

**REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN
89th NATIONAL CONVENTION COMMITTEE ON
LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
LEXINGTON HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER, JACKSONVILLE, FL
OCTOBER 13, 2016**

The National Convention Committee on Legislative Service met in the Compass Amphitheater Room of the Lexington Hotel & Conference Center, Jacksonville, FL, at 0815 on Thursday, October 13, 2016.

In attendance were:

Chairman: NED Thomas J. Snee, Branch 181
Members: PRPSC Russell N. Miller, Branch 201
Advisor: John R. Davis, Branch 181

Guests: Russ Miller, Branch 201
Bruce Talbot, Branch 159
Nicole Talbot, Branch 159
Harry Rhizer, Branch 307
Frank Gates, Branch 293
Jim Katzenberger, Branch 163
Mark W. Thompson, Branch 104
Chris Slawinski, Branch 181
Roland Shorter, Branch 008
Donald Gibson, Branch 011
Wayne Odell, Branch 112
Floyd Hunt, Branch 214
George G. Cleveland, Branch 208
Marcia Cunningham, Branch 014
Steven Wilson, Branch 287
Paula Falu, Branch 099
Stanley F. Milewski, Branch 259
Al Davenport, Branch 013
Donald Larson, Branch 094
Lew Bearden, Branch 024
Dale Wright, Branch 293

The National Legislative Service Committee meeting reviewed the report to Delegates of the 89th National Convention, which includes minutes from the April 2016 meeting.

The committee recommends that the following issues be pursued during the following year:

PROPOSED 2017 FRA LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

EXPAND HEALTH CARE OPTIONS

TRICARE Reform – The current level of coverage for all beneficiaries contained in the existing TRICARE benefit should be considered the “floor” for any new health care reform.

Oppose Excessive TRICARE Enrollment Fee Increases – The Defense Department must sufficiently investigate and implement other options to make TRICARE more cost-efficient as alternatives to shifting costs to TRICARE beneficiaries, and the Association opposes any indexing of future TRICARE Fee increases beyond CPI indexed to COLA increases.

Support Adequate Funding for Defense Health Agency – Ensure adequate funding for the Defense Health Agency (DHA) in order to meet readiness needs, fully fund TRICARE, and improve access and awareness of benefits for all beneficiaries regardless of age, status or location, including Reservists participating in TRICARE Reserve Select, TRICARE Retired Reserve, and Individual Ready Reserve personnel.

DOD/VA Health Care Resource Sharing – Ensure adequate funding for Department of Defense (DoD) and Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) health care resource sharing in delivering seamless, cost effective, quality services to personnel wounded in combat and other veterans and their families.

Pharmaceutical Drug Benefit – Monitor the pharmacy benefit and ensure that pharmacies maintain a broad uniform formulary. FRA supports efforts to reduce prescription costs through “federal pricing” and other discount programs, and will encourage increased utilization of home delivery prescriptions to limit co-pays for beneficiaries and reduce costs as alternatives to higher fees, and co-payments.

Allow Military Retirees to Pay for Healthcare with Pretax Dollars – Secure authorization for military retirees to pay health insurance premiums on a pretax basis and allow for a tax deduction for TRICARE supplemental insurance premiums.

PROTECT PERSONNEL PROGRAMS

Active Duty Pay – Secure annual active duty pay increases that are *at least* equal to the Employment Cost Index (ECI).

Keep 12 Years of Service Bonus – Oppose efforts to eliminate a major provision of newly created “blended” retirement system that provides a mandatory bonus (minimum 3 months’ pay) at the end of 12 years of service, if service member signs up for 4 more years of service.

Extend and Increase Government Match for TSP – Extend the government match for the Thrift Savings Plan beyond the current 26 years of service to until retirement, and increase the maximum government matching contribution.

Ensure Early Retirement Benefits for Involuntarily Separated Personnel – Early retirement and other benefits must be authorized for service members involuntarily separated with less than 20 years of service – including the temporary early retirement authority (TERA) program to minimize the impact of end strength reductions on career personnel.

Defense Budget – Advocate for a Defense (DoD) Budget that is at least five (5) percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to ensure adequate funding for both personnel and weapons programs.

Military Resale System – Ensure adequate funding for the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA) and oppose privatization to preserve the value of the current benefit and access for all patrons, and oppose consolidation or closure of military exchanges.

End Strengths – Track active duty and Reserve end strengths to ensure there are adequate personnel available to meet operational requirements, and work to minimize expanding deployment periods and reduced dwell times.

BAH – Oppose cuts to Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) payments. Reform enlisted housing standards by allowing E-7s and above to reside in separate homes, track the BAH to ensure it is commensurate with actual housing costs, ensure adequate housing inventory and that housing privatization programs are beneficial to service members and their families.

PCS Reform – Track the PCS process, ensure adequate funding of the Transition and Relocation Assistance Programs, and authorization of increased PCS mileage rates and higher household goods weight limits for senior enlisted personnel. Also advocate for shipment of a second POV for accompanied overseas assignments.

