollment fees and higher deductibles for TRICARE Standard beneficiaries and increase TRICARE fees for retirees under age 65.

2006: In light of the expanded role Reservists are playing in the War on Terror, TRICARE Reserve Select benefits are expanded without increasing service members' cost share. FRA is instrumental in legislation that caps interest rates at 36 percent on loans to service members, and with their TMC counterparts again thwart DoD and VA efforts to charge beneficiaries more for medical coverage.

2007: FRA continues to hold the line on efforts to increase military retirees' out-of-pocket healthcare expenses. For the third year in a row, FRA thwarts efforts to impose increased TRICARE enrollment fees and higher pharmacy copays for military retirees. FRA stops efforts to repeal laws that protect service members from predatory lending practices.

2008: FRA-endorsed legislation is enacted that dramatically improves education benefits for service members serving since 11 September 2001.

# FRA Timeline (continued)

2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021

2009: The Congressional Budget Office released two reports suggesting ways to cut government spending, many of which would reduce the value of military pay and earned benefits. Access to VA healthcare was restored for 266,000 veterans in Priority Group 8. The FRA Education Foundation was launched in conjunction with FRA's 85th birthday.

2010: The deadline to significantly cut reimbursement rates for Medicare and TRICARE providers was postponed numerous times. FRA successfully lobbied to have DoD and VA healthcare programs excluded from the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, a.k.a. Obamacare. The VA expanded eligibility for veterans exposed to Agent Orange and established a list of vessels likely to have been affected by the toxin.

2011: The Budget Control Act mandated significant budget cuts over the next 10 years, plus the enactment of sequestration if further cuts weren't identified to balance the federal budget. (Sequestration took effect on January 1, 2013.)

2012: Nearly 3,000 Sailors were unfairly selected for separation by Enlisted Retention Boards; less than 10 percent qualified for TERA benefits. For the first time in several years, active duty and Reserve personnel identified "preserving retirement benefits" as a higher priority than "military and veterans' health care" in FRA's annual survey of benefits. The FRA Education Foundation became an approved charity in the Combined Federal Campaign.

2013: FRA blocked higher TRICARE Prime fees, pharmacy co-pays and the fee for TRICARE-for-Life (TFL) beneficiaries proposed by Administration. FRA led the charge to introduce legislation to provide payment of full military retired pay and veteran's disability pay (concurrent receipt). At FRA's request legislation was introduced in the House and Senate to provide Agent Orange presumption for Blue Water Navy veterans with connected ailments.

2014: FRA welcomed the repeal of the one-percent COLA cut for those joining the military before January 1, 2014 but was disappointed the COLA cut applies to future retirees that joined the military on or after January 1, 2014. FRA celebrated its 90th anniversary in November.

2015: the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC), created by the FY 2013 NDAA released its final report. The 280-page report made 15 substantive recommendations. FRA staff met frequently with the members of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) and their staff while the report was being written. The report recommends restructuring the military retirement system for future retirees, nearly doubling SBP premiums, and replacing all TRICARE programs except for TRICARE-For-Life (TFL) with a selection of commercial insurance plans. The Commission claims that TRICARE is no longer fiscally sustainable.

2016: The Presidential election overshadowed Congressional legislation in the last year of the 114th Congress. President Obama's last budget request called for drastic increases in TRICARE fees, pharmacy co-pays for military retirees under age 65, and an active duty pay increase that is smaller than civilian pay increase. FRA successfully opposed these initiatives. 2016 also marked a dramatic decrease in VA disability claims backlog and an increase in VA disability claims appeals cases.

2017: The year started with a new administration in the White House, and we were half way through FY 2017 and the federal government was still operating under a Continuing Resolution (CR) at FY 2016 spending levels. Also the debt ceiling needed to be addressed. The new administration requested an increase for the Armed Services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps) of nine percent. However, the Coast Guard budget was cut significantly. In response to proposed cuts to the Coast Guard, FRA mobilized grassroots to successfully oppose Coast Guard budget cuts.

2018, FRA successfully fought to expand the VA caregiver program to include all severely disabled veterans. The original program applied only to badly disabled veterans that were injured after September 11, 2001. Also FRA successfully repealed a scheduled one percent cut in Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for active duty.

2019, The FRA successfully supported the "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R. 299-P.L. 116-23) to provide long-overdue benefits and care to veterans that served on ships off the coast of Vietnam and suffering from Agent Orange exposure. Also, the long-sought SBP/DIC offset repeal was included in the FY 2020 NDAA.



# The Voice of Sea Service Personnel for More than 90 Years

Setting forth on an uncharted sea, fewer than 100 shipmates assembled in Philadelphia in October 1922 to organize the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA). The group chose the name because its prospective membership would be largely drawn from the Fleet Naval Reserve component or those eligible for transfer to it. This was the first time in recorded naval history that career enlisted personnel were banding together for mutual loyalty, protection and service.

Chief Yeoman George L. Carlin, on duty in Philadelphia, conceived the concept of joining together in such a fashion. He is rightfully considered the Founder of FRA. His idea stemmed from the earlier action of an unorganized group of enlisted personnel who helped defray the cost of sending Chief Yeoman Robert W. “Bob” White and Chief Gunner’s Mate Carl H. McDonald, USN (Ret.), to Washington, D.C., to represent enlisted personnel before a congressional panel. This is the first documented instance where enlisted personnel presented testimony before Congress and is the foundation for FRA’s current legislative advocacy efforts.

In the early 1920s it was a revolutionary idea to consider a permanent organization that would present the enlisted perspective to influence military personnel legislation. Most naval officers instinctively viewed such an organization as a threat to good order and discipline, and many civilian leaders warned it might lead to unionism in the military.

Ironically, the circumstances of active military service limited the involvement of service members in political matters, yet the enlisted viewpoint had to be effectively expressed if it would gain congressional attention. The active-duty enlisted force had no true champions within the administration to plead its cause. Defense officials who spoke for personnel needs were also the ombudsmen for policy and hardware matters. They served two masters, the Pentagon and the White House. Consequently, it was often left to the appropriate congressional committees to champion the enlisted cause. Given these factors, it is easy to understand why representation on Capitol Hill for enlisted personnel and their families did not come easily.

In the interest of providing direct and effective representation for enlisted personnel, that small group of Navy enlisted retirees met and adopted the plan to create a legislative advocacy organization. In 1922 this plan was set in motion by a few, fueled by the needs of many, and has benefited all enlisted personnel and their families since its adoption. Shaped by experience and tempered by a sense of American justice and fair play, the plan evolved into today’s FRA.

FRA was born to protect the well-being and promised benefits of enlisted personnel and their families, and it has endured. It has been remarkably successful in that it has never strayed from that purpose. Anyone today doing research on legislation that impacts military enlisted personnel will find that FRA is almost always involved.

Although an enlisted association, one of FRA’s early actions was advocating for senior officers who Congress was planning to omit from a major pay initiative. Senior Lobbyist Charlie Lofgren appeared before a congressional subcommittee and argued the merit of a pay raise for the “admirals and generals,” something they could not do for themselves. It had a telling effect on Congress. It enacted the pay bill, including increases for senior officers.

Additionally, it made a profound impression on the leaders of the Navy and earned immense good will for FRA. Consequently, FRA gained a reputation as an advocate for all military personnel.

The story of the FRA is a tale of grassroots lobbying at its purest. In today’s world of political action committees (PACs) and high-powered legislative influence, FRA continues to employ the basic lobbying techniques it has used since 1924; personal contact, reasonable and logical proposals, honorable service, and an American sense of fair play. However, like the Navy structure it came from, FRA is unique and one of the most democratic organizations in existence today. There is a carefully nurtured structure of branches, organized by regions, with regional presidents comprising a National Board of Directors to govern the association between annual conventions. But it is the delegates, assembled in convention, who set the course. They determine policy and approve expenditures.

FRA has had outstanding lobbyists, including Lofgren, who led the Association out of the wilderness of the 1930's to a status of being recognized and respected on Capitol Hill. What Lofgren left for his successors was a reputation that FRA is a reliable spokesman for enlisted personnel. Bob Nolan, who served as FRA's National Executive Secretary (NES) for 24 years, took it an important step further.

Nolan was a reliable spokesman for the enlisted forces and he did not wait for things to take shape. Prior to his tenure, military association lobbyists largely responded to requests for their views on proposals emanating from the Department of Defense (DoD). They were reactive. When the machinery of government moved too slowly, Nolan geared up the association to propose its own programs for positive change. In short, FRA took its issues directly to Congress, and did not wait for an invitation or for others to lead. Today, this tradition continues as FRA's Legislative Team proactively works to protect and enhance the quality of life for military personnel.

FRA has never had a PAC, never appears at political fundraisers, and never offers honorariums. The Association is non-partisan and has only the concept of equity to sell.

Successful lobbying could not have been accomplished over the years without grassroots support of FRA's membership, including all past and current national officers. Kudos also go to all past national presidents who provided the guidance and leadership to ensure a viable congressional legislative agenda was presented to the convention delegates for their consideration.

To meet recurring legislative challenges, FRA has four guiding principles: be diligent in monitoring DoD and congressional proposals and actions; always be alert to anything that might affect the best interests of career enlisted personnel and their families; be reasonable in its approach to legislative solutions; and last but not least, be ready to propose attainable programs that Congress can embrace and eventually adopt as law.

In fulfilling its mission of presenting the enlisted viewpoint on military personnel issues, FRA faced a different challenge at the start of the 1990's. In 1991, the Soviet empire imploded and the Cold War ended. The constant strategic threat of the Cold War period disappeared and the nature of the

threat to U.S. interests changed. Defense budgets were decreased rapidly and many questioned the need for maintaining substantial end strengths. Base closures and personnel reductions followed and were very unsettling to people in the military community. This would continue for several years.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, our nation's defenses were slashed by about 40 percent, yet the military forces were called upon to do far more than they had before the collapse; nearly doubling the call to handle contingency operations and deployments. This forced an even greater reliance on the Sea Services to deploy forces when and where needed.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 led to our nation's involvement in the Global War on Terror, and again changed the focus for America's fighting force. The Coast Guard's role in the Department of Homeland Security increased significantly while Navy and Marine involvement grew in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other international hot spots.

Despite the vast technological advances in weaponry, the essential ingredient in the protection of our country continues to be the manpower that effectively employs that technology. They must be treated fairly and compensated equitably. The service person's compensation and benefits cannot vary according to world events and the whims of national leaders. There must be a consistent belief that the government will keep faith with personnel even when circumstances change.

FRA has never rested on the laurels of its past successes. It effectively faces today's challenges while remaining true to its original purpose — to protect the rights and benefits of the members of our Sea Services and provide adequate defense for our beloved nation. By adhering to its three cardinal principles of Loyalty, Protection and Service, FRA continues to achieve its primary goal: "A Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard that is second to none, manned by personnel superior to all."

FRA is federally chartered and stands as one of the nation's top military associations. It continues to lead the way in enhancing and preserving the benefits for current and former Sea Service personnel and their families. From peacetime veteran benefits, to issues on military and retirement pay, survivors' benefits, dependents' medical care and widow's equity, FRA shipmates

stand shoulder-to-shoulder to champion the causes of the Sea Services community.

FRA was also a founder of the original 16-member Council of Military Organizations (COMO) and later was instrumental in forming a more influential group under the banner of The Military Coalition (TMC). Today TMC is the leading military and veterans lobbying group working on Capitol Hill. FRA plays an active role in the continued success of TMC, with FRA staff members holding key posts within the organization. In addition, many TMC meetings are hosted at FRA headquarters.

One of the greatest tributes to FRA was published in FRA's 1993 *Brotherhood Of The Sea* — "In a poll taken by a leading military newspaper, staff members of congressional committees dealing with the military were asked to grade some 18 military-related associations, regular and Reserve, officer and enlisted. FRA was rated most effective."

There is not a man or woman, officer or enlisted, regular or Reserve, on active duty or retired from the Armed Forces of the United States, who at this very moment is not deriving some benefit achieved through the efforts of the FRA.

FRA's major legislative accomplishments include the establishment of the CHAMPUS Health Benefits

Program, now TRICARE, and the military's Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP). In 1998, FRA was the first organization to actively seek repeal of the Military Retirement Reform Act (REDUX) and was successful in urging members of Congress to introduce and/ or sponsor legislation to repeal the law. And in 1999, the Association led a successful campaign resulting in legislation that authorized pay increases for E-5, E-6 and E-7 personnel on 1 July 2001 and for E-5s through E-9s, effective 1 January 2002. In recognition of this successful pay reform initiative, FRA's Legislative Team was presented with a Certificate Award as part of the American Society of Association Executives' (ASAE) 2000 Awards of Excellence in Government Relations.

Since FRA became the voice of the enlisted sea services personnel so many years ago, the enlisted family's standard of living has improved. To quote John Ford, former Staff Director, House Armed Services Committee, "Military association spokesmen have frequently talked over the years of the erosion of benefits and at times have won some battles and lost some. But look at how the standard of living of military families has improved since FRA became the spokesman for sea services personnel. A lot of military families live better because FRA has been on watch [since 1924] and that, as they say, is the bottom line."

# FRA's Legislative Efforts and Successes from 1919 through the Present

## 1919 through 1929

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Enactment of the Naval Reserve Act of 1916 allowed enlisted men of the regular Navy and Marine Corps to transfer to the Fleet Naval Reserve upon completion of 16 and 20 years of active service respectively. As a result, the need for an organization to preserve the rights and benefits granted them and their dependents by Congress became apparent.

Due to World War I, no attempt was made to secure direct representation for the enlisted force until 1919, when (through the efforts of a group of loyal shipmates and with the sanction of the Navy Department,) YNC Robert W. White and GMC Carl H. McDonald testified during congressional hearings on proposed military pay legislation being considered by Congress. They made an excellent presentation of fact, and substantial pay raises were recorded in the passage of a temporary pay bill — The Temporary Pay Act of 18 May 1920. A permanent pay plan was under consideration in the next congressional term (1921-1922). The successes achieved reinforced the need for an organization to protect these gains during that period.

The “Philadelphia Plan,” the blueprint for the present-day FRA, was authored by YNC George L. Carlin. The first test of the new organization's ability to provide protection to its members and other service members came in 1923 when shipmates who had accepted temporary commissions in the Navy in WWI were advised that only enlisted time could be counted as time served for transfer to the Fleet Naval Reserve. In the interim, many men with commissioned service had transferred to the Fleet Naval Reserve. Legislation (H.R.4820) was drafted to address and its enactment was the first of many signal victories by the group.

FRA's charter was authorized on 11 November 1924, in the Court of Common Pleas, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and in 1925 included members of the U. S. Marine Corps among its members.

FRA was responsible for the Savings Clause in the Naval Reserve Act of 1925 that allowed anyone on active duty on 1 July 1925 to retain all

existing benefits pertaining to pay and time-in-service upon transfer to the Fleet Reserve with either 16 or 20 years service. In 1927 FRA was accredited to represent shipmates in matters before the Veterans Administration. The country was enjoying unprecedented prosperity in 1928 and legislation detrimental to career personnel just wasn't considered. (It must be noted that during the prosperous years, Congress is apt to consider the person in uniform up front, but let the tide turn and the career service member becomes an expensive luxury.)

By 1929, the organization had proven its worth to the Navy Department and at the Association's Sixth National Convention in Norfolk, Va., three rear admirals addressed the assembled delegates and spoke of the successes of the new organization. Rear Adm. R. H. Leigh also unequivocally offered the endorsement of the Navy Department.

## 1930 through 1939

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During the Depression era, Congress proposed legislation that threatened military careers. One such proposal would have given Fleet Naval Reserve members one year's pay in cash and a ticket home. Thanks to a savings provision proposed by FRA, which included the words “except enlisted,” many service members were spared a pay cut ranging from eight to 20 percent in 1932. But the latter saved the day only temporarily. The so-called Economy Act of July 1933 reduced the pay of armed forces personnel by 15 percent and demonstrated the axiom: “What Congress gives, Congress can take away.” The shipmates at FRA's Ninth National Convention adopted a program to fight the 15-percent pay cut. They additionally proposed recognition of free care while hospitalized in Naval medical facilities, and Civil Service preference for inactive duty personnel with more than 16 years of service. That year the shipmates enjoyed two five-percent pay raises as restoration of the cut. The remaining five percent was restored in April 1935. Two benefits gained by FRA in 1935 were the eligibility for care in VA hospitals in areas where military facilities were not available, and the right to medical care for their families in areas adjacent to Navy yards and stations.

Under the watchful eye of FRA, enlisted personnel were protected from major losses in 1936 when Congress proposed a reorganization of Fleet Naval Reserve personnel. Legislation authorizing commissary privileges to military widows was also enacted that year.

Legislation, including free hospitalization and medical treatment for members of the Fleet Naval Reserve and Fleet Marine Corps Reserve, passed Congress in 1930. The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, however, halted implementation as a result of a ruling by the Comptroller General (COMGEN). It was not until eight years later that career personnel finally received the benefit of this important legislation when the Naval Reserve Act of 1938 became law. That same year, with FRA's support, pay for members of the Naval Academy Band was placed on a par with other Navy musicians. The long fight for renewal of "shipping over" (re-enlistment) bonuses became a reality when the Navy Department directed that (effective 1 July 1939) the bonuses would be paid upon re-enlistment or extension. Finally, a decision to permit retired enlisted members to waive their retired pay to accept higher benefits from the VA was adopted in November 1939.

## 1940 through 1949

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The Association secured a number of career benefits for enlisted personnel during the early WWII years. These included pay for enlisted members retained in hospitals beyond expiration of enlistment dates, an enlisted clothing allowance, establishment of a quarters' allowance for the first three enlisted pay grades, longevity increases to Fleet Reservists and retirees for active service rendered subsequent to transfer to the Fleet Naval Reserve, transportation benefits for dependents of Fleet Naval Reservists upon retirement, and a retention of petty officer first class pay at \$66 per month instead of \$60.

Enactment of these benefits was due in large measure to appearances by FRA's National Executive Secretary before the Senate and House Military Affairs Committees. The new pay plan was enacted through the combined efforts of all military and veterans groups. A claim filed by FRA in the Court of Claims for the payment of the Medal of Honor gratuities was also sustained in 1942.

The key mandate at the October 1943 National Convention was to seek legislation to allow 16-year Fleet Reservists recalled to active duty and completing 20 years of service to retire at the highest enlisted grade held.

During 1943 a challenge developed whereby proof of honorable discharge was required for personnel to apply for veterans benefits. A person transferred to the Fleet Naval Reserve did not receive a discharge and thus did not qualify as a veteran. Working with the VA, FRA helped modify the interpretation of the law so that a release from active duty under honorable conditions was considered the equivalent of an honorable discharge.

During 1944 and 1945, other gains included rotation of duty assignments; spot promotions; transfer of patients to naval hospitals nearest their homes at government expense; protection from discharge by the Boards of Medical Survey, and 30 days leave for Fleet Reservists and retired personnel upon release from active duty. In September 1945 legislation was introduced in the House of Representatives which gave Fleet Reservists and retired enlisted members permanent advancement to ratings earned while on active duty and also credit for active duty longevity service.

In December 1948, the report of the Hook Commission on Service Pay was released. The report cast a dark shadow of uncertainty on the future of enlisted personnel. One aspect of the report, and of most interest to those on active duty, was the recommendation to eliminate transfer to the Fleet Reserve upon completion of 20 years service and substitute a straight 25-years-of-service or attain-age-50 requirement. To the credit of FRA alone, the proposal was defeated. FRA represented the enlisted community throughout deliberations on the Hook Commission Report, which evolved into the Career Compensation Act of 1949. That same year FRA instituted four test cases in the Court of Claims on previous rulings by the COMGEN. The most celebrated was the Sanders case, in which FRA contended that someone who retired after 16 years of service, was recalled to active duty, and completed 20 years service should receive retired pay based on 20 years (one-half base pay) instead of 16 years (one-third base pay). FRA fought this case through two appeals courts, eventually winning in 1952. The result was that over 3,000 shipmates received more than \$7 million in back pay.

## 1950 through 1959

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In the early 1950s military retirees had no program whereby they could leave a portion of their retired pay to surviving dependents. This became a concern of the House Committee on Naval Affairs. Several lawmakers seeking to rectify this shortcoming found immediate support from FRA. The Uniformed Services Contingency Option Act of 1953 was the first law to establish such a plan. Under the act, retired members could receive reduced retirement pay during their life-time to assure their surviving dependents received an annuity after their demise. The act required the program to be actuarially sound and that the government did not share in the program's cost. Service members had to enroll in the program in their eighteenth year of active service. The program was very restrictive and comparably expensive, and despite later improvements, it attracted few enlisted participants and drew less than fifteen percent of all military retirees. FRA believed the program was restrictive and too costly and continued to work toward better survivor benefits.

Congressional attempts to close military commissaries in 1953 were halted thanks to FRA's lobbying efforts. Only six of some 200 commissaries actually shut their doors.

Military personnel were not covered by Social Security until after 31 December 1956. During WWII those serving in the military received Social Security wage credits based upon a gratuitous \$160 a month earnings. However, the law clearly stated that anyone who subsequently credited their WWII service towards any federal retirement could not use that service for computing Social Security benefits. Clearly, Uncle Sam did not intend to pay twice for the same period of service. However, after WWII, the military draft continued and young Americans were forced to involuntarily serve the nation for at least two years and were denied Social Security coverage for their period of military service. The fact that Social Security coverage could also provide disability insurance and survivor benefits, made the idea of extending Social Security coverage to all military personnel very appealing. The Social Security law was amended, placing all military personnel in the program beginning 1 January 1957. FRA fully supported the change.

Pay for active duty personnel is comprised of basic pay and allowances. In the 1950s, military retired

pay was based only on basic pay and computed on 2.5 percent of basic pay for each year of active duty service. Hence, a person retiring on 20 years of service received 50 percent of his or her basic pay, which equates to about 35 percent of total compensation. Prior to 1958, each time basic pay was increased for the active duty force, military retirees' retired pay was also recomputed based on the new active duty basic pay scales. This practice of "recomputation" was in effect for several years. The passage of P.L. 85-422 on 20 May 1958 increased military active duty pay by 8.3 percent, but prohibited recomputation of retired pay on the new rates. The cost of recomputation for the bill would have been \$65 million. Instead, military retirees received a six-percent increase to their retired pay, reducing the government's cost to approximately \$35 million. This change in principle shocked the military retired community, but was far more acceptable than the Administration's recommendation to provide no increase in retired pay for 1958.

## 1960 through 1969

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In 1961, P.L. 87-381 changed the name of the military's existing survivor benefit program from the Contingency Option Act to the Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan (RSFPP). RSFPP was revised by law on 8 March 1966 in an attempt to gain greater participation. Despite changes that relaxed requirements on enrollment, taxation, withdrawal and annuities, the plan's acceptance and enrollment grew by only several percentage points within the retired community. Needless to say, FRA supported all improvements to the legislation while campaigning for a more equitable survivor benefit program.

FRA joined other military associations in a massive campaign to restore retired pay recomputation in law. In 1961 and 1963, the House approved such a bill, but the Senate defeated the measure. However, the Uniformed Services Pay Act of 1963 replaced the recomputation practice in permanent law with a method of adjusting retired pay based on changes in the cost of living as measured by increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This method is now commonly known as "cost of living adjustments" or "COLAs."

FRA convinced the original Cold War G.I. Bill sponsor, Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough, to draft legislation authorizing military careerists to

use their GI education benefits for 10 years after discharge from active duty. The House Armed Services Committee also called on FRA and the Navy to testify on Hazardous Duty Pay, and Congress authorized flight deck crews to receive the allowance in 1965. In 1967 FRA lobbied for changes in the military pay law to give added basic pay to all the services' top senior enlisted personnel.

Another milestone in FRA's lobbying efforts was attained when the Military Health Benefits Act of 1966 was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson, bringing a victorious end to FRA's Hospital Rights campaign. Prior to enactment of this legislation, retired military families had no statutory right to medical care. The Dependents Medicare Act of 1956 authorized them care in military hospitals on a "space-available basis." Reduced medical care was the result of the growth in military retiree rolls. During 1961 hearings, the House Appropriations Committee ruled the space-available language prohibited the programming of retiree bed space in newly constructed military hospitals. Although FRA repeatedly asked how beds could be made available for retirees if they were not programmed, the ruling did not change and DoD did not program retiree beds in the military hospitals constructed from 1961 to 1966. This policy was also sustained in subsequent military hospital construction and limited access to an important military retiree benefit.

At the Association's 1963 National Convention delegates appointed a special Hospital Rights Committee to pursue a guaranteed right to medical care for military retirees and their dependents. The panel researched and documented the government's responsibility and obligation to provide care to retired military families. Twenty-five thousand replies to a questionnaire were received from FRA shipmates, providing the committee with a comprehensive survey that was compiled into a 64-page booklet entitled "Military Retirement Hospital Rights." The publication not only outlined the problem, but also offered the solution.

A total of 65,000 copies of the book were distributed within Congress and the Navy Department. The Judge Advocate General's Office hailed the book as the most authoritative book on the subject and a special subcommittee was appointed to investigate this problem. At the same time, FRA drafted legislation that would guarantee medical care to retirees and the bill was introduced in the House

by Representatives Charles Gubser (Calif.), Charles Bennett (Fla.) and Richard Lankford (Md.).

The subcommittee completed the investigation and published its findings in September 1964. The report stated that (1) the Government has a "moral obligation" to provide medical care to retirees and their dependents; (2) beds should be programmed for retirees in military hospitals; and (3) the report directed DoD to draft legislation that would guarantee medical care to retirees and their dependents for presentation to the first session of the 89th Congress.

After prodding from the Secretary of Defense, DoD submitted an inequitable proposal and FRA went into action, lobbying against the DoD proposal that was later withdrawn. FRA testified at hearings to offer the enlisted member's viewpoints, and the subcommittee then drafted a generous bill that gave retirees and their dependents not only guaranteed care in military hospitals, but care in civilian hospitals at minimal costs. The bill further provided increased healthcare coverage for active duty dependents that included outpatient care in civilian medical facilities and financial aid in the case of mentally or physically handicapped dependents.

President Johnson signed the measure into law (P.L. 89-614) establishing The Civilian Health and Medical Program for the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) effective for active duty dependents on 1 October 1966 and for retirees and their dependents on 1 January 1967. House Armed Services Committee Chairman L. Mendel Rivers (S.C.) praised FRA's Hospital Rights Program by saying, "FRA can take a great deal of pride in the passage of this legislation because it was FRA which first brought this problem to national attention. I doubt if a bill would have passed without the efforts of FRA."

Another major personnel measure passed during the session was a 10-percent military pay raise. The Administration recommended a 3.2 percent raise and Chairman Rivers believed a 10-percent raise was more appropriate. With FRA and Navy League support, the chairman won the battle for the higher increase.

## 1970 through 1979

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Following the successful Hospital Rights initiative, FRA launched the Widow's Benefits legislative

program. Military retirees were the only federal retirees who could not leave their surviving spouses a percentage of their federal retirement. FRA believed that military retiree survivors should receive the same entitlement as civilian survivors. At the 1968 FRA National Convention, delegates approved a plan to pursue a survivor benefit that included a comprehensive study of existing plans in private industry and government. Findings were published and sent to all FRA members, congressional representatives and all military and civilian government leaders. FRA drafted proposed legislation based on the study, and later the bill became a law that launched the Association's Widow's Equity Program. After a 16-month campaign, Chairman Rivers appointed a special Subcommittee to investigate survivor benefits. On 7 July 1970, the Special Subcommittee held public hearings and FRA arranged for seven destitute military widows to testify.

DoD opposed the plan, but Rivers introduced a bill to create a new military survivor benefit plan. And although companion bills were introduced in the Senate, both measures died with the adjournment of the 91st Congress.

With the convening of the 92nd Congress in January 1971, Representative F. Edward Hebert (La.) became chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. He immediately introduced similar legislation (H.R.984) and served notice on the Pentagon that the bill was going to pass the House. Newly-elected Senator J. Glenn Beall (Md.) introduced companion legislation (S.325) in the Senate, hearings were held and FRA was the first public witness. The measures subsequently passed in their respective chambers and P.L.92-425 was signed into law on 21 September 1972, giving military retirees 12 months in which to apply for Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) coverage. As the deadline approached, FRA learned from the services' finance centers that retirees had difficulty understanding the complex law. FRA successfully lobbied for an extension of the enrollment period to March 1974.

The Association also marked another milestone when it amended its bylaws in 1970 to welcome career designated U.S. Coast Guard personnel as members. In 1975 FRA extended membership to active duty members of the Sea Services from their first day of enlistment and launched a battle against unionizing the military that later resulted in legislation outlawing military unions.

FRA sponsored its first "Navy Recruiters of the Year" Program in 1974 and the first "Sailors of the Year" Program in 1975. It later expanded this program in 1981 to include the "Reserve Sailor of the Year." Today, FRA is still actively involved in sponsoring these and other recognition events to acknowledge outstanding performers in the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

Between 1975 and 1979 FRA played a key role in twice defeating the Administration's proposal to phase out the budget subsidy for military commissaries. FRA also responded to proposals to revise the military compensation and retirement system in 1977 by conducting a White Hat's Pay Panel and holding symposiums in military communities across the country to learn enlisted views on these issues. After FRA presented the panel's findings to Congress, President Jimmy Carter's plan to change the retirement system was abandoned. Despite this success, the active duty and retired communities viewed these years as lean ones because military pay increases were capped for two years in a row.

How did others view FRA during the 1970s? Admiral John S. McCain, Jr., USN, Commander in Chief Pacific, wrote: "Throughout my Navy career it had been my privilege to observe FRA in action, ready to serve at every opportunity. No request for assistance has been too insignificant or too big for the Association to tackle. I know of many, many instances of wives and widows of our Navy and Marine Corps, officer and enlisted, member and non-member alike, whose needs have been more than adequately taken care of by the unselfish dedication of the shipmates at National Headquarters and branch levels. Yet these personal services have been only a part of the tradition of FRA. Lawmakers of the land invariably turn to FRA for assistance in matters affecting the welfare of the Armed Forces with the knowledge that they will receive sound, timely advice. There is no one in the Armed Forces today who has not benefited from the accomplishments of FRA. I am fully aware of your achievements and you have my highest esteem and appreciation in this regard."

## 1980 through 1989

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In January 1980, FRA testified before the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel that the Navy was short nearly 20,000 highly skilled mid-career enlisted personnel and 2,600 mid-grade officers. FRA warned that the

Navy stood at only 85 percent of combat readiness levels, citing Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Thomas B. Hayward's characterization of the dismal re-enlistment rates as "a hemorrhage of talent." Congress recognized the problem and set about to remedy the situation. An 11.7-percent basic pay increase was enacted in 1980, and in 1981 personnel received a 14.3-percent basic pay increase. The Nunn-Warner Amendment was added to the FY1981 NDAA, giving qualified personnel a 10-percent increase in subsistence, a 25-percent increase in flight pay, a 25-percent increase in enlisted submarine pay, an increase in sea pay and the establishment of the Variable Housing Allowance (VHA), which provided additional housing stipends for service members living in high-cost areas. There was even involvement in establishing a peacetime GI Bill and FRA took the lead among military associations by sponsoring a "GI Bill Forum" in San Diego.

Hard on the heels of this newfound military prosperity, the nation entered a recession that quickly reversed the mood of Congress. With a scarcity of jobs in private sector, many young Americans entered the armed services. Within two years, the services man-power issues were resolved. Recruiting stations soon had waiting lists and the services' re-enlistment rates were the highest they had been since WWII. Talk of a peacetime GI Bill evaporated and there were speeches on how military spending and the generous military retirement system was contributing to the nation's \$200 billion deficit. In 1982, Congress reduced the Consumer Price Index cost-of-living adjustment for retirees. A proposed 11-percent active duty basic pay raise shrunk to a pay freeze in 1983!

The President appointed a commission of 150 private industry leaders to survey all federal spending and recommend reductions. FRA swung into action to halt the pay freeze, which the Administration announced in January 1983. FRA pushed hard for a military pay raise and Congress subsequently enacted a 4-percent increase in basic pay, BAQ and BAS (effective 1 January 1984). In 1984, FRA helped defeat proposals to make annual half-COLA retired pay increases permanent law. Congress agreed to restore full COLAs to military retirees in 1986. FRA also waged a successful campaign to defeat a plan to privatize operations at two commissaries.

The Association conducted a study of the military retirement system, Enlisted Perception of Military

Retirement, and presented its findings to Congress. Due to FRA efforts, all active duty personnel who would have been affected by the retirement changes in 1986 (REDUX) were grand-fathered under a special amendment. Ironically, FRA would later lead the effort to repeal the REDUX Retirement Program in 1998.

During this era, FRA realized that by creating a unified lobbying group through an affiliation with other veterans' service organizations, it could generate even more clout for its membership. With this goal in mind, it became a charter member of The Military Coalition (TMC), now a group of 35 military and veterans' organizations, working to advance legislation that benefits military personnel, their families and survivors. TMC represents more than five million active duty, Reserve, National Guard personnel, veterans and retirees.

## 1990 through 1999

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Not since FRA's founding years did enlisted careerists and retirees face more risks to their benefits as they did in the early 1990s. Administration officials and lawmakers pushed for deeper cuts to the Defense budget, significant personnel reductions, an end to automatic inflation-matching COLA increases for retirees, and the reduction or elimination of other quality-of-life benefits to reduce government spending. A successful COLA mailgram campaign in 1990 helped FRA and TMC defeat the Administration's attempts to reduce COLAs in 1991 and freeze COLAs at one point below the annual inflation rate from 1992 through 1995. FRA also helped convince Congress to enact a Persian Gulf Benefits Package in 1991, and authorize transition benefits for involuntarily separated personnel.

In 1992, FRA's lobbying efforts helped hold the line on retired pay COLAs; won a military pay hike and a longevity increase for personnel who served 24 years; guaranteed tenure for enlisted personnel with 18 years service; gained transition assistance benefits for active and Reserve members; and increased the SGLI to \$200,000.

In 1993, FRA challenged President Bill Clinton's FY1994 budget plan to skip military pay raises, and helped secure a 2.2 percent increase. Thanks to COLA-Alert letters sent by thousands of shipmates, FRA and TMC defeated proposals to eliminate or reduce COLAs for retirees under age 62. However, the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA)

of 1993 unfairly delayed retired military COLAs for the next five years.

In 1994, FRA helped to squelch the Kerry-Brown Bipartisan Senate Budget Rescission Plan to reduce military COLAs. The Association also aided in the defeat of the President's plan to reduce active duty pay by 1.5 percent and convinced Congress to consider a stateside COLA for active duty personnel. FRA gained congressional support for COLA equity bills to put military COLAs back on the same 1 April schedule as federal civilians, and influenced Congress to consider VA disability compensation for Persian Gulf veterans. In addition, FRA was instrumental in defeating attempts to eliminate the Selective Service System for the second consecutive year.

Improving health care access for Medicare-eligible retirees topped FRA's 1997 legislative agenda and the most significant legislation enacted was the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, which included language authorizing a three-year Medicare subvention demonstration. The program would allow Medicare to reimburse military treatment facilities for services provided to Medicare-eligible retirees. This demonstration project evolved to become TRICARE for Life (established in 2000), which offers a generous health-care benefit to military retirees over the age of 65.

Also noteworthy was enactment of legislation authorizing a \$165 monthly annuity to "forgotten widows," a partial survivor benefit that would be paid to widows of military service members and reservists who retired and died prior to the enactment and implementation of the military SBP program.

Other legislative successes included combining BAQ/ VHA into one allowance (BAH), extending the retiree dental program to include surviving spouses and dependent children, the option to voluntarily discontinue SBP participation and the ability to name a current spouse as the beneficiary of the SBP benefit and eliminate a former spouse's claim to the annuity.

In 1998, FRA focused on the importance of enacting legislation that would establish an FEHBP-65 demonstration, which would allow some older retirees to participate in the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan. FRA takes considerable pride in the enactment of this important legislation (included in the FY1999

NDAA). The stunning success of adopting the FEHBP-65 initiative so soon after the 1997 subvention demonstration, was due in large part to the efforts of FRA and The Military Coalition with tireless grassroots support from shipmates and others.

Also noteworthy was the increased appropriations for DoD Health Affairs, chronically under-funded at an estimate as high as \$613 million for FY1999. Other successes from the Second Session, 105th Congress included: A full Employment Cost Index (ECI) active duty pay hike of 3.6 percent; veterans' preference legislation; improved pharmacy operations; and paid-up SBP coverage that would take effect in 2008.