Tuition Assistance (TA) for Navy and Marine Corps Reserves – Support TA benefit for Navy and Marine Corps Reservists. Currently all service branches provide TA benefits for reservists except for Navy and Marine Corps.

SCRA Enforcement / Predatory Lending Protections – Ensure that the Service members Civil Relief Act (SCRA) is enforced by regulatory agencies, including the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), Office of Military Affairs and work to ensure that active duty personnel are protected from predatory lenders.

Coast Guard Parity – Ensure funding parity with DoD of pay, benefits and housing for Coast Guard personnel plus adequate resources for same within the U.S. Coast Guard budget.

Impact Aid Program – Ensure that the Department of Education has adequate funding to reimburse local school districts for educating military children and that the DoD budget includes sufficient supplemental funds to provide support for highly impacted school districts.

Reservists Out-of-Pocket Expenses – Allow full tax-deductibility of non-reimbursable expenses related to military training and weekend drill.

Sea Services Recruiters – Work to ensure that recruiters have unrestricted access to secondary schools, colleges and universities on the same basis as private sector employers.

VETERAN'S ISSUES

Monitor Implementation of VA Choice Card Program – Monitor implementation of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act (VACAA) that provides a \$10 billion fund to pay for non-VA care for veterans who live 40 or more miles from a VA facility or have been experiencing wait times for care of more than 30 days. VA has provided “Choice Cards” to veterans who were enrolled in VA health care as of August 1, 2014, and to recently discharged combat veterans who enroll within the five-year window of eligibility.

Improve Department of Veterans' Affairs Funding – Support initiatives to help ensure adequate funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), with special attention for VA health care to ensure access and care for all beneficiaries.

Support Blue Water Navy Agent Orange Disability Claims – Seek to reverse the VA's policy that prevents “blue water” military retirees and veterans from claiming disability benefits for diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

Oppose Access Fees – Oppose establishing a tiered enrollment fee structure for veterans in Priority Groups 7 and 8 within the VA Health Care System.

Improve VA Claim Processing – Work to eliminate the backlog of claims at the VA and support reform of the antiquated Veterans' Benefits Administration (VBA) paper claims system.

Expand VA Caregivers Act – Extend the VA Caregivers Act to full-time caregivers of catastrophically disabled veterans from conflicts before September 11, 2001.

Education Enhancements – Monitor the Post 9/11 GI Bill program and work to improve other education benefit programs for veterans, and survivors of disabled or deceased veterans, and preserve the military Tuition Assistance (TA) program and oppose shifting significant part of the cost to active duty beneficiaries.

Reserve Retirees Veterans' Status – Seek full veteran status for Reservists with 20 years or more of service, who do not otherwise qualify for full veterans' benefits under current law.

SAFEGUARD RETIREE BENEFITS

Protect Military Retired or Retainer Pay – Fight efforts to reduce military retired or retainer pay and ensure equitable cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for all military retirees commensurate with their service and

sacrifices, and oppose efforts to civilianize the military retirement system. And advocate for rounding up to the next dollar for retired pay and other benefits.

Concurrent Receipt – Support legislation authorizing the immediate payment of concurrent receipt of full military retired pay and veterans’ disability compensation for all disabled retirees.

Oppose Delay in Matching TSP Contribution – Oppose delay of the employer matching contribution for the newly created “portable” Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) from after 3 years of service, to after 5 years of service.

Reserve Retirement Age – Support extension of authority for early retirement (90 days active duty = three months reduction) for all Reservists who have served since 9/11/01, and the elimination of fiscal year specific rule associated with same.

USFSPA – Encourage the introduction and enactment of legislation to eliminate inequities in the Uniformed Services Former Spouses Protection Act (USFSPA).

Retention of Final Month’s Retired Pay – Support legislation authorizing 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.

SBP/DIC Offset – Support legislation to repeal the SBP/DIC offset for surviving spouses of personnel who die of service-connected causes.

Increase SSAI for widows – Support authorizing an extension (program ends October 1, 2017) of the Special Survivor Indemnity Allowance (SSAI) which should continue to be increased gradually to pay at least a portion of the SBP/DIC offset.

Paid-up SBP at Age 67 – Work to change the minimum age for paid-up SBP from age 70 to age 67 which will allow those who joined the military at age 17, 18 or 19 and serve 20 years to only be required to pay SBP premiums for 30 years.

Base Closures – Closely monitor the impact of base closures and realignments and support retention of military treatment and other facilities at BRAC sites that are patronized by sizeable retiree and Reserve populations.

The National Convention Committee on Legislative Service also **recommends** the following:

1. That the Honorable Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, of New York receive FRA’s 2017 Pinnacle Award to be presented at a ceremony in April 2016, in conjunction with the NBOD Hill Visits.

I wish to thank the members of the National Convention Committee on Legislative Service for their efforts, advice, and assistance with this report and for their contributions during the past year.

This concludes the report of the 89th National Convention Committee on Legislative Service and I move the adoption of this report and the legislative agenda recommendations contained therein.

In Loyalty, Protection and Service,

NED THOMAS J. SNEE
Chairman