FRA also continued its strong opposition of additional manpower reductions while a heightened operations tempo was in effect. Significant progress was further made in educating members of Congress on the effect of capped pay hikes for 12 of the past 16 years, the challenge of maintaining a viable active duty and Reserve force amid declining recruiting and retention numbers.

The year also saw a 20-percent increase in funding for Montgomery GI Bill benefits and more money to support other education benefits, reform of the military pharmacy system, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) reinstatement for remarried spouses whose marriages end by death or divorce.

FRA's most significant success in 1999 was the repeal of REDUX, the 1986 Military Retirement Reform Act, a law that significantly reduced the value of retired pay for those who entered active duty after July of that year. As a result of REDUX's repeal in the FY2000 NDAA, personnel now have a choice at the 15-year career mark of reverting to the more generous High-3 formula for calculating military retired pay, or remaining under the REDUX formula and receiving a \$30,000 bonus.

In addition, there was considerable progress on pay comparability in 1999 with enactment of a 4.8-percent active duty pay hike and somewhat greater than Employment Cost Index (ECI) pay increases previously authorized through 2006.

Bill language also provided a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) for active duty and Reserve personnel contingent upon enactment of subsequent appropriations and TRICARE improvements

including remote location access and claims processing enhancements.

Other enhancements include repeal of the dual compensation law limiting total compensation for retired military personnel working in government jobs, \$200 million in emergency funding for Coast Guard pay and benefit improvements, an enhanced dental program for retirees plus expansion and improvement of Reserve Dental Program, waiver of TRICARE deductibles for families of Reservists recalled to active duty for less than one year, and enhanced military construction (MILCON) funding for housing and barracks construction and maintenance totaling \$3 billion.

There was progress on the concurrent receipt issue with enactment of a special compensation for severely disabled (70 percent and above) military retirees along with expanded burial space for Arlington National Cemetery, honor guard details for all veterans' funerals, and permanent authorization for the forgotten widows' Survivors Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity.

## 2000 through 2009

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As the world awaited the arrival of the year 2000, or Y2K, there was global fear the world's digitally-based information and electronic data storage, retrieval and control systems would go haywire, since most computer systems were programmed to recognize only up to the year 2000. Y2K fears proved unfounded, but the years since have been anything but normal. Events that have occurred since, along with accompanying shifts in international economic, political and military priorities and alliances, prompted a paradigm shift within the U.S. military, including alternating reductions and increases in manpower, operational adjustments, shifting (rebasin) and reducing the American military's footprint overseas (especially in Europe), and the need to cut costs.

FRA's challenges have been particularly daunting, since the cost of personnel programs for active duty members and retirees have risen steadily during the period. Healthcare costs skyrocket annually, consuming precious and increasingly sparse dollars. As a result, it's increasingly challenging to sustain the military healthcare benefit and other quality-of-life (QOL) programs. With lawmakers focused on reducing federal spending and lowering the national debt, military programs — from

weapons systems to what previously had been thought to be sacrosanct entitlements and QOL benefits — now are in Capitol Hill's budget-cutting crosshairs. The Global War on Terrorism, along with unprecedented rebuilding costs from natural disasters at home and U.S. financial assistance for foreign disaster aid, have squeezed available funding for our men and women in uniform, both past and present, as the U.S. military increasingly relies on a business model to operate more efficiently.

There inevitably will be continuing pressure to cut entitlement programs, including those for military members, retirees, veterans and their families. FRA continues to closely monitor all proposals that directly impact its members and respond accordingly. Grassroots pressure — members communicating with their elected officials — can greatly influence a proposal's outcome. Perhaps the greatest value of being an FRA member is the organization's advocacy work in taking our members' concerns and loudly voicing them on Capitol Hill. FRA headquarters representatives send immediate action alerts to mobilize support — or opposition when warranted — about legislation affecting pay, healthcare, benefits and quality-of-life programs. Such influence must be brought to the attention of any potential or former members who might not understand or appreciate the value of FRA membership.

FRA and its partners in The Military Coalition (TMC) will not allow fiscally challenging times to deny past and present service members — and their families — entitlements and rights promised when they chose to serve. We continue the vigorous fight to prevent lawmakers from eliminating and/or under-funding promised benefits. We accept change is inevitable and understand the need for fiscal responsibility, however, FRA continues to represent our active duty, reserve, retired and veteran members and tenaciously oppose any attempts to reduce or eliminate earned entitlements and benefits. We do not believe that service members' benefit programs should be the first target of opportunity when it comes to saving money. FRA considers these benefits to be lifelong, contractual obligations and — as in the business world — must be honored in their entirety.

The year 2000 is remembered as the benchmark in improvements to healthcare for military retirees, and coupled with the successes of 1999, will go down in history as two of the most successful

legislative years in the preceding two decades with regard to pay and benefit improvements.

FRA actively championed TRICARE for Life (TFL) and expanded pharmacy benefits for Medicare-eligible retirees, creating one of the most robust senior health-care plans in the country. TFL provides healthcare coverage for military retirees and their family members over the age of 65. (Prior to this legislative success, older retirees were dropped from the TRICARE system when they became eligible for Medicare.) The expanded worldwide pharmacy program, which includes access to the benefit via military treatment facilities, the National Mail Order Pharmacy and retail pharmacies, became effective on 1 April 2001. These and other healthcare enhancements included in the FY2001 NDAA mark significant steps toward fulfilling the government's commitment of healthcare-for-life for military retirees.

In addition, FRA's mid-career enlisted pay reform campaign led to authorization of pay increases for E-5, E-6 and E-7 personnel effective on 1 July 2001. Other key legislative successes during 2000 include emergency supplemental funding for DoD Healthcare, BAH, recruiting and retention efforts, a budget agreement that included \$400 million to establish a military retiree healthcare trust fund and enhanced DoD health program funding of \$178 million.

Other successes include expanded TRICARE Prime Remote for active duty family members, the elimination of copays for family members enrolled in TRICARE Prime, a retiree catastrophic cap reduction under TRICARE Standard to \$3,000, and authorization of a Long Term Care insurance program for active, reserve, retired military and federal civilians.

Regarding pay and other benefits, FRA's 1999 study on enlisted pay resulted in enactment of pay reform for mid-career enlisted personnel. In addition, an expansion of the Special Compensation for Disabled Retirees to include Chapter 61 retirees was authorized along with career sea pay reform, increased BAH to reduce out-of-pocket housing costs to 14.5 percent (and eventually to zero by 2005), appropriations to administer the active/reserve Thrift Savings Plan, increased SGLI benefits from \$200,000 to \$250,000, improved benefits for reserve members performing funeral duty, and increased special duty assignment pay.

Legislation also authorized certain VEAP (Veterans Educational Assistance Program) participants to enroll in the more generous Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) and increased the monthly MGIB rate from \$536 to \$650 effective 1 November 2000, advance payments of PCS temporary lodging expenses, repeal of legislation prohibiting the VA from assisting veterans prepare benefit claims, and the elimination of the Social Security earnings limit for beneficiaries age 65 to 69.

For the second year in a row, healthcare topped FRA's legislative agenda in 2001. Threats to military health-care and the Association's work to address those threats will be a continuing trend over the ensuing years. Specifically in 2001, FRA wanted to ensure TRICARE for Life (TFL) provisions passed the previous year were effectively implemented. The TFL benefit provides healthcare coverage for military retirees over age 65 and acts as a second payer to Medicare. FRA and other military associations worked closely with TRICARE management personnel and DoD representatives to determine how to best and most efficiently bring this important program to thousands of beneficiaries.

The Association did not rest on its laurels following the TFL victory. In addition to monitoring the program's implementation, FRA continued to advocate expanded healthcare options for active duty personnel and retirees, supported efforts to offer the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) to military beneficiaries who do not live near a military treatment facility, and testified before House and Senate committees about the shrinking number of military treatment facilities.

FRA also used its influence in 2001 to express outrage over the large number of arbitrarily discarded military absentee ballots in the 2000 presidential election, predominantly in Florida. Despite DoD postal regulations, thousands of military absentee ballots lacked postmarks, which was a key facet of the ballot controversy. Partnering with other members of The Military Coalition, FRA sent strongly worded protests to key House Armed Services Committee members and to Florida state officials. The protests resulted in then-Secretary of Defense William Cohen initiating a DoD Inspector General (IG) investigation.

No mention of the year 2001 would be complete without referencing the terrorist attacks on

September 11th of that year. Shortly after the attacks, President Bush announced a “war on terror,” a conflict that has continuing impact on military personnel, their families and all Americans.

FRA’s efforts in 2002 laid the groundwork for future successes. Following months of deliberations and threats of a presidential veto, lawmakers and the Administration reached a compromise on the concurrent receipt issue. The compromise came in the form of a special combat disability pay for disabled military retirees who were wounded in combat. The special pay, Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC), was paid to retirees who had a disability rating of 10 percent or higher resulting from a combat wound or injury that resulted in the awarding of a Purple Heart. If a retiree had a disability rating of 60 percent or higher for injuries and illnesses incurred in “combat situations,” they were also eligible for CRSC benefits. Although the measure fell far short of FRA’s ultimate objective of full concurrent receipt for all disabled retirees, it did provide relief to more than 10,000 disabled retirees and was a monumental first step toward eventual elimination of existing concurrent receipt restrictions.

During 2002, FRA took the lead on a campaign to preserve the commissary benefit, working with other military organizations to counter proposed cuts to commissary funding and staff over the next three years.

FRA was instrumental in the enactment of the Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) of 2002, legislation designed to protect US ports and waterways from terrorist attacks. The legislation expanded the Coast Guard’s end strength and authority to reflect the service’s growing role in national security and in preparation for its transition from the Department of Transportation to the Department of Homeland Security in February 2003.

The Association also persuaded members of Congress to sponsor two bills to address shipmates’ concerns. The first initiative, the Military Retiree Dislocation Assistance Act (HR 4936, 107th Congress), proposed a dislocation allowance be paid to military personnel who are retiring or transferring to the Fleet Reserve. FRA was directly responsible for taking the concerns voiced by senior enlisted Marines during a Sergeants Major Symposium and carrying them forward to Capitol Hill. The second measure, the Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act (HR 5287, 107th Congress),

also addressed members’ concerns by proposing that survivors be allowed to retain the last month of retired pay following a military retiree’s death. (Existing policy requires that survivors return a prorated portion of the final month’s retired pay.)

Until 2003, disabled military retirees were forced to forfeit a dollar of their retired pay for each dollar they received in VA disability compensation. FRA scored a significant victory in 2003, when Congress authorized some disabled military retirees to receive their military pay and VA disability compensation concurrently, without offset. The “concurrent receipt” language was part of the FY2004 NDAA, passed in late 2003, and created a phased-in benefit for retirees whose disability ratings are 50 or higher. The measure also expanded eligibility for Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) to all military retirees with combat-related disabilities. (Previous CRSC benefits were available only to retirees who received a Purple Heart or had disability ratings of at least 60 percent for a combat-related injury.) The new plan also opened a phased-in concurrent receipt program and CRSC benefits for National Guard and Reserve retirees. Although the concurrent receipt victory eliminated the dollar-for-dollar offset for approximately 200,000 disabled military retirees, FRA continues to advocate full concurrent receipt for all disabled retirees.

Many of FRA’s other legislative efforts came to fruition via the FY2004 NDAA, including an across-the-board 4.1 percent pay raise for military personnel, with additional pay hikes for career enlisted service members. Active duty personnel saw their Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) increase, resulting in a reduction of average out-of-pocket costs from 7.5 to 3.5 percent. The FY2004 NDAA — thanks to the efforts of FRA and other military and veterans’ organizations — also extended until December 2004 family separation, hostile-fire/imminent-danger pay and other previously-enacted specialty pays for service members fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. Basic allowance for subsistence (BAS) rates also increased. The FY2004 NDAA also established full replacement-value reimbursement for personal property lost or damaged during government-ordered PCS moves, thanks in part to FRA’s support. Although the full replacement-value policy wouldn’t be implemented until 2006, it was an enormous step away from the previous system that provided an arbitrary, depreciated-value reimbursement for

personal property damage during a PCS move.

In its continuing effort to preserve and enhance the military quality of life, FRA and TMC worked together to provide unlimited commissary access for Guard and Reserve personnel, and “gray area” retirees — reservists who have completed their military careers but are not yet eligible to receive retired pay.

Following its successful role in implementing TRICARE for Life, FRA continued to advocate adequate funding for, and enhanced accessibility to, the Defense Health System. FRA representatives attended the 2003 annual TRICARE conference and weighed in against the proposed 4.2 percent reduction in Medicare reimbursement rates. TRICARE reimbursement rates are linked to those of Medicare, and the FRA became concerned that reduced reimbursement rates would create accessibility problems for TRICARE and Medicare beneficiaries throughout the country. FRA joined with TMC representatives to strongly voice concerns to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld about the proposed rate reductions. FRA legislative team members also pointed out the dwindling number of TRICARE-participating providers in the system, resulting in beneficiaries having to travel unrealistic distances for care. For instance, in one geographical area a beneficiary had to drive 70 miles to see a TRICARE specialist when a similarly qualified specialist, who was not a TRICARE provider, was available in town.

Strong efforts by FRA and other members of TMC also led to enhanced TRICARE coverage for Guard and Reserve personnel, offering TRICARE enrollment (on a cost share basis) to non-activated Reservists and their families who are unemployed or whose employers do not offer health insurance coverage.

FRA marked its 80th anniversary in 2003 with the launch of Project Outreach, a national effort to establish, reinforce or expand support to local Sea Service commands and activities, and seek input from service members on issues of concern to them. The outreach program emphasized the influence that members have when voicing their concerns about congressional action — or inaction — on proposals and legislation impacting benefits and entitlements.

After waging battle for decades, 2004 brought a major FRA victory when the Association was able to

convince lawmakers to phase out the “widow’s tax” imposed on Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuitants. FRA and other members of TMC had long opposed the dollar-for-dollar reduction in military survivors’ SBP annuities when they reached the age of 62 and became Social Security-eligible, reducing the benefit to 35 percent of the service member’s retired pay. Provisions of the FY2005 NDAA, passed in late 2004, authorized the gradual elimination of these offsets over a three-and-a-half year period, effectively increasing the SBP benefit for thousands of survivors. The phased-in enhancements began in September of 2005 (raising SBP annuities from 35 to 45 percent) and continued through April of 2008 (increasing annuities to 55 percent of retired pay). The measure also provided an SBP open enrollment period for military retirees who did not elect SBP when they ended their active military career.

Building on previous successes, FRA was also involved in concurrent receipt enhancements approved in 2004. Provisions of the FY2005 NDAA authorized military retirees whose VA disability ratings were 100 percent to receive both their military retired pay and VA disability compensation, without offset, beginning in January of 2005. This was a welcome acceleration of concurrent receipt legislation approved in 2003 and a significant step toward full concurrent receipt for all disabled military veterans.

The FY2005 NDAA also included a 3.5-percent pay raise for active duty and reserve personnel and increased Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) rates. The BAH increase represented the fifth and final installment of a multiyear initiative to eliminate average out-of-pocket housing expenses for military personnel. Lawmakers also recognized the important sacrifices of Reserve personnel by improving Reservists’ access to the military’s TRICARE healthcare program.

During 2004, FRA also weighed in as DoD determined which military installations would be eliminated during its 2005 round of Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC). The Association asked the BRAC commission to consider the impact of a base closure on military retirees who live in the vicinity and rely on the base infrastructure for healthcare and commissary/exchange access. DoD responded by agreeing to include FRA’s recommendation in its final selection criteria.

Despite ongoing efforts to consolidate the various

service base exchanges into one system, FRA and TMC continued to support the services' desire to maintain individual exchange systems. Although FRA supports resource-sharing and other cooperation leading to more efficient operation, the Association believes each service is best able to handle its own exchange system, including the management and distribution of funds generated to support morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) programs.

When proposals to institute variable pricing policies in commissaries surfaced, FRA shipmates voiced their concerns and the Association played a key role in defeating the proposal. The variable pricing plan would have been a significant departure from the current commissary policy of pricing goods at five percent above cost. Another proposed change to the commissary system was rejected when the FRA, along with other organizations representing active duty and retired service members, voiced strong opposition to a proposal for having a political appointee replace the military chairman of the Commissary Operating Board.

The FRA also successfully lobbied in 2004 to authorize hazardous duty incentive pay (HDIP) for Coast Guard Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) personnel. Navy VBSS personnel conducting similar maritime interdiction operations at least three times a month were already authorized HDIP, but USCG personnel performing similar operations were not. Through FRA efforts, Coast Guard VBSS team members now are at pay parity with their Navy VBSS counterparts.

FRA wasted no time weighing in at the beginning of 2005 when the Association felt the proposed VA budget was inadequate. The Association was concerned that the FY2006 VA budget targeted only low-income, special-needs veterans who had service-connected disabilities. Veterans not falling into this category would be asked to pay a \$250 annual enrollment fee and absorb an almost 100-percent increase in prescription drug copayments. FRA was particularly concerned about the cost in both money and long waiting periods for service for those veterans in Priority Groups 7 and 8 — vets who had no compensation-eligible disabilities and whose incomes exceeded specified levels. Final VA funding earmarked for FY2006 fell significantly short of veterans' needs and FRA continues to closely monitor VA healthcare issues.

Through no fault of deserving retirees or other beneficiaries, medical care costs across the board continued to skyrocket in 2005, resulting in national news articles critical of the high cost of sustaining medical care for military retirees and their families. FRA was successful in stalling lawmakers' efforts to institute premium increases in TRICARE coverage for retirees under age 65 and institute an enrollment fee (and higher deductible) for TRICARE Standard beneficiaries. Although the defeat of these proposals was a significant victory for the Association, FRA immediately began preparing to defend its members against future increases.

One of 2005's priority issues for the FRA was speeding up enactment of the 1999 NDAA provision that eliminated Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) premiums — while retaining full benefits — for military retirees age 70 or older who have paid into the system for 30 or more years. If the legislation's effective date (1 October 2008) remained unchanged, many enrollees who signed up for SBP at its inception in 1972 will pay premiums for 36 years. Although, language to advance the enactment date appeared in the House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act, it was not included in the final law. FRA continued its fight for early enactment of this measure.

In 2005, FRA and TMC began their campaign to enact legislation protecting service members from abusive financial practices that compromise readiness. FRA opposed exorbitant interest rates charged by predatory lenders who offer quick, easy, but obscenely expensive loans — some coming with interest rates as high as 500 percent — and successfully supported legislation that would limit interest rates to 36 percent for military members. FRA also facilitated enactment of a financial protection bill that would protect servicemen and women from unscrupulous promotion of dubious financial products (insurance and other products) aboard military bases and installations.

FRA also lent its strong support to the 108th Congress's Crosby-Puller Combat Wounds Compensation Act, designed to allow critically wounded service members who require lengthy recuperation to retain all specialty pay and allowances to which they were entitled prior to their injury. The bill would allow the wounded member to continue drawing all pay and allowances until reassignment or release from active duty.

One of FRA's longstanding legislative priorities took center stage when LtCol. Patricia Larabee, USA, briefed the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Service (DACOWITS) on the inequities of the Uniformed Services Former Spouse Protection Act (USFSPA). During the meeting, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said he'd "never heard of it," and indicated DoD and the services' reluctance to educate service members about USFSPA. FRA has long contended that provisions of the loosely-written and inconsistently-applied law force many military retirees to pay an unfair portion of their retired pay to their former spouses. The Association consistently calls for reform of the USFSPA to make it more equitable for service members, and also schedules presentations on the law during its annual national conventions.

FRA is a founding member of The Military Coalition (TMC), a powerful group consisting of 35 military, veterans, uniformed services, and survivor organizations that present a unified front when working for their respective members. FRA has always been extremely active in TMC's collective advocacy work, and in 2005, strengthened its role when TMC representatives elected FRA National Executive Secretary Joe Barnes to co-chair the coalition for a two-year term. Barnes's effective leadership of TMC's Personnel, Compensation, and Commissaries committee made him an outstanding candidate to represent the enlisted perspective in TMC matters. FRA continues to work with other like-minded organizations to weigh in on all issues affecting our members.

2005 also brought substantial change to the internal operations of the FRA. During the Association's 78th National Convention, delegates voted to expand FRA membership eligibility to include former members of the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. Membership had previously been limited to active duty and reserve Sea Service personnel, and those who retired following a full military career.

Delegates also voted to abolish the position of National Financial Secretary (NFS), and establish a National Finance Officer position. Paul Rigby, who served as FRA's senior accountant since 1998, was hired for the position and was installed on 1 November 2005.

Healthcare victories were among FRA's most significant legislative achievements for 2006 —

including the defeat of several proposals to increase military beneficiaries' out-of-pocket healthcare costs.

For a second year in a row, Congress and the Department of Defense (DoD) proposed dramatic increases to TRICARE Prime premiums and copays for younger retirees (under age 65), the establishment of a new TRICARE Standard annual enrollment fee, and increased pharmacy copayments for all DoD beneficiaries. Thanks in large part to congressional testimony by FRA officers and staff; visits to lawmakers by FRA's National Board of Directors, Regional Vice Presidents and LA FRA leaders; and strong grassroots support from our members, these proposals were defeated until other cost-saving initiatives within the Defense Health System can be explored and implemented. Shifting the financial burden to military retirees should be a last resort and is adamantly opposed by FRA.

FRA was also successful in again resisting efforts to impose a \$250 annual enrollment fee on former service members seeking healthcare within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) if they have higher incomes and/or do not have service-connected disabilities (Priority Groups 7 and 8). This proposal has surfaced annually since 2004 in an effort to subsidize the cost of VA healthcare — a benefit FRA believes is earned and "paid for" through honorable service to our nation.

In addition to curbing healthcare cost increases for its members, FRA was also instrumental in securing expanded benefits for service members and their families. In the FY2007 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), TRICARE coverage for Select Reservists and their families was expanded without increasing cost shares for these beneficiaries, enhanced mental health screenings were approved, and a pilot program was established to promote early diagnosis and effective treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Active duty personnel benefited from FRA's work to enact laws that protect military personnel from predatory lending practices and from implementation of full replacement-value reimbursement for household goods lost or damaged during a government-sponsored move (originally authorized in the FY2004 NDAA).

FRA actively supported legislation that authorized more Marine Corps personnel, increased the

Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) benefit for personnel serving in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, and banned protests before, during and after service members' funeral services conducted at cemeteries within the National Cemetery Administration.

Healthcare concerns again topped FRA's legislative agenda in 2007, and FRA was again successful in thwarting DoD and congressional proposals to impose substantial increases to TRICARE Prime premiums and copays for military retirees under the age of 65. The FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (passed in December of 2007) also included language that halted proposed enrollment fees for Priority Group 7 and 8 veterans seeking care at VA facilities, many of whom are military retirees.

Additionally, the legislation included other FRA-supported initiatives such as a 3.5-percent pay increase for active duty personnel (0.5% above the Administration's request), expanded Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) for Chapter 61 retirees (those who were medically retired), and reduced Reserve retirement age by three months for each collective 90-day period of active duty service.

The DoD healthcare system came under heavy public and congressional scrutiny during 2007 for the inadequate care provided to wounded warriors. A series of articles in *The Washington Post* (beginning on 18 February 2007) revealed filthy quarters, administrative hassles, outpatient neglect and unacceptable treatment standards at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Various congressional hearings and legislative proposals followed, culminating in a wholesale change in Army medical leadership, several review panels and commissions, and FRA-supported legislation that mandates improved care and management of wounded service members at DoD facilities, as they transition from DoD to VA healthcare systems, and during their shift to the civilian world, if necessary.

FRA's ongoing battle to reform the Uniformed Services Former Spouse Protection Act (USFSPA) was strengthened when DoD sponsored briefings and submitted recommended changes to the law. Despite Pentagon and FRA efforts to amend the USFSPA, no changes were enacted during the year.

FRA's top legislative concern for 2008 was again healthcare. For the third year in a row, the Association was successful in holding the line on

premium and pharmacy fee increases for military retirees under age 65. FRA helped convince Congress to maintain the current premium and pharmacy rate structure for retired TRICARE beneficiaries, despite repeated proposals by the Administration and DoD to increase premiums for TRICARE Prime enrollees, establish new enrollment fees and increased deductible amounts for TRICARE Standard beneficiaries, and increase pharmacy copays for all retiree participants. FRA also won its fight against Administration proposals to establish a \$250 enrollment fee for Priority Group 7 and 8 veterans (those with higher incomes and no compensable disabilities) seeking care at Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities. Additionally, when Congress sought to cut Medicare (and associated TRICARE) reimbursement rates by 10.6 percent, FRA weighed in. Congress not only repealed the rate cut, but authorized a 1.1-percent increase in reimbursement rates for 18 months.

FRA also championed legislative efforts to assist wounded warriors, their families and caregivers. As a result a comprehensive policy was established to address the challenges of identifying and treating service members suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

One of FRA's most significant achievements for 2008 was the authorization of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. The education program provides a more generous tuition benefit and includes stipends for housing, books and tutoring. The legislation also eliminated the \$1,200 enrollment fee that exists for Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) participants, and includes provisions that allow eligible personnel to transfer the benefit to spouses and dependent children in exchange for additional years of service. FRA strongly supported this legislation and led the charge to include VEAP-era (Veterans Education Assistance Program) personnel and others who did not currently have access to MGIB benefits.

Disabled military retirees also benefited from FRA's efforts in 2008 when the phase-in period for Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP) was eliminated for retirees who are rated 100-percent disabled as Individual Unemployable (IU). Benefits were paid retroactively to 1 January 2005 for this population. Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) was also expanded to include Chapter 61 (medically retired) retirees with at least 15 years of service and disability ratings of 60 percent or higher.

Since the 2000 federal elections, when thousands of military absentee ballots were arbitrarily discarded, FRA has consistently called for improvements to the absentee voting process for military voters. In 2008, the Association's congressional testimony caught the attention of the PEW Charitable Trust's Center on the States, a not-for-profit organization that identifies and advances state policy solutions. FRA endorsed PEW's Make Voting Work initiative to improve the accuracy, convenience, efficiency and security of the absentee voting process, and also joined the newly-established Alliance for Military and Overseas Voting Rights, which is focused on enacting laws that will streamline and expedite the processing of absentee ballots from overseas voters.

2008 marked the final phased-in adjustment for Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) beneficiaries who are also eligible to receive Social Security payments. SBP annuity payments increased from 50 to 55 percent of covered retired pay, thanks to previously enacted legislation that was championed by FRA. Legislation that granted paid-up status to SBP participants who pay 360 months of premiums and reach age 70 also took effect in 2008.

2009 marked the beginning of the 111th Congress, amid strong calls to trim the federal budget and reduce the nation's enormous debt. As healthcare costs continued to skyrocket and the need for weapons and technology programs continued to compete with military people programs for funding, FRA sustained its fight to ensure service members' and veterans' pay, benefits and quality-of-life programs were not compromised.

Early in the year, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released a report that included 115 "options" for cutting government costs for DoD, VA and other healthcare programs. Many of these proposals suggested shifting larger cost shares to beneficiaries. In October, CBO published a second volume of its recommendations, which included proposals to cap military pay raises at 0.5 percent below the Employment Cost Index (ECI), consolidate military commissaries and exchanges, and revise the annual formula for calculating retirees' cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) in a way that would reduce COLAs by an estimated 0.3 percent. Although none of these proposals were introduced as legislative bills during the year, they were stark reminders of threats to military benefits.

Healthcare again was the Association's top legislative focus and FRA worked in both the

DoD and VA arenas to preserve earned medical benefits for its members. DoD's Military Health System Senior Oversight Committee made recommendations to increase TRICARE Prime enrollment fees for military retirees and their families, boost pharmacy copays and reduce catastrophic caps from \$3,000 to \$2,500. The Obama Administration suggested the VA seek payment for veterans' medical treatment from third party payees, if the veteran had private insurance coverage. Outcries from FRA shipmates and others thwarted these initiatives.

The challenges facing the VA took center stage in 2009, with the Administration proposing additional funding for the department along with an effort to implement a two-year VA budget cycle. FRA supported both initiatives, which took effect later in the year.

To address chronic delays in processing claims for veterans' disability benefits, the VA implemented an expedited process to adjudicate claims for 100-percent disabled veterans. FRA also supported White House efforts and legislation that sought to expand eligibility for the concurrent receipt of military retired pay and veterans' disability benefits, however these initiative never became law.

Despite its challenges, FRA proudly endorsed some of the VA's success stories in 2009. FRA had been a strong proponent of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and closely monitored its implementation. Although there were initial administrative delays for some students, the program has proven to be very beneficial to service members, veterans and their families.

The VA had suspended enrollment for Priority 8 veterans (vets whose incomes exceeded the VA's income threshold) in 2003, but many FRA shipmates were among the 266,000 veterans whose access to VA healthcare was restored, effective January 1, 2009. FRA was a long-standing advocate for this initiative, as well as the VA's efforts to better serve female veterans and address homelessness among our nation's former service members.

During the year, FRA continued its efforts to ensure military voters, particularly those serving overseas, are not disenfranchised by restrictive mailing and balloting requirements, and the Association cheered the end of Stop Loss, the policy that forced active duty and Reserve personnel to extend their tours beyond their

enlistment contract or eligibility for retirement.

The Association's legislative successes for the year included full funding for the Defense Health Program and limiting fee increases for some TRICARE Standard beneficiaries; a 3.4-percent pay hike for service personnel and an increase in Supplemental Subsistence Allowance (from \$500 to \$1,100/month) for junior enlisted personnel with dependents; eliminating a scheduled COLA cut for retirees and the enactment of a special benefit program for designated care givers who assist catastrophically wounded or ill service members.

FRA marked its 85th anniversary by launching the FRA Education Foundation at its 82nd National Convention in Virginia Beach, Va. Thanks to the generosity of shipmates and corporate sponsors, FRA's existing scholarship program had grown substantially over the decades and the FRA Education Foundation was established to provide assistance to even more scholars, through the development of more and larger scholarships, as well as other educational programs.

The 2009 National Convention will also be remembered for the appearance of the Honorable Tammy Duckworth, assistant secretary for Public and Intergovernmental Affairs for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). A former Black Hawk helicopter pilot who lost both her legs and partial use of one arm in Iraq in 2004, Duckworth spoke passionately about the VA's efforts to help all veterans, regardless of age, income, geography or gender, and outlined many of the VA's ongoing efforts to assist vets from all eras. NVP Gary Blackburn (FRA Branch 8, Vallejo, Calif.) was elected to be FRA's National President, with PRPEC Jim Scarbro (FRA Branch 40, Chesapeake, Va.) serving as National Vice President.

## 2010 through 2018

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*Note: Additional detail of FRA's more recent legislative advocacy efforts is available in the annual reports from the chairman of the National Committee on Legislative Service, which is available in each year's Convention Delegate Kit documents. These reports are accessible in the Member Resources section of the FRA website ([www.fra.org](http://www.fra.org)), as part of the annual Resource CD.*

The nation's burgeoning budget deficit and proposals to cut government spending dominated

the headlines and FRA's legislative work in 2010. Healthcare reform, resolving pending cuts to Medicare and TRICARE reimbursement rates, and authorizing service-connected status for veterans and retirees who served off the coast of Vietnam and suffer the effects of Agent Orange exposure were among the key issues the Association worked during the year.

The debate over healthcare reform waged for months before The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act became law was enacted (P.L.111-148) in March. The measure sought to provide healthcare for every American, but FRA members were concerned its passage would negatively impact military and VA healthcare programs. Healthcare remained FRA's top priority for the year and the Association was outspoken in its belief that military and veterans' healthcare services are integral to military readiness and serve the unique needs of current and former service members, their families and survivors. FRA and its members convinced congressional leaders that DoD and VA medical services should be excluded from the law, but funding the massive reform initiative involves assumptions about reducing funding for Medicare and other programs over the ensuing 10 years.

For the first time since 2006, no increases to TRICARE fees were proposed during the year, but FRA shipmates were anxious about the future of many military and veterans programs. Early in the year, President Obama established a bi-partisan National Committee on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform and asked for recommendations on reducing government costs and debt by the end of the year. The committee's final report, released in December, included recommendations to increase TRICARE and TRICARE-for-Life costs for beneficiaries, change the formula for determining military retirement benefits, deferring receipt of cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) until age 62 and revamping the basis for measuring inflation via the Labor Department's Consumer Price Index (CPI).

The preamble of the report made it clear that all programs and budget line items would be considered for future cuts: "The problem is real. The solution will be painful. Everything must be on the table."

The report also included a recommendation to find a permanent solution to the so-called

“Doc Fix.” Cuts in Medicare and TRICARE reimbursement rates were mandated by previously enacted legislation and many physicians and other healthcare providers threatened to stop seeing Medicare and TRICARE patients if the cuts took effect. Congress kept extending the deadline for the reductions to take effect, ostensibly to make time for revising the rate formula or finding another suitable compromise. During 2010, the deadline to enact these reductions was postponed no fewer than five times, with the last deadline extending to January 1, 2012. Each time the enactment date slipped, the rate of the proposed cuts got deeper. In early 2010, the cumulative reduction to reimbursement rates was cited at 21 percent; by the end of the year, the cuts were predicted to be closer to 23 percent. (By 2011, the situation was still unresolved and the cumulative reduction rate had risen to 27 percent.) According to Tom Philpott (Military Update, December 29, 2011), the American Medical Association estimates it would have cost \$48 billion if the new formula had been enacted in 2005, but predicts the cost to be more than \$300 billion if it were enacted on January 1, 2012.

Insuring access to healthcare for veterans was also a high priority for FRA in 2010. In congressional testimony and discussions with members of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, FRA consistently listed the following at its top veteran-related concerns:

- Insuring maximum access to VA care for all veterans,
- Improving processing to reduce the staggering backlog of unresolved VA disability claims,
- Removing restrictions on Agent Orange disability claims filed by Vietnam vets who served off the coast (a.k.a. “Blue Water” vets, see below),
- Improving Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefits, and
- Ensuring that Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits are distributed in a timely manner.

Access to VA disability benefits was expanded for Vietnam veterans who’d been exposed to Agent Orange during the year. In early August, President Obama signed legislation that provided \$13 billion in funding to process claims for some 200,000 Vietnam vets who suffer from ischemic heart disease, Parkinson’s disease or B-cell leukemia. These three diseases were deemed service-related, but only for veterans who had “boots on the ground” in Vietnam.

FRA was pleased at this development, but continued to advocate a broader definition of service-connection to include those Navy and Coast Guard vets who served off the coast of Vietnam, so called “Blue Water” veterans. Many have health problems often associated with herbicide exposure, but have endured drawn-out legal battles with the VA to prove those problems are related to their military service. (Read the April 2011 feature story in *FRA Today* about Agent Orange.)

More progress was made on the Agent Orange front when the VA released a list of vessels that had operated primarily or exclusively on Vietnam’s inland waterway, as well as those that temporarily operated in inland waterways or tied up at shoreside piers, and those that operated in Vietnam’s close coastal waters for extended periods with evidence that crewmembers went ashore. If a veteran’s service aboard one of these vessels can be confirmed through his military record during the specified time frames, exposure to herbicides can be presumed. The list, which is available at [www.fra.org/agentorange](http://www.fra.org/agentorange), is continuously being updated and will hopefully make it easier for some Vietnam vets to receive benefits for Agent Orange-related ailments.

FRA’s other legislative successes for the year included full funding for the Defense Health Program; enactment of legislation that provides caregiver support, expanded VA healthcare for female veterans and improved rural healthcare programs; mental health initiatives and aid for homeless vets; and implementation of overseas voting improvements during the 2010 elections. FRA also weighed in to oppose protesters at military funerals, even though the Supreme Court upheld the protesters’ right to do so. FRA also expressed its frustration and outrage at several states’ delays in providing absentee ballots for the 2010 elections and called for reform in the wake of reports that more than 200 gravesites in Arlington National Cemetery were improperly marked and service members’ remains were handled improperly.

FRA’s 83rd National Convention was held in Spartanburg, S.C., where delegates focused on membership retention. Assistant Secretary of the Navy Juan Garcia III and Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard Michael Leavitt were the guest speakers at the FRA and LA FRA joint opening ceremonies. Delegates approved a partnership with Capella University that will provide tuition discounts to shipmates, their family members and

FRA Headquarters staff, and also endorsed the Ladies Auxiliary of the Fleet Reserve Association decision to do business as the FRA Auxiliary. NVP Jim Scarbro (FRA Branch 40, Chesapeake, Va.) was elected National President and PRPEC Jeff Gilmartin (FRA Branch 207, Dale City, Va.) was elected as National Vice President.

2011 opened with great speculation about the recommendations from the aforementioned National Committee on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform (released in late 2010). The recommendations made in the report, along with those suggested by the Bipartisan Policy Center's Debt Reduction Task Force, dominated the headlines, as well as FRA's efforts, throughout the year and generated great concern and anxiety in the military and veterans' communities.

In early January, Secretary of Defense Gates announced an unexpected directive from President Obama to trim an additional \$78 billion from the Defense budget over five years, beginning in 2012. This reduction is on top of previously announced plans to reduce DoD spending by \$100 billion over the same time period. To reach this end, Gates recommended "modest increases" to TRICARE fees for working-age retirees and also referenced cuts in Army and Marine Corps manpower, the elimination of government contractors (including 780 at the TRICARE Management Activity) and commands (including Joint Forces Command in Norfolk/ Suffolk, Va.), and substantial changes to weapons and equipment programs.

Additionally, the new 112th Congress instituted new rules that required any new tax cut or spending increase to be offset by other tax increases or spending cuts. FRA had its work cut out for it in the new year, particularly in light of the reduced number of lawmakers with military service. (Only 20 percent of the House's 435 members and 25 of the Senate's 100 members are military veterans.)

Before turning over the reins as Secretary of Defense to Leon Panetta in June, Robert Gates publicly acknowledged the difficult budget environment and the dismal outlook for military pay and benefits. Panetta, whose background included being the director of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in the early 1990s and director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) from 2009 to 2011, became the 23rd SecDef in July and almost immediately had to grapple with the 2011 Budget Control Act (passed August 2,

2011) that would further compound DoD's budget challenges.

The 2011 Budget Control Act increased the nation's debt ceiling and required significant spending cuts to the federal budget. The cuts would come in two phases, with initial cuts of nearly \$1 trillion government-wide (with some \$350 billion coming from Defense) and a second phase that established a special "Super Committee" that was tasked to determine how best to trim an additional \$1.2 to \$1.5 trillion by November 23, 2011. The 12-member, bipartisan and bicameral committee's recommendations would then be sent to Congress for approval, without the option for amendments or filibusters.

When the Super Committee failed to reach an agreement on ways to pare down government spending, automatic spending cuts (known as sequestration) were authorized as part of the Budget Control Act. These cuts, which included another \$500 billion in reductions to Defense spending, were scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2013, and continue through 2021.

Sen. Tom Coburn (Okla.) released a 614-page report in August that detailed suggestions for reducing the federal deficit by \$9 trillion. The report, entitled "Back in the Black," fueled speculation about exactly how the budget cuts would impact shipmates. Recommendations included requiring all military retirees to enroll in TRICARE Standard and increasing annual enrollment fees to \$3,500 for families and \$2,000 for individuals; making TRICARE Prime available only to active duty personnel and their dependents, creating a \$500 co-pay for TRICARE for Life (TFL) beneficiaries and requiring TFL beneficiaries to pay half of medical costs not covered by Medicare (up to \$3,025), increasing prescription co-pays, requiring veterans in Priority Groups 7 and 8 to pay an annual enrollment fee of \$250 and increase co-pays for VA prescriptions, consolidating military commissaries and exchanges, and eliminating DoD schools and tuition assistance programs for active duty service members. These were only suggestions, but caused considerable concern for FRA and its members.

The FY 2012 National Defense Authorization Act included several victories for FRA. Active duty personnel saw a 1.6-percent pay increase and FRA successfully advocated for tax credits for employers who hire veterans. Although TRICARE Prime

enrollment fees increase marginally to be based on annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjustments rather than the more onerous health care inflation index, efforts to impose an enrollment fee for TRICARE Standard and TRICARE-for-Life beneficiaries were not authorized by Congress. After a year of delays, Congress failed to resolve the so-called “doc fix” and the proposed cut to reimbursement rates for physicians seeing Medicare/ TRICARE patients were again postponed.

FRA’s 84th National Convention was held in Kansas City, Mo., where delegates elected NVP Jeff Gilmartin (FRA Branch 207, Dale City, Va.) to serve as National President and PRPSE Mark Kilgore (FRA Branch 22, Pensacola, Fla.) to serve as National Vice President. LtGen Steven Hummer, USMC, commander of Marine Forces Reserve and Marine Forces North, and Kevin Secor, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Service Organization Liaison, addressed shipmates and Auxiliary members at the joint opening ceremony. No changes were made to FRA’s Constitution and By Laws during this convention.

Debate about sequestration and concerns about the nation rumbling over the “fiscal cliff” continued to dominate the headlines in 2012. A variety of options were discussed, including exempting the Departments of Defense and Veterans’ Affairs from sequestration, but by year’s end (apart from protecting VA programs from arbitrary budget cuts), the 112th Congress still had no definitive way forward and kicked the proverbial can to the 113th Congress via a six-month continuing resolution that kept most spending levels at FY 2012 levels, which convened in January of 2013. (It’s important to clarify that VA health care programs were protected from this because they operate on a two-year budget.)

The “doc fix” also went unresolved during 2012 and was added to a growing list of unfinished business. Lawmakers also deferred on a necessary increase in the nation’s debt ceiling until well into the new calendar year, and a continuing resolution, which kept the government operating at 2012 levels, was approved in September and extended to March 27, 2013.

The Department of Defense consistently described military medical costs as “eating the department alive,” but in August, DoD sent a request to Capitol Hill asking for authorization to reprogram \$708 million in unspent funds from the Defense Health

Program. FRA cheered the 24 members of Congress who wrote to Secretary of Defense Panetta, suggesting these excess funds be used “to address the issues of military retiree health care, research and treatment for PTSD and TBI, and address the military suicide epidemic that we are currently facing.”

Amid concerns about looming budget cuts, service members grew more anxious about their retirement benefits. For the first time in several years, preserving retirement benefits surpassed healthcare as a top priority for active duty and Reserve personnel who took FRA’s annual survey of military and veterans’ benefits. Healthcare, both access and quality, remained the top concern for military retirees and veterans.

Concerns about healthcare access were amplified in November, when it was announced that some 171,000 military retirees in Iowa, Minnesota, Oregon and Reno, Nev., would no longer have access to TRICARE Prime coverage. Beneficiaries who live more than 40 miles from a Military Treatment Facility learned they would be shifted to TRICARE Standard coverage as of April 1, 2013. This deadline was later shifted to October 1, 2013.

FRA was effective in stopping proposals to drastically increase TRICARE Prime enrollment fees and implement new fees for TRICARE Standard and TRICARE-for-Life (TFL) beneficiaries. As noted above, FRA was also successful in thwarting proposals to peg future fee increases to healthcare inflation. The FY 2013 National Defense Authorization Act included increased pharmacy co-pays that were substantially less than increases proposed by DoD, due to a multi-year demonstration for TFL beneficiaries to use home delivery for prescription medications for at least one year. Legislative success was also realized when veterans and family members who lived and worked at Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base from 1957 to 1987 were authorized to receive hospital care and medical services for certain illnesses and conditions related to exposure to the base’s contaminated water supply. (Click here to read more about the Camp Lejeune water issue.) Despite FRA’s opposition, the U.S. Supreme Court determined The Stolen Valor Act of 2005 violated a citizen’s right to free speech and declared it was unconstitutional to impose sanctions against someone who lied about his/ her military service and/or awards.

FRA continued its support for legislative or policy action that would allow Blue Water veterans to obtain service-connection for health problems related to Agent Orange exposure. Although the VA did not amend its stand on those who served off the coast of Vietnam, the department did expand its list of ships that were exposed to the toxin. A link to the ever-growing list of vessels is available at [www.fra.org/agentorange](http://www.fra.org/agentorange). The VA also continued its efforts to streamline its claim process and reduce the backlog of unresolved disability claims.

FRA also strongly supported a number of initiatives aimed at reducing the unemployment rate among America's veterans, including the VOW to Hire Heroes Act, mandatory transition assistance support and additional tax credits for employers who hire veterans. Efforts to stem the dramatic increase in military suicides also remained at the forefront of FRA's work and the Association supported a variety of legislative initiatives aimed at improving mental health access and consolidating DoD and VA suicide prevention efforts.

Among its wide-reaching advocacy efforts, the Association also supported legislative proposals to provide retirement benefits to Sailors who were involuntarily separated from the Navy. Nearly 3,000 Sailors were unfairly selected for separation by Enlisted Retention Boards (ERB), but less than 10 percent of them qualified for retirement benefits. FRA weighed in on this injustice, particularly since only those who completed 15 years of service before September 1, 2012, were eligible for Temporary Early Retirement Authority (TERA) benefits.

More than 120,000 messages were sent from FRA shipmates to members of Congress through the Association's online Action Center at [www.fra.org](http://www.fra.org) during 2012. These messages strengthen FRA's voice on Capitol Hill and set an all-time record for shipmate's online interaction with lawmakers.

The FRA Education Foundation became an approved charity in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC), the only authorized solicitation of federal employees. As the parent organization, FRA is justifiably proud that the Foundation met the stringent requirements to participate in the CFC.

FRA's 85th National Convention was held in Reno, Nev., where delegates elected NVP Mark Kilgore (FRA Branch 22, Pensacola, Fla.) as National President and PRPWC Virgil Courneya (FRA Branch 274, Reno, Nev.) as National Vice President.

Convention highlights included keynote addresses from Mark Clookie, director of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and Kevin Secor, the Veterans Service Officer Liaison for the VA. Shipmates voted to consolidate the New England and Northeast Regions (effective at the close of the 86th National Convention in 2013), reduce the number of members required to start a new branch from 25 to 20, dissolve the FRA Building Committee; terminate the FRA Defined Employee Pension Fund and make the Special Committee on Future Strategic Planning a standing national committee (National Committee on Future Planning).

The 2012 election set the framework for the legislative process for Congress in 2013. President Barack Obama and his running mate Vice President Joe Biden won re-election and the Democrats maintained the majority in the Senate. However, Republicans maintained their majority in the House of Representatives. A notable freshman Senator elected was Senator Tammy Duckworth (IL), who was keynote speaker at the 82nd FRA National Convention (2009), Virginia Beach, Virginia, when she served as Assistant Secretary U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and previously served as Director of the IL Veterans Affairs Department. She is a disabled Army National Guard veteran from the War in Iraq (wounded in November 2004).

In 2013 FRA successfully The Association blocked drastically higher TRICARE Prime fees, pharmacy co-pays and new TRICARE-for-Life (TFL) beneficiaries proposed by Administration.

FRA led the charge to introduce legislation to provide payment of full military retired pay and veteran's disability pay (concurrent receipt). At FRA's request legislation was introduced in the House and Senate to provide Agent Orange presumption for Blue Water Navy veterans with connected ailments.

In October FRA elected PRPWC/NVP Virgil Courneya (Branch 274, Reno, Nev.) as National President, PRPNW John Ippert (Branch 46, Honolulu, Hawaii) as National Vice President. A new National Executive Director, Thomas J. Snee, was elected during the 86th National Convention in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He replaced Joe Barnes who retired. Director of Legislative Programs John Davis was elected co-chairman of the Military Coalition.

In 2013 FRA presented testimony before key Congressional oversight committees in conjunction with the pending FY 2014 authorizing and appropriations legislation. These include:

1. NP Mark Kilgore testified before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees on March 6, 2013;
2. DLP John Davis participated in a House Veterans Affairs Committee Roundtable discussion of the disability claims backlog at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) with Chairman Jeff Miller (Fla.) and other majority members of the committee;
3. NED Joe Barnes testified before Senate Armed Services Committee's Personnel Subcommittee on April 17, 2013;
4. DLP Davis wrote statement for the record on behalf of FRA and The Military Coalition (TMC) submitted to the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee, April 17, 2013 hearing regarding personnel issues;
5. NED Joe Barnes participated in a VSO round table discussion with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on April 25, 2013;
6. DLP John Davis and representatives from other veteran service organizations (VSOs) met with the Senate Democratic Steering and Outreach Committee, July 25, 2013.

FRA's ninth annual "Storming the Hill" addressed FRA priority issues which focused on TRICARE fee increases, reduction of TRICARE Prime service areas, Medicare/TRICARE physician reimbursement rates (i.e. "doc fix"), concerns about newly appointed Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, Chained CPI for COLA, benefits for Agent Orange Blue Water Vietnam Veterans, VA disability claims backlog, advanced funding for VA, and concurrent receipt reform.

FRA's legislative successes for 2013 include:

- No TRICARE fee increases;
- Adequate funding of TRICARE and VA healthcare;
- defeating efforts to reduce future cost-of-living-adjustments (COLA) increase for military retirees by blocking implementation of chained CPI in lieu of current CPI;
- 1.7% active duty pay increase despite a federal civilian pay freeze; and
- Increased funding for VA.

FRA co-sponsored the House Guard and Reserve Caucus breakfast on March 13, 2013. FRA hosted the 15th annual House Coast Guard Caucus breakfast meeting. NED Tom Snee and DLP John Davis provide a legislative process brief for Navy CY 2014 Legislative Fellows on November 22, 2013; DLP John Davis provides a legislative process brief to Marine Corps CY 2014 Legislative Fellows on November 25, 2013.

The Pinnacle award was presented to Rep. Jeff Miller (Fla.), Chairman House Veteran's Affairs Committee.

In December 2013 FRA's legislative team together with staff from other military and veterans' associations visited every Senator's office on Capitol Hill to urge them to oppose the provision (Section 4300) of the budget agreement (H. J Res. 59) that reduces by one percent the cost of living adjustment (COLA) for military retirees under age 62 that will be implemented with 2016 COLA increases. FRA mobilized its grassroots program to help oppose this measure. The measure passed both chambers and was signed into law by President Obama in January.

Calendar year 2014 was marked by partisan gridlock stopping federal government budget form passing and forcing Congress to use short-term Continuing Resolutions (CR) to keep government open. The Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission also became operational, significant end strength reductions proposed in Administration's FY 2015 budget, the Phoenix, Arizona VA hospital scandal, and FRA celebrating its 90th anniversary in November. Repeal of COLA cut for retirees under age 62 that joined military before January 2014 was included in CR that passed in January, 2014. FRA noted with concern the decrease in the Defense Department (DoD) personnel programs from \$144 billion in the current FY 2014 budget to \$135 billion proposed in the Administration's FY 2015 request. Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Chuck Hagel warned that future sequestration budget cuts mandated by the 2011 Budget Control Act (BCA) will create a "hollow force."

FRA welcomed the repeal of the one-percent COLA cut for those joining the military before January 1, 2014 but was disappointed the COLA cut applies to future retirees that joined the military on or after January 1, 2014. The Association was delighted that all current retirees and almost all of those currently

serving are excluded from the one-percent COLA cut. FRA continued to work to eliminate the one-percent COLA cut provision for those enlisting after January 1, 2014, that could have a negative impact on recruitment.

FRA presented testimony before key Congressional oversight committees in conjunction with the pending FY 2015 authorizing and appropriations legislation, and attended meetings with Members of Congress focused on key legislative agenda issues. These include:

- NP Virgil Courneya testified before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on March 12, 2014;
- DLP John Davis testified before the Senate Armed Services, Personnel Subcommittee on behalf of FRA and the Military Coalition (TMC) on March 26, 2014;
- DLP John Davis provided written testimony to the House Armed Services Committee, Military Personnel Subcommittee on March 25, 2014;
- NVSO Chris Slawinski participated in VSO roundtable with Rep. Jeff Miller (Fla.), Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, other members of the committee, and House leadership on April 29, 2014;
- DLP John Davis participated in VSO/MSO roundtable with Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on June 12, 2014; and
- DLP John Davis participated in VSO/MSO roundtable with Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on July 25, 2014.

On July 3, 2014 the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) released an interim report. While the 358 page interim report does not make any recommendations for changes to benefits, it does document the Commission's understanding of the entirety of current military compensation and benefit programs; relevant laws, regulations, and policies; associated appropriated Federal funding; and historical background for the uniformed services' compensation and benefit programs.

The MCRMC stated that while compensation funding has increased substantially over the last two decades it is mostly due to inflation (particularly medical inflation) and 13 years of war. MCRMC also found that while the compensation funding has increased it has remained consistently around 30 percent of the DOD budget. The MCRMC did note that Reserve compensation

deserves special attention for reform.

The 2013 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) established a nine-member commission to review military compensation and retirement programs and make recommendations for their modernization to the president and Congress in February 2015. President Obama has charged the MCRMC to review "the full breadth of the systems," including healthcare, military family support, and any federal programs that could influence the decision of current or future service members to stay in uniform or leave the service. FRA has consistently expressed serious concerns about cost-driven efforts to "reform" pay and benefits and contends that the current pay and benefit package is key to recruiting and retention and sustaining military readiness. The Association provided a written statement to the Commission expressing FRA concerns. DLP John Davis (also TMC Co-chairman) met with MCRMC Commissioners and repeatedly with MCRMC staff to provide an enlisted perspective on pay and benefit changes.

The tenth annual "Storm the Hill" visits started with the Pinnacle Award reception in the Rayburn House Office Building recognizing Rep. Joe Wilson (SC) Chairman of the House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee. Immediately after the reception members of FRA's National Board of Directors (NBOD) and other Association leaders brought the enlisted perspective to Capitol Hill as they visited their respective elected officials in Washington, DC. These shipmates shared the Association's position on priority legislative issues with their senators and representatives, asking them to oppose the Administration's call for drastically higher TRICARE Prime fees, co-pays and new enrollment fees for TRICARE Standard and TRICARE-for-Life (TFL) beneficiaries. They urged Congress to expand concurrent receipt to all disabled veterans, not to cut funding for military stateside commissaries and to exclude Defense from sequestration. FRA leaders also asked that Congress make adequate physician reimbursements ("doc fix") for Medicare/TRICARE patients permanent. Additionally, FRA leaders asked lawmakers to take action to reduce the disability claims backlog at the VA, extend disability benefits to "Blue Water" Vietnam veterans exposed to the Agent Orange herbicide while serving off the coast of Vietnam, and allow the VA to have full two-year advance funding to avoid the delay of services to wounded warriors during government shutdowns.

It is important to note that more than 2,500 Shipmates sent advocacy messages to Capitol Hill in conjunction with NBOD storming the Hill.

FRA maintains a strong and credible presence on Capitol Hill and successes for 2014 include:

- Repealing one-percent COLA cut for retirees under age 62 that joined the military before January 1, 2014;
- No additional retiree health care enrollment fee hike in FY 2015;
- Beating back Administration's effort to reduce Commissary subsidies;
- Protecting personnel programs from arbitrary "sequestration" cuts;
- The Administration abandoned its call for implementing the Chained Consumer Price Index (CPI) in lieu the current CPI in its 2015 budget request to reduce COLA increases;
- Allowing Post 9/11 GI bill benefits for spouses of service members who died in the line of duty since September 11, 2001.
- Requiring the VA to offer non-VA care to any veteran enrolled in VA health care system as of August 1, 2014 or who is newly discharged combat veteran if such veteran is unable to secure an appointment within 30 days or resides more than 40 miles from the nearest VA medical facility;
- Allowing 2-year funding for the entire VA budget and increasing funding;
- Extending pilot program to provide rehabilitation services to veterans with complex-mild traumatic brain injury (TBI);
- Improving care for veterans experiencing military sexual trauma;
- Allowing the VA Secretary to expedite the firing senior VA managers who are accused of mismanagement;
- Hiring more physicians, other medical staff, and improving VA infrastructure;
- Providing in-state tuition to veterans and eligible dependents using Post 9/11 GI Bill;
- Providing Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to spouses of service members who died in the line of duty; and
- Establishing a Congressional Commission on Care to evaluate access to care throughout the VA health care system and provide a report to Congress;

A major threat to military benefits are the arbitrary and gradually increasing sequestration budget cuts that require half of the cuts to come from the Defense budget even though Defense makes up on

17 percent of the budget. FRA is advocating that Defense be excluded from ever-larger sequestration cuts. FRA is also concerned about the nearly 30-percent reimbursement rate cuts effective March 15, 2015, for doctors who accept Medicare and TRICARE patients unless Congress acts to address this issue. Reimbursement rates are significant to beneficiary access to care. FRA is supporting the "SGR Repeal and Medicare Provider Payment Modernization Act" (H.R. 4015) to make the doc fix permanent.

NP Virgil Courneya, NED Tom Snee, and DLP John Davis met with Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard (MCPOCG) Michael Leavitt on legislative issues. Later that day NP Courneya and NED Snee presented the 2013 Pinnacle Award to Rep. Jeff Miller in his Capitol Hill office. NP Virgil Courneya and FRA staff met with Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Michael Barrett to discuss issues of mutual concern.

NED Tom Snee and DLP John Davis provided a legislative update for the Secretary of the Navy Senior Enlisted Symposium on May 20, 2014.

DLP John Davis attended a media event sponsored by Speaker of the House John Boehner (Ohio) and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif) highlighting Caring for Military Families, a joint effort of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation (EDF), and the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP).

FRA hosted the 15th annual Coast Guard Caucus breakfast meeting on June 25, 2014.

ADLP Stephen Tassin and DLP Davis manned information table at Modern Day Marine Expo, September 23-25, 2014 (6 new members and 64 Green cards).

The 87th Convention was held in Corpus Christi, Texas, and delegates elected NVP John Ippertu (Branch 46, Honolulu, Hawaii) as the national president and PRPSE Roger Mitchell (Branch 188, Tampa, Fla.) as national vice president.

NED Thomas Snee and DLP John Davis provided legislative process brief for the newly appointed Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard (MCPOCG) Stephen Cantrell on October 28, 2014.

NP John Ippert, NED Thomas Snee, DLA John Davis and ADLP Stephen Tassin attended the Marine Corps Ball on November 8, 2014. NP John

Ippert and DLP John Davis with MC Commandant Joseph Dunford and SMMC Micheal Barrett attended the Marine Corps Birthday event at the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington, Va. on November 10, 2014.

Due to the untimely death of NVP Roger Mitchell, the National Board of Directors approved National President Ippert's appointment of JrPNP Virgil Couneya as National Vice President. The 88th Convention was held in Spokane, Washington where delegates elected NVP Virgil Courneya as National President and PRPSC Donald Larson was elected national vice president.

On Friday January 30, 2015 the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC), created by the FY 2013 NDAA released its final report. The 280-page report made 15 substantive recommendations. FRA staff (NED Snee and DLP Davis) met with the members of the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) and their staff the day the report was released to discuss the final recommendations of the commission. The report recommends restructuring the military retirement system for future retirees, nearly doubling SBP premiums, and replacing all TRICARE programs except for TRICARE-For-Life (TFL) with a selection of commercial insurance plans. The Commission claims that TRICARE is no longer fiscally sustainable.

The Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) and House Armed Services Committees (HASC) held separate hearings the week after the release of the MCRMC report. FRA was the first and only military association to submit written statements to SASC and HASC initial hearings on the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) recommendations. FRA consistently expressed serious concerns about cost-driven efforts to "reform" pay and benefits and contends that the current pay and benefit package is key to recruiting and retention, and sustaining military readiness.

The first MCRMC recommendation (#1) would provide a "blended" retirement benefit to future service members and future retirees. The current defined benefit plan after 20 years of service would be replaced by a smaller defined benefit plan (from 50 percent to 40 percent) and there would be a new defined contribution plan known as a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) providing a one

percent employer contribution and an employee contribution unless the service member opts out. Any employee contributions would be matched by employer up to five percent of pay, but only up to 20 years of service. Both the House and Senate passed FY 2016 National Defense Authorization bills include similar retirement provisions based on the recommendations of the MCRMC will apply to future service members. FRA is deeply concerned that these changes will be inadequate to keep the 20-year career force and will create a culture of leaving, which will make long-term retention difficult. That said, the Association sent a letter to key members of the NDAA conference committee that among its other provisions would suggest several improvements to the retirement provisions that include:

- Eliminating the one-percent COLA cut for future retirees;
- Continuing TSP matching contributions past 20 years of service;
- Matching TSP contribution up to 5 percent; and
- Providing for a 2.5 percent (vice 2.0 percent) disability multiplier.

On February 13 FRA sent a survey question to all Shipmates with an e-mail address, asking for their opinion on this issue. Members were asked to fax back completed survey. The question and membership response are provided below:

"The Military Compensation Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) has proposed that future service members receive a reduced defined benefit plan (20-plus year retainer pay), a re-enlistment bonus after 12 years of service for re-enlisting for 4 more years, and a Thrift Savings Plan (TSP-a defined contribution plan from service member's pay) with a matching contribution from the federal government. Our legislative team will soon meet with elected officials to discuss this recommendation, and we need your input. Should FRA:

Support the plan (16.3%\*)

Oppose the plan (79.3%\*)

Take no position (4.4%)\*

*\*Results based on first 1855 responses received at FRA NHQ*

Another key recommendation (#6) impacts current beneficiaries by replacing TRICARE (except for TRICARE-for-Life) with a plan similar to the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program (FEHBP), except that Military Treatment Facilities would be included in the network. Like FEHBP

beneficiaries, retirees could choose from a selection of commercial insurance plans. Beneficiaries would be required to pay 20 percent of all health care costs, and premiums would be allowed to increase every year. FRA believes that health care costs for retirees have, at least in part, been paid for with 20 or more years of arduous military service. The TRICARE “reforms” were not accepted by either the House or Senate Armed Services Committees. Both committees indicated that future study of the proposed health care reforms was necessary.

FRA commented on all 15 recommendations in its 4 February HASC and SASC testimony. Congress enacted the Blended retirement System recommendation to take effect January 1, 2018.

The eleventh annual Hill visits started with Pinnacle Award Reception recognized Senator Kelly Ayotte (NH) for her work repealing the one-percent COLA cut for retirees under age 62 and for her steadfast opposition to increasing TRICARE annual enrollment fees. Immediately after the reception, members of the NBOD and other Shipmates “Storming the Hill” to bring the sea service enlisted concerns to Capitol Hill as they visited their respective elected officials. These Shipmates shared the Association’s position on priority legislative issues with their Senators and Representatives, asking them to oppose the Administration’s call for drastically higher TRICARE Prime fees, co-pays and new enrollment fees for TRICARE Standard and TRICARE-for-Life (TFL) beneficiaries. The Shipmates insisted that Congress not cut retirement benefits for future retirees as recommended by the retirement commission. They urged Congress to expand concurrent receipt to all disabled veterans, not to cut funding for military stateside commissaries and to exclude Defense from sequestration. FRA leaders asked lawmakers to take action to reduce the disability claims backlog at the VA, extend disability benefits to “Blue Water” Vietnam veterans exposed to the Agent Orange herbicide while serving off the coast of Vietnam, and expand the VA Caregiver program to include all catastrophically disabled veterans. Further they asked for Congress to provide oversight over the implementation of the VA Choice Card program. There were 44 meetings with FRA members and their legislators and/or staff.

It is important to note that more than 2,800 Shipmates sent advocacy messages to Capitol Hill in conjunction with NBOD storming the Hill.

Efforts to expand Agent Orange presumption for VA disability claims to include those who served off the coast of the Republic of Vietnam have been buoyed by the substantial number of co-sponsors for the House bill (H.R. 969) and the fact that the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) holding a hearing on the Senate bill and by the statement by SVAC Chairman Johnny Isakson (Ga.) that he would schedule a markup and committee vote on the bill.

Despite the VA’s irrational opposition to helping Blue Water Navy veterans, the agency has expanded presumption for exposure to Agent Orange for a select group of Air Force and Air Force Reserve veterans who served in Vietnam. It is now presumed these service members were exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange through regular and repeated contact with contaminated C-123 aircraft that had been used as part of Operation Ranch Hand (ORH). As a result, the VA can immediately begin providing benefits to this veteran population who submit a disability compensation claim for any of the 14 medical conditions that have been determined to be related to exposure to Agent Orange.

FRA is supporting Senator Gillibrand’s “Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act” (S. 681) and its House companion bill (H.R. 969), sponsored by N.Y. Rep. Chris Gibson), measures that would clarify a presumption for exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War for veterans who served off the coast of Vietnam, so-called Blue Water veterans.

FRA legislative successes in 2015 include:

- Blocking the Administration’s efforts to increase TRICARE enrollment fees for retirees under age 65;
- Passing a permanent “doc fix” (H.R. 2) to reform doctor reimbursement for Medicare/ TRICARE patients to ensure physician availability (P. L. 114-10);
- Protecting personnel programs from arbitrary “sequestration” cuts;
- Persuading Administration to abandon its call for implementing Chained (reduced) Consumer Price Index (CPI) in lieu of current CPI in determining COLA increases in its FY 2016 budget request;
- Enacting suicide prevention bill (H.R. 203) requiring 3rd party review of DoD and VA programs (P.L. 114-2);
- Increasing funding for VA programs;

- Persuading SVAC to hold a legislative hearing on Agent Orange/Blue Water Navy legislation (S. 681) for the first time in many years;
- Successfully postponing MCRMC proposal to replace TRICARE;
- Successfully defeating MCRMC recommendation to double SBP premium;
- Stopping MCRMC proposal to consolidate the Commissary and Exchange systems.

NED Tom Snee, DLP John Davis, and ADVP Ben Young provided legislative process brief for the newly appointed Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps (SMMC) in his Pentagon office on May 14, 2015.

NED Tom Snee and a small number of other association CEOs met with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA), Robert A. McDonald, to discuss the department's pending FY 2016 budget on May 21, 2015.

FRA hosted the 17th annual Coast Guard Caucus Breakfast, an event to expand awareness of the Coast Guard's varied missions, remarkable service to our nation, and promote dialogue between members of Congress and key Coast Guard leaders. NVP Virgil Courneya, NED Tom Snee, CG Commandant Admiral Paul Zukunft, former Commandant Admiral Robert Papp (Ret.), and MCPOCG Steven Cantrell spoke at the event on June 25, 2015.

The 2016 Presidential election overshadowed Congressional legislation in the last year of the 114th Congress. President Obama's last budget request called for drastic increases in TRICARE fees, pharmacy co-pays for military retirees under age 65, and an active duty pay increase that is smaller than civilian pay increase. 2016 also marked a dramatic decrease in VA disability claims backlog and an increase in VA disability claims appeals cases.

FRA presented testimony before key Congressional oversight committees in conjunction with the pending FY 2017 authorizing legislation, and attended meetings with members of Congress focused on key legislative agenda issues. FRA Congressional testimony for 2016 includes:

1. FRA statement-House Armed Services Committee on FY 2017 NDAA 3/17/16;
2. NP Virgil Courneya testimony-House & Senate Veterans Affairs Committees 3/16/16;

3. FRA statement-Senate Personnel Subcommittee on military benefits 3/8/16;
4. FRA statement-HASC-MP on DHA structure and budgeting 2/24/16; and
5. FRA statement-Senate Personnel Subcommittee on health care reform 2/23/16;

In addition, the FRA Legislative Team met with HASC-MP subcommittee and SASC-P subcommittee staff to discuss the FRA legislative agenda, the Administration's budget request and its impact on FRA members and other expected and pending legislation. The meeting with the HASC-MP included the Chairman of the Subcommittee, Rep. Joe Heck (NV).

The 12th annual National Board of Directors (NBOD) Storm the Hill visits started with the Pinnacle Award reception in the Rayburn House Office Building recognizing Congressman Tim Walz (Minn.) for his work on the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) and the House Armed Services Committee (HASC). Immediately after the reception, Board members and other FRA Shipmates brought the sea service enlisted concerns to Capitol Hill as they visited their respective elected officials.

These FRA members shared the Association's position on priority legislative issues with their Senators and Representatives, asking them to oppose the Administration's call for drastically high TRICARE Prime enrollment fees, a new TRICARE Standard "participation" fee, an enrollment fee for future TRICARE for Life beneficiaries, and huge increases in pharmacy co-pays. They urged Congress to oppose any drastic reform of TRICARE that would be used as a "smoke screen" to shift health care costs to beneficiaries. These Shipmates ask their legislators to expand concurrent receipt to include all disabled veterans, support VA claims presumption for Blue Water Vietnam Veterans exposed to the Agent Orange herbicide, and reduce the VA disability appeals claim backlog at VA. Finally, Shipmates asked legislators to extend the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) for widows/widowers and increase it.

FRA legislative successes 2016 include:

- Blocking efforts to abolish TRICARE (except for TRICARE for Life) and replace it with an entirely new health care system (Although substantial structural changes to health care program was enacted.);
- Successfully opposed the Administration's call

for a TRICARE for Life (TFL) new enrollment fee for new TFL beneficiaries;

- Blocking TRICARE Prime enrollment fee increases above CPI;
- Preventing new annual \$200 or more participation fee for TRICARE Standard;
- Tying future health fees to National Health Expenditures (NHE) index;
- Stopping Administration's proposed cuts to active duty BAH;
- Approving larger than requested active duty pay increase;
- Successfully supported the House passing Agent Orange/Blue Water Navy presumption provision as an amendment to the House FY 2017 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs (MilCon/VA) appropriations bill. Final version of MilCon/VA spending bill dropped Agent Orange provision;
- The House Agent Orange/Blue Water Navy bill had more co-sponsors than any other bill in the House (335);
- Final NDAAs include an extension of Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) payments for military widows and widowers that is due to sunset Oct. 1, 2017;
- VA recently issued a final ruling to increase VA health care eligibility for veterans affected by contaminated drinking water at the Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune (MCBCL). The final rule is a result of an FRA-supported bill that was signed into law in 2012, providing health benefits to service members and family members exposed to the contaminated water from 1957 to 1987;
- Successfully included reform provisions for the Uniform Services Former Spouse Protection Act (USFSPA) in Defense Authorization bill that was enacted into law;
- Protecting personnel programs from arbitrary "Sequestration" cuts;
- Increasing funding for VA programs;

FRA hosted the 18th annual Congressional Coast Guard Caucus breakfast on Capitol Hill, an event to highlight the Coast Guard's remarkable service to the nation. Admiral Paul F. Zukunft, provided a two-year report on his tenure as USCG Commandant. Master Chief Petty Officer of the Coast Guard (MCPOCG) Steven Cantrell echoed Zukunft's appreciation for FRA's support of the Coast Guard Family, specifically thanking the Association for its ongoing engagement with the Coast Guard's Enlisted Person of the Year (EPOY) program and supporting current and former

enlisted personnel on Capitol Hill. Caucus Co-Chairmen Rep. Duncan Hunter (Calif) and Rep. John Garamendi (Calif), chairman and ranking member (respectively) of the House Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Subcommittee, and Rep Joe Courtney (Conn.) attended the event. (May 2016)

During the FRA's 89th national convention, delegates elected National Vice President Donald Larson (Branch 94, Corpus Christi, Texas) as National President, PRP Northeast William Starkey (Branch 57, South Jersey, N.J.) as National Vice President and NED Tom Snee (Branch 181, Arlington, Va.) was elected by roll-call vote to serve for a second term.

The 2017 year started with a new administration in the White House, and we were half-way through FY 2017 and the federal government was still operating under a Continuing Resolution (CR) at FY 2016 spending levels. Also, the debt ceiling needed to be addressed. The new administration requested an increase for the Armed Services (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps) of nine percent. However, the Coast Guard budget was cut significantly. In response to proposed cuts to the Coast Guard, FRA mobilized grassroots to oppose Coast Guard budget cuts.

FRA presented testimony before key Congressional oversight committees in conjunction with the pending FY 2018 authorizing legislation and attended meetings with members of Congress focused on key legislative agenda issues. FRA Congressional testimony for 2017 includes:

- National President Donald Larson testified before joint meeting of House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees 3/22/17;
- DLP John Davis submitted statement HVAC Subcommittee on Agent Orange Blue Water Bill (HR 299) 4/05/17;
- NED Thomas Snee, and other VSOs, met with House Minority Leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA) and House Veterans Affairs Committee Ranking Member Rep. Tim Walz (MN.) and other Democratic legislators to discuss women veteran's issues 3/29/17;
- NED Thomas Snee participated in a press conference on Capitol Hill to celebrate the passage of the "Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act" (S.1094) to bring accountability to the VA 6/14/17.

- NED Snee participated in a VSO round table discussion about the future of Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) pertaining to extending the availability of ANC 6/12/17.
- DLP John Davis attended VSO meeting with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.), House Veterans Affairs Committee Ranking Member Tim Wlaz (Minn.) other key Democratic Representatives to discuss improvements to the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill and pending legislation on the Veteran's Choice program 7/18/17; and
- NED Snee, DLP Davis, and NVSO Slawinski met with HVAC Chairman Dr. Phil Rowe and HVAC staff to discuss Agent Orange/Blue Water Navy issue. 7/25/17

In addition, DLP John Davis met with Senate Armed Services, Personnel Subcommittee staff to discuss implementation of FY 2017 NDAA changes to TRICARE. Further all Military Coalition (TMC) policy committee co-chairs (HCA Bob Washington and DLP Davis) met with House Armed Services Military, Personnel Subcommittee staff to discuss military personnel issues including retirement benefits, TRICARE issues, concurrent receipt reform, and extending the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA). NP Donald Larson and DLP Davis met with Rep. Mike Coffman's staff to discuss FRA's legislative agenda. Rep. Coffman is Chairman of the House Armed Services, Military Personnel Subcommittee.

For several years the Pinnacle reception was held in conjunction with NBOD "Storming the Hill." Due to a scheduling conflict the National Board of Directors (NBOD) April meeting occurred with Congress was on recess.

For the past 22 years, FRA has presented its highest award to a member of Congress who goes above and beyond to advance FRA's legislative agenda. FRA National President Donald Larson National Executive Director Thomas Snee and DLP John Davis presented the Association's prestigious annual Pinnacle Award to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) to honor her outstanding leadership in preserving and enhancing the quality of life for military personnel, retirees, veterans and their families. Delegates at the October 2016 National Convention in Jacksonville, Florida voted unanimously to give this award to Senator Gillibrand.

FRA maintains a strong and credible presence on Capitol Hill and legislative successes in 2017

include:

- VA will use DoD Electronic Health Record (EHR) system which is a major step forward in FRA's goal of providing a "seamless transition" for personnel wounded or injured switching from active duty status to veteran status to receive the best care possible.
- Enactment of GI Bill improvements.
- Enactment of stop gap funding for FY 2017 for VA Choice program.
- Successfully supported enacted legislation to make VA employees more accountable for their conduct.
- Arlington National Cemetery (ANC) has scheduled expansion of cemetery. FRA survey indicates that 92 percent of members prefer expansion of cemetery before restrictions on eligibility.
- The U. S. Supreme Court ruled a state court may not order a military retiree to indemnify a divorced spouse for the loss in the divorced spouse's portion of the retirement pay caused by the retiree's waiver of retirement pay to receive service-related disability benefits. FRA has expressed this concern in Congressional testimony that some state courts have been awarding a percentage of veterans' compensation to ex-spouses, a clear violation of U. S. law.
- Successfully defeated legislative provision to reduce veteran's preference in federal hiring.
- FRA successfully persuaded DFAS to change narrow interruption of statute that would prohibit those who are divorced with a deceased former spouse to change the SBP beneficiary from the former deceased spouse to a current spouse.

FRA hosted its 19th annual Coast Guard Caucus breakfast in June. This event is designed to expand awareness on issues between senior Coast Guard leaders that promote dialogue between those members and members of Congress. The Coast Guard's 25th Commandant, Admiral Paul Zukunft was the keynote speaker (June 2017).

As part of its strong support of Sea Services Reserve Component enlisted personnel, FRA joined other military and veterans' organizations in co-sponsoring the House Guard and Reserve Caucus Breakfast on Capitol Hill. Representatives Steven Palazzo (Miss.) and Tim Walz (Minn.) co-chair the bipartisan caucus (March 2017).

For several years, the Pinnacle reception was held in conjunction with NBOD “Storming the Hill.” Due to a scheduling conflict the National Board of Directors (NBOD) April meeting occurred with Congress was on recess.

For the past 22 years, FRA has presented its highest award to a member of Congress who goes above and beyond to advance FRA’s legislative agenda. FRA National President Donald Larson National Executive Director Thomas Snee and DLP John Davis presented the Association’s prestigious annual Pinnacle Award to Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) to honor her outstanding leadership in preserving and enhancing the quality of life for military personnel, retirees, veterans and their families. Delegates at the October 2016 National Convention in Jacksonville, Florida voted unanimously to give this award to Senator Gillibrand.

NED Thomas Snee and representatives of other Veteran Service Organizations (VSO), attended a veteran specific listening session with members of the Presidential Transition Office (November 2016).

NP Larson attended the White House breakfast before participating in the ceremonies at Arlington National Cemetery and the special wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns. Following the breakfast, President Obama spoke to veterans and their family members who attend the occasion (November 11, 2016).

NP Larson will also attend the wreath laying ceremony at the Iwo Jima memorial in observance of the 241st anniversary of the Marine Corps (November 10, 2016).

At FRA’s 90th convention held in Hunt Valley, Maryland, delegates elected NVP William Starkey (Branch 57, South Jersey, N.J.) as President and Robert Washington (Branch 181 Arlington, Va.) as Vice President.

2018 is the first year since 1996 that the Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA-H.R. 5515) before the October 1, deadline. The final legislation dropped a huge TRICARE fee increase and put a cap on catastrophic rent increases at the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH). In addition the FRA-supported VA MISSION Act improving VA Choice program and extending the VA Caregiver program was signed into law.

The 91st FRA Annual Convention elections were held in San Antonio, TX. Delegates elected Robert Washington, (Branch 181 Arlington, Va.) as President, Donna M. Jansky, (North Shore Branch 31 Peabody, Mass.) as Vice President.

#### CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY/SPECIAL MEETINGS

FRA offered to present testimony key Congressional oversight committees in conjunction with the FY 2019 authorization legislation and attended meetings with members of Congress focused on key legislative agenda issues. FRA Congressional testimony for 2018 includes:

National President William Starkey testified before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees on March 14, 2018;

NED Tom Snee and DLP John Davis attend White House VA MISSION Act bill signing ceremony on June 6, 2018;

ADVP Brian Condon participated in a Capitol Hill press conference relating to the FRA-supported legislation, “Burn Pits Accountability Act” (S. 3181), sponsored by Sens. Amy Klobuchar (MN) and Dan Sullivan (AK). The bill seeks to address the widespread exposures of service members to airborne toxins from burn pits during post-9/11 deployments, a problem experienced by many veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. (June 28, 2018)

National Executive Director testified before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on the “Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act” (H.R. 299) on August 1, 2018;

DLP John Davis participated in a Capitol Hill press conference pertaining to the FRA-supported legislation, “Burn Pits Accountability Act” (H.R. 5671), sponsored by Reps. Tulsi Gabbard (Hi) and Brian Mast (Fla.), Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, respectively. (August 2, 2018)

DLP John Davis participated in round table conversation with House Minority Leader Rep. Nancy Pelosi (CA), Reps. Mark Takano (CA), Conor Lamb (PA), and Julia Brownley (CA), members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC). Also Rep. Eric Swalwell (CA), and Rep. Seth Moulton (MA), both members of the House Democratic Caucus were also in attendance. The

focus of the meeting was implementation and funding of the VA Mission Act.

#### PINNACLE AWARD/STORMING THE HILL

The FRA National Board of Directors and other Association leaders “stormed” Capitol Hill on Thursday, 12 April, 2018. Storming the hill is designed to bring the enlisted perspective to Capitol Hill as they visit their respective elected officials in Washington, D.C. These Shipmates provided a copy of FRA’s 2018 Legislative Agenda and discussed the Association’s position on priority legislative issues with their senators and representatives. They asked their legislators to extend veterans disability benefits to “Blue Water” Vietnam veterans exposed to the Agent Orange herbicide while serving off the coast of Vietnam. Additionally, requests were made to pass concurrent receipt reform, and to exclude Defense from sequestration. This event was held in conjunction with the Pinnacle Award reception that was held on Capitol Hill.

For the past 22 years, FRA has presented its highest award to a member of Congress who goes above and beyond to advance FRA’s legislative agenda. The Association presented its prestigious annual Pinnacle Award to Congressman Mike Coffman. He was first elected to Congress in 2008. He served as Chairman of the House Armed Services, Military Personnel Subcommittee. The Subcommittee under his leadership blocked TRICARE fee increases (The 2017 TRICARE fee increases were proposed in the Senate Defense Authorization bill.) and authorized a larger than requested active duty pay increase. Coffman is the only veteran in the Colorado delegation and the only Member of Congress to have served in both Iraq Wars. His military service includes serving in the Marine Corps and the Marine Corps Reserve.

#### ACTION CENTER

One of the reasons FRA has been successful on Capitol Hill is that we have members who are willing to contact their legislators and express their views on issues of importance to them. Since starting the FRA Action Center, Shipmates have sent more than 500,000 messages to Capitol Hill. Effective January 1, 2018 FRA changed vendors from CQ/Roll Call to Phone 2 Action.

The Association has experienced some difficulties with the new system. The contract with Phone 2 Action expires on December 31, 2018. FRA review status of the system at that time. FRA wants to thank Shipmates for providing feedback on the

Action Center. This year so far the Action Center has generated more than 37,000 e-mails to Capitol Hill. There are currently 14 issues on the FRA Action Center.

#### LEGISLATIVE TEAM

FRA’s Legislative Team consists of DLP John Davis, NED Thomas Snee, ADVP Brian Condon, and NVSO Chris Slawinski. These registered lobbyists work to enact the Association’s legislative agenda. Legislative Team members attend hearings, briefings, and special events; they participate in numerous meetings with members of Congress, and their staff; spearhead lobbying efforts; dispatched Congressional correspondence on legislation impacting FRA’s legislative agenda; and researched, wrote, and submitted testimony addressing priority active, Reserve, retired, and veteran’s issues plus Defense, Coast Guard and VA budgets.

#### LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

FRA maintains a strong and creditable presence on Capitol Hill and legislative successes during 2018 include:

- Blocked a huge TRICARE fee increase that would have doubled annual fees for TRICARE beneficiaries under age 65;
- Passed the Agent Orange Blue Water Navy bill (H.R. 299) out of the House;
- Expanded VA caregiver program to include all severely disabled veterans. Original program applied to badly disabled veterans that were injured after September 11, 2001;
- Limited rent increases for residents at Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) and phasing in next year’s scheduled huge fee increase over three years;
- Prohibited AFRH from removing residents only because they are unable to pay rent;
- Increased Navy and Marine Corps reserve and active-duty end strength for FY 2019;
- Consolidated seven VA community care programs into one to improve efficiency access to care;
- Increased annual active duty pay (2.6%) that keeps pace with civilian pay increases;
- Repealed a scheduled one percent cut in Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) for active duty;
- Expanded availability of Military One Source for retired and discharged members of the Armed Forces;
- Allowed Purple Heart, Medal of Honor, former POW, and service-connected disability veterans, and caregiver for disabled veterans to use commissaries and MWR facilities;

- Filed a Senate floor amendment, at FRA's request, to expand concurrent receipt. Amendment was not called for a vote;
- Permitted veterans, who have a 100 percent service-connected disability, to utilize a travel benefit currently extended to active duty and retired military members and their families to travel on military aircraft when there is extra space onboard.
- Mandated maximum life insurance coverage for service members deployed in a combat zone;
- Increased VA funding (6.1%) for FY 2019;

## LEGISLATION

Agent Orange: The House amended and approved (382-0) the House version of the "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R. 299). The National Executive Director testified before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee (SVAC) urging the Committee to approve the "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R.299) without amendment and send it to the Senate floor for final passage. Then sent it onto the President to sign it into law.

The original proposal would clarify that service members serving off the coast of the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict have a presumption for filing disability claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for ailments associated with exposure to the Agent Orange herbicide.

During the committee markup in the House, the legislation was amended to extend the presumption of herbicide exposure for veterans who served on or near the Korean DMZ between September 1, 1967 and August 31, 1971. As amended, the legislation will now also extend health care, vocational training & rehabilitation and monetary allowance to a child who was born with spina bifida if at least one of the child's parents served in Thailand between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975 and the VA determines that at least one of the parents had been exposed to a herbicide agent during that period. The bill also now includes improvements to VA's home loan program.

FRA believes Congress should recognize these veterans were exposed to Agent Orange herbicide and authorize presumptive status for VA disability claims associated with this exposure. Now is the time.

FRA supported excluding the Defense budget from sequestration. Budget cuts mandated by the BCA

of 2011 pose a threat to national security and will substantially impact member pay and benefits. These automatic cuts, known as Sequestration, require that 50 percent come from Defense even though Defense only makes up 15 percent of the federal budget. These cuts were intended to be so punitive that Congress and the Administration would be forced to work together to find reasonable alternatives. Unfortunately, this has not occurred. Last year Congress agreed to increase spending caps for FY 2018 and FY 2019. But the drastic cuts will kick in for FY 2020 and FY 2021. The NBOD stormed the Hill on this issue on April 12, 2018. FRA supported comprehensive concurrent receipt reform legislation (S. 66/H.R. 333) sponsored by Senators Dean Heller (NV) and Rep. Sanford Bishop (GA) respectively. These bi-partisan bills would authorize the immediate payment of concurrent receipt of full military retired pay and veterans' disability compensation for all disabled retirees. The FRA NBOD stormed the Hill April 12 and this was one of three key issues discussed with legislators. At the request of FRA Senator Heller introduced a floor amendment to the Senate version of the FY 2019 NDAA. The amendment was not called for a vote. The issue was listed on the FRA Action Center.

The FRA has long sought the elimination of the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP)/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset (H.R. 846/S. 339) for widows and widowers of service members. This offset, also known as the "widow's tax," impacts approximately 63,000 widows and widowers of our Armed Forces. These widows and widowers should receive both SBP and DIC benefits without the current dollar-for-dollar offset. SBP provides a surviving spouse 55 percent of their deceased spouse's retirement pay. The retiree gains this coverage for their spouse by paying a premium equal to 6.5 percent of his/her retired pay. Currently this offset is more than \$1,200 a month for many widows/widowers. Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) which increased gradually and now pays approximately 25 percent (\$310) of the offset. Senator Bill Nelson (Fla.), the sponsor of the Senate bill filed a floor amendment for the Senate version of the FY 2019 NDAA (S. 2987). The amendment was not called for a vote. The issue was listed on the FRA Action Center.

At the request of FRA, Rep. Walter Jones (NC) introduced the "Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act" (H.R. 3011) which would authorize the retention of the full final month's retired pay by the

surviving spouse (or other designated survivor) for the month in which the member was alive for at least 24 hours. The bill is listed on the FRA Action Center.

Surviving spouses who are unaware that the Defense Finance and Accounting Services (DFAS) should be notified immediately on the death of the military retiree are surprised to learn of this requirement. Those who had joint bank accounts, in which retirement payments were made electronically, gave little if any thought that DFAS could swoop down and recoup any overpayments of retirement pay from such accounts. This action could easily clear the account of any funds remaining whether they were retirement payments or money from other sources. The bill is listed on the FRA Action Center.

FRA supported the “Burn Pits Accountability Act” (H.R. 5671/S. 3181). Sponsored by Reps. Tulsi Gabbard (Hi) and Brian Mast (Fla.), Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, respectively, and Sens. Amy Klobuchar (MN) and Dan Sullivan (AK). The bills direct DoD to provide service members in Iraq and Afghanistan to have periodic health assessments during deployment and during military separations an evaluation of whether or not a service member has been exposed to open burn pits or toxic airborne chemicals. If they report being exposed, they will be enrolled in the Burn Pit Registry unless they opt out. The legislation was listed on the FRA Action Center.

#### CAPITOL HILL FUNCTIONS, MEETINGS AND LEGISLATIVE OUTREACH

FRA hosted its 20th annual Coast Guard Caucus breakfast on Wednesday, 12 June 2018. This event is designed to expand awareness of Coast Guard issues and promote dialogue between senior Coast Guard leadership and members of Congress. The newly confirmed Coast Guard’s 26th Commandant Admiral Karl Schultz was the keynote speaker.

DLP John Davis did legislative process brief for 105 active duty enlisted Marines at SNCO Academy (April, 2018).

DLP John Davis and other key Military Coalition (TMC) members met with Senate Armed Services, Personnel Subcommittee (SASC-P) staff on March 1, 2018 for an off-the-record meeting to discuss various personnel issues.

DLP John Davis, NVSO Chris Slawinski and other TMC policy committee co-chairs met with House Armed Services, Military Personnel Subcommittee (HASC-MP) staff

As part of its strong support of Sea Services Reserve Component enlisted personnel, FRA joined other military and veterans’ organizations in co-sponsoring the House Guard and Reserve Caucus Breakfast on Capitol Hill. Representatives Steven Palazzo (Miss.) and Tim Walz (Minn.) co-chair the bipartisan caucus (March 2018).

DLP John Davis provided CY 2018 Navy Fellows their introductory legislative process brief (November 2017) to prepare them for working on Capitol Hill for one-year. DLP John Davis and ADVP Brian Condon attended Mack’s Marines USMC Birthday celebration at Marine Corps Commandant’s residence representing FRA on November 3, 2017.

DLP Davis attended the Commandant’s Marine Corps Ball celebrating USMC 242nd birthday. ADVP Condon did legislative process brief for 98 active duty enlisted Marines at SNCO Academy (November, 2017).

#### LOBBYING DISCLOSURE

In 2018 FRA was in full compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Law requiring registration of lobbyists, organizational lobbying activities and expenditures. Each member of the Legislative Team is registered and files a report twice a year, and reports for the Association are filed three times a year.

In 2019 FRA helped enact the Agent Orange Blue Water bill (HR 299) and the SBP/DIC offset (“military widows tax”) was repealed.

#### CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY/SPECIAL MEETINGS

FRA offered to provide testimony to key Congressional oversight committees in conjunction with the FY 2020 authorization legislation, and attended meetings with members of Congress and their staff that focused on key legislative agenda issues. FRA Congressional testimony for 2019 includes:

National President Bob Washington testified before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees on March 12, 2019; DLP John Davis and several other TMC members

met with HASC subcommittee staff on January 28, 2019. The HASC meeting concentrated on concurrent receipt reform, SBP/DIC offset repeal, and the commissary benefit;

NED Thomas Snee, DLP John Davis, NVSO Chris Slawinski and a few other Military Coalition (TMC) Policy Committee co-chairs met with the Senate Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee staff on February 11, 2019, for an off-the-record meeting to discuss upcoming issues in this session of Congress. The meeting focused on proposed cuts to medical staff and possible TRICARE fee increases;

ADVP Brian Condon and several other VSOs met with SVAC staff to discussion pending veteran's legislation on February 25, 2019;

ADVP Brian Condon met with Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) staff to discuss implementation of last year's legislation impact on the AFRH on February 28, 2019; DLP John Davis submitted a written statement on the FY 2020 Defense Authorization bill (S. 1790) to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Personnel Subcommittee in conjunction with subcommittee markup hearing on May 21, 2019;

DLP John Davis attended a roundtable discussion on Capitol Hill with Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (CA) on implementation of the VA MISSION Act on May 8, 2019;

FRA dispatched a letter on June 3, 2019, to the House Armed Services Committee, Military Personnel Subcommittee providing comments on subcommittee's markup of the FY 2020 Defense Authorization (H.R. 2500);

NED Thomas Snee attended a bill enrolling ceremony for "the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R. 299) hosted by the Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi on June 18, 2019;

HCA Kerry Sprouffske attended meeting with SASC-P staff on July 16, 2019, to discuss proposed cuts to military medical staff;

DLP John Davis attended meeting with HASC-MP staff on July 26, 2019, to discuss proposed cuts to military medical staff; and

DLP John Davis participated in a roundtable discussion with the Commission on Military,

National, and Public Service on October 17, 2018 to discuss return of military draft.

During the 92nd annual FRA National Convention held in Memphis, Tennessee, the delegates unanimously elected the Association's first woman National President, Shipmate Donna Jansky (Northshore Branch 31), Michael F. "Mick" Fulton (Imperial Branch 289) as National Vice President and Christopher J. Slawinski (Navy Branch 181) was elected National Executive Director.

#### THE PINNACLE AWARD

The Pinnacle award is FRA's most prestigious award is given to one Representative or Senator each year. During the 115th Congress Congressman Phil Roe (TN), a veteran himself, served as the Chairman for the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC), and now is the Ranking Member in this current Congress. He has served six years on HVAC and has worked continuously to improve the lives and benefits for military retirees, veterans and active duty service members. He spearheaded the effort to pass the Agent Orange Blue Water legislation (H.R.299) last year that achieved a unanimous (382-0) passage in the House of Representatives. Though the bill ultimately failed in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, Congressman Roe did successfully push for other FRA-supported bills such as the "Quicker Veterans Benefits Delivery" (H.R. 1725), the "Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act" (H.R. 2288) and the "Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act" (H.R. 3218) to become law. Dr. Roe was presented the award after FRA's National President, Robert Washington Sr., finished testifying at a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. NP Washington and National Vice President Donna Jansky presented the award and thanked the Congressman for his hard work on behalf of veterans.

Due to a scheduling conflict the National Board of Directors (NBOD) did not "Storm the Hill" this year. The April Board meeting occurred when Congress was not in session. The NBOD was given a tour of the Pentagon in lieu of storming the Hill.

#### THE ACTION CENTER

One of the reasons FRA has been successful on Capitol Hill is that we have members who are willing to contact their legislators and express their views on issues of importance to them. Since starting the FRA Action Center, Shipmates have sent more than 500,000 messages to Capitol Hill.

Effective January 1, 2019, FRA changed vendors from Phone 2 Action to Voter Voice that is owned by Fiscal Note.

The Association was compelled to switch vendors because of difficulties with the P2A system. FRA wants to thank Shipmates for providing feedback on the Action Center. This year so far the Action Center has generated more than 27,000 e-mails to Capitol Hill. There was 17 issues on the FRA Action Center in 2019.

#### LEGISLATIVE TEAM

FRA's Legislative Team consists of DLP John Davis, NED Thomas Snee, ADVP Brian Condon, NVSO Chris Slawinski, and HCA Kerry Sprouffske. These registered lobbyists work to enact the Association's legislative agenda. Legislative Team members attend hearings, briefings, and special events; they participate in numerous meetings with members of Congress, and their staff; spearhead lobbying efforts; dispatch Congressional correspondence on legislation impacting FRA's legislative agenda; and researched, wrote, and submitted testimony addressing priority active, Reserve, retired, and veteran's issues plus Defense, Coast Guard and VA budgets.

#### LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

FRA maintains a strong and creditable presence on Capitol Hill and legislative successes during 2019 include:

- Enactment of the "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R. 299) that provides the presumption for VA disability claims for "Blue Water Navy" veterans, veterans that served near the Korean DMZ, and to children born with spina bifida due to a parent's exposure in Thailand;
- No TRICARE fee increases in the House (H.R. 2500) and Senate (S. 1790) NDAA bills;
- Elimination of automatic budget cuts, known as Sequestration that requires that 50 percent of the cuts come from Defense, even though Defense only makes up 16 percent of the federal budget;
- SBP/DIC offset repeal ("widows tax") for the first time is in House Defense Authorization bill (pending);
- House and Senate concurrent receipt legislation introduced and, at FRA's request, concurrent receipt amendments for NDAA filed in House and Senate. (Amendments were not called for a vote.);
- House NDAA bill (H.R. 2500) includes a delay

of proposed drastic cuts to military medical staff and requires GAO study to assess impact of cuts;

- Active duty annual pay increase that keeps pace with civilian pay increases (3.1%);
- Increasing Navy and Marine Corps end strength in House and Senate Defense Authorization bills;
- House and Senate Defense Authorization bills require Congressional approval to consolidate Exchanges and Commissaries;
- Final enacted NDAA created tenant bill of rights for service members in military housing;
- House and Senate Defense Authorization bills requires service members exposed to toxic chemicals to be registered in burn pit registry;
- Increased funding for VA (9.6%) in the House and Senate appropriations; and
- At the request of FRA, the "Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act" (H.R. 464) was introduced which would allow retention of the full final month's retired pay by the surviving spouse (or other designated survivor) for the month in which the member was alive for at least 24 hours.

#### LEGISLATION

As the convention book goes to press both chambers of Congress have passed their respective versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA-H.R. 2500/S. 1790) and a conference committee was appointed to resolve the differences between the two bills. Once the differences are resolved a final bill was submitted to the House and Senate for a vote. Both chambers approved the bill will and the President signed into law.

There are no TRICARE fee increases in either bill and both proposals provide an annual active duty pay increase (3.1%) that at least keeps pace with civilian pay. In addition, both bills require DoD to obtain Congressional approval to consolidate Exchanges and Commissaries, and create tenant bill of rights for service members living in privatized housing. Further both bills require service members exposed to toxic chemicals to be registered in burn pit registry. The House bill for the first time provides for a long-sought provision for SBP/DIC offset repeal for widows (known as "Widows Tax"). The House bill also delays proposed drastic cuts to military medical staff and requires a GAO study to determine the impact these cuts would have on combat readiness, and impact on access and quality of care for beneficiaries. FRA is disappointed that concurrent receipt floor amendments for the House

and Senate were not called for a vote.

The House NDAA had a provision to allow military service members to sue the Department of Defense for instances of medical malpractice unrelated to their military duties. Currently, the Feres Doctrine prevents service members from having their day in court when malpractice by military health care providers unconnected to combat results in severe injury or even death.

The Feres Doctrine was established in 1950 from *Feres v. United States*, 340 U.S. 135 (1950), in which the Supreme Court of the United States held that the military is not liable under the Federal Tort Claims Act for injuries to members of the armed forces sustained while on active duty resulting from the negligence of others in the armed forces. The practical effect is that the Feres doctrine effectively bars service members from collecting damages from the United States Government for personal injuries experienced in the performance of their duties. It also bars families of service members from filing Wrongful Death actions when a service member is killed. This exclusion does not extend to killed or injured family members, so a spouse or child may still sue the United States for tort claims. A compromise was reached that allowed the Secretary of Defense to compensate service members for instances of medical malpractice.

The Senate passed the two-year budget deal (H.R. 3877) that in effect repeals the Budget Control Act spending caps, known as Sequestration. The bill was signed into law by President Trump. FRA opposes sequestration because it poses a threat to national security and would have substantially impacted member pay and benefits. These automatic cuts require that 50 percent come from Defense, even though Defense only makes up 16 percent of the federal budget.

The budget deal will clear the way for appropriations (spending) bills for FY 2020 and FY 2021. Specifically, the bill provides \$738 billion in Defense spending for FY 2020. That is less than requested by the Administration (\$750 billion) and more than the House Democrats wanted to spend (\$733 billion). In addition to the agreement suspends the debt ceiling for two-years. The suspension will allow the federal government to borrow and spend without having to worry about being limited by the debt ceiling.

At the request of FRA, Rep. Walter Jones (NC) in January introduced the “Military Retiree Survivor

Comfort Act” (H.R. 464) which would authorize the retention of the full final month’s retired pay by the surviving spouse (or other designated survivor) for the month in which the member was alive for at least 24 hours. In February Rep. Walter Jones passed away.

Earlier in the year a number of hearings have been held on Capitol Hill, investigating conditions of military base housing. These conditions include faulty wiring, exposed plumbing, poor water quality, vermin infestations, mold and lead contamination, raw sewage, and other toxic exposures that have had negative health impacts for all residents. The “Ensuring Safe Housing for our Military Act” (S.703), introduced by Senator Dianne Feinstein (CA), would address many of these issues. There are provisions in both the House and Senate NDAA that provide a “Tenants Bill of Rights” ensuring that the final bill will address this issue. A tenant bill of rights was included in the final NDAA.

Earlier in the year The Department of Homeland Security, which includes the Coast Guard, was part of the partial (25 percent) shutdown of the federal government. Although DoD employees were paid during the shutdown, Coast Guardsmen were not paid. The partial government shutdown ended without changing the law to ensure the Coast Guard gets paid. So while the Coast Guard personnel are getting paid, FRA wants a permanent solution before the next deadline for funding ends (Oct.1, 2019). It’s important for legislators to remember that during the government shutdown, members of the Coast Guard safeguarded our waterways and blocked attempts to smuggle illegal drugs and contraband into the country, all without pay. FRA supported the “Pay Our Coast Guard Act” (S. 21/HR 367) that provides continuing appropriations to the U.S. Coast Guard for any period during which interim or full-year appropriations for the Coast Guard are not in effect.

FRA worked to ensure that the VA MISSION Act was effectively implemented. This Act includes consolidating community care programs and expanding the VA Caregiver program to include all catastrophically disabled veterans. The Association is also working to ensure VA and DoD work together to effectively implement and modernize their respective Electronic Health Record (EHR) to help ensure a seamless transition from DoD to VA for service members.

FRA also wants DoD and VA to work together to reduce the number of service members and veterans who die by suicide. That effort should include enhanced research for PTSD and TBI. Capitol Hill Functions and Legislative Outreach FRA hosted the 21st annual Coast Guard Caucus breakfast on Thursday, June 20, 2019. The annual event is intended to increase awareness of the Coast Guard's issues and promote dialogue between senior Coast Guard leadership and key members of Congress. Nine members of Congress attended this year's event.

DLP John Davis, Co-chair of TMC Retiree Committee visited Capitol Hill offices of key legislators with other Committee members to discuss concurrent receipt reform on May 7, 2019;

ADVP Brian Condon with other members of TMC Survivor Committee visited Capitol Hill offices of key Representatives to discuss SBP/DIC offset repeal issue on May 22, 2019;

FRA co-sponsored House Guard and Reserve Caucus breakfast on April 30, 2019.

DLP John Davis attended Mack's Marines luncheon Marine Corps Birthday celebration on November 2, 2018.

DLP John Davis provided a legislative process brief for CY 2019 enlisted Marine Corps Congressional Fellows December 4, 2018.

DLP John Davis provided CY 2019 Navy Legislative Fellows a legislative process brief November 26, 2018.

ADVP Brian Condon participated in the Commandant's Marine Corps Combined Awards program in Quantico, Virginia, January 11, 2019. ADVP Brian Condon scheduled Capitol Hill tour for Navy Recruiter of the Year finalists and their families on January 23, 2019.

#### LOBBYING DISCLOSURE

In 2019 FRA was in full compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Law requiring registration of lobbyists, organizational lobbying activities and expenditures. Each member of the Legislative Team is registered and files a report twice a year and reports for the Association are filed four times a year.

In 2020 the nation was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic that had a significant impact on the

Association's advocacy efforts.

Congressional Testimony/Special Meetings FRA offered to provide testimony to key Congressional oversight committees in conjunction with the FY 2021 authorization legislation, attend meetings with members of Congress and their staff that focused on FRA's 2020 Legislative Agenda. Those opportunities to meet with staff and provide testimony before key committees and subcommittees have been dramatically reduced with the Coronavirus pandemic. FRA Congressional Testimony includes:

National President Donna Jansky testified before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees on March 3, 2020.

NED Chris Slawinski was one of four featured speakers at the Veteran and Servicemember Suicide Prevention roundtable discussion on Capitol Hill that was sponsored by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention in November 2019.

DLP John Davis participated in a VSO/MSO roundtable discussion of pending issues with the Speaker of the House and other key House Democrats in November 2019.

DLP John Davis submitted FRA statement to SASC-P in conjunction with subcommittee hearing on March 11, 2020.

NED Chris Slawinski dispatched letter to key members of the HASC-MP on the FRA Legislative Agenda as it pertains to the FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on June 3, 2020.

DLP John Davis submitted letter to key members of the NDAA Conference Committee regarding support for specific sections of House and Senate versions of the bill on August 20, 2020.

DLP John Davis participates in press conference on concurrent receipt legislation with Rep. Gus Bilirakis in January 2020.

DLP John Davis and ADLP Theo Lawson met with Republican staff for the House Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee to discuss FRA's legislative agenda.

DLP John Davis met with Rep. Sanford Bishop's staff on concurrent receipt legislation (HR 333) in January 2020.

## PINNACLE AWARD

The Pinnacle award is FRA's most prestigious award is given to one Representative or Senator each year. FRA National President Donna Jansky presented the FRA Pinnacle Award to Rep. Takano (CA), Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee (HVAC) for his work in helping veterans. The award presentation took place on Capitol Hill. Due to the pandemic FRA did not have the Pinnacle reception nor did the National Board of Directors "Storm the Hill" this year. Rep. Takano successfully sponsored the "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (HR 299) that was enacted into law. He also created the Women Veterans Taskforce that focused on tackling the barriers that women veterans face while attempting to access their VA benefits and health care. He has served on HVAC for the last five years. As HVAC Chairman and Ranking Member (last session of Congress) he has worked tirelessly to help veterans.

## THE ACTION CENTER

One of the reasons FRA has been successful on Capitol Hill is that we have members who are willing to contact their legislators and express their views on issues of importance to them. Since starting the FRA Action Center, Shipmates have sent more than 500,000 messages to Capitol Hill. Effective January 1, 2019, FRA changed vendors from Phone 2 Action to Voter Voice that is owned by Fiscal Note.

The Association was compelled to switch vendors because of difficulties with the P2A system. FRA wants to thank Shipmates for providing feedback on the Action Center. This Session of Congress (Jan. 1, 2019-Oct 5, 2020) the Action Center has generated 73,610 e-mails to Capitol Hill. There are currently 18 issues on the FRA Action Center.

## LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

In 2020 the House and Senate each passed their version of the FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and a conference committee was appointed to resolve the differences between the two bills and submit a final bill to each chamber of Congress that was approved and signed into law. FRA maintains a strong and creditable presence on Capitol Hill and legislative successes during the year include:

Successfully opposed "Skinny NDAA" in November (2019) that leaves out critical benefit provisions for troops, retirees and widows.

No new TRICARE fee increases in the House

(H.R.6395) and Senate (S. 4049) FY 2021 NDAA. Supported a provision in the Senate NDAA (section 723) that passed the Senate to authorize the Secretary of Defense to waive pharmacy co-pays during a pandemic.

Backed provision in House NDAA (section 704) that delays scheduled cuts in military medical staff until FY 2022 and requires study to review impact of cuts that passed the House.

Endorsed a provision in the House NDAA (Section 705), that was enacted, that temporarily stops the scheduled restructuring that would restrict retirees and military dependents access to certain MTFs. Enacted an active duty annual pay increase (3.0 percent) that keeps pace with civilian pay increases. Successfully supported two comprehensive veterans suicide prevention bills that has passed and was signed into law.

The FRA-supported Debra Sampson Act (H. R. 3224) that seeks to improve VA's programs for women veterans passed and signed into law. The House and Senate passed, and President signed into law the FRA-supported H.J. Res.80, to approve a request from the Department of Veterans Affairs to pursue a pilot program that increases veteran access to dental care.

The House unanimously passed the FRA-supported "Puppies Assisting Wounded Servicemembers (PAWS) for Veterans Therapy Act" (H.R. 4305) intended to assist veterans struggling with PTSD and other mental health challenges through service dog training therapy.

The House passed the FRA-supported "Gold Star Spouses and Spouses of Injured Servicemembers Leasing Relief Expansion Act" (H.R. 2227), that would extend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act, allowing spouses of catastrophically injured servicemembers to terminate property leases and automobile leases and Gold Star spouses to terminate automobile leases.

FRA dispatched letter to Arlington National Cemetery informing ANC that a majority of Shipmates opposed the proposed changes to eligibility criteria for burial at ANC that will restrict military retirees for only above-ground inurnment. The Association sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Mark Esper urging him to re-consider his decision to restrict attendance at Child Development

Centers for kids from U.S. Coast Guard families. Later the Secretary withdrew the proposed changes.

FRA supported the Guard and Reserve Hazard Pay Equity Act (S. 3308 and H.R. 5887) that was introduced in the House and Senate, that would provide the Reserve Component with same hazard-duty incentive pay (HDIP) as active duty members receive.

President Trump signed into law FRA supported legislation (S. 3503-P.L. 116-128) that will make sure student veterans impacted by the COVID-19-related school closings would not get their monthly housing stipends reduced.

FRA supported legislation (H.R. 6612) introduced in the House, that would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to appoint at least one licensed hearing aid specialist at each VA Medical Center in the country.

The Association supported legislation (S. 3637/H.R. 6767), that was signed into law (P.L. 116-158) that would expand the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) to provide additional legal protections for servicemembers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

FRA supported the “Veterans Economic Recovery Act” (H.R. 7111/ S. 3899) introduced in both chambers of Congress that directs to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide a retraining assistance program for unemployed veterans. FRA supported the “Toxic Exposure in the American Military Act” (TEAM Act - S.4393) introduced in the House that expands access to preventative and diagnostic services for veterans exposed to toxins and establishes an independent scientific commission tasked with researching the health effects of such toxic exposure and reporting its findings to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Congress.

#### LOBBYING DISCLOSURE

In 2020 FRA was in full compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Law requiring registration of lobbyists, organizational lobbying activities and expenditures. Each member of the Legislative Team is registered and files a report twice a year and reports for the Association are filed four times a year.





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