

**December 14, 2018**

**In this issue:**

**Senator Stops Agent Orange Legislation**

**New Chairman of JCS**

**TRICARE Season Still Open**

**More Female Veterans in Congress**

**One Senator Stops Agent Orange Reform Legislation**

An effort (Unanimous Consent motion) by the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman Sen. Johnny Isakson (Ga.) to bring the "Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act" (H.R.299) to the Senate floor for a vote for final passage failed when one Senator, Michael Enzi (Wyo.), objected citing the Department of Veterans Affairs opposition. The bill, sponsored by Rep. David Valadao (Calif.) passed the House unanimously (382-0) on June 25, 2018. National Executive Director Thomas Snee testified before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee at a public hearing on the bill on August 1, 2018. The legislation 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 herbicide Agent Orange.

The next day, NED Snee attended a press conference to express outrage about the failed attempt to move the bill forward. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (N.Y.), sponsor of the Senate version of the bill (S.422) said, "The only thing standing in the way of this bill to help our Vietnam veterans is the U.S. Senate, and that is shameful. We have just days before this Congress is finished and our Blue Water Navy veterans are waiting for us. Their families are waiting for us. Some of them are dying [while] waiting for us."

Senate leaders could bring the bill up under regular order, but time is running out. Members are urged to use the [FRA Action Center](#) to weigh in on this issue before the end of the session.

**New Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Announced**

President Trump recently announced he would nominate Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley to become the new chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Milley, a four-star general, will be the tenth Army Chairman and will succeed former Marine Corps Commandant and current JCS Chairman Marine General Joseph Dunford, whose term as the nation's highest-ranking uniformed officer will end in the summer of 2019. Five Chairmen have been Navy Admirals and two have been Marine Corps Generals. President Trump has also announced that his current Chief of Staff, Marine Corps General John Kelly (Ret.) will retire at the end of the year. No replacement of General Kelly has been announced.

The JCS is housed in the Pentagon and was created in 1947. It advises the President, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council on defense matters. JCS is defined by statute and consists of

the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Vice Chairman, and the Military Service Chiefs from the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and the Chief of the National Guard Bureau. They are all appointed by the President and require Senate confirmation.

### **Missed TRICARE Open Season? There's Still Time to Act!**

If a beneficiary missed the TRICARE Open Season they can still enroll. This year, only individuals can enroll in or change their TRICARE Select or TRICARE Prime plan through December 31, 2018. Coverage will begin on January 1, 2019. Beneficiaries may also change their type of enrollment, such as switching from individual to family coverage.

Beneficiaries considering a change should not delay. Starting on January 1, 2019, beneficiaries will only be able to enroll or make changes to their TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select plan during open season or after a Qualifying Life Event (QLE). The next TRICARE Open Season will take place in fall of 2019.

A QLE is defined as a certain change in your life, such as marriage, birth of a child or loss of a family member. If you experience a QLE, you may have different TRICARE options available to you. A QLE provides a 90-day period for beneficiaries to make eligible enrollment changes. If one family member experiences a QLE, then all family members may make enrollment changes. For more information about QLEs, [go online](#).

You have three options to enroll in a TRICARE Prime or TRICARE Select plan:

- Online: Go to the Beneficiary Web Enrollment website (<https://tricare.mil/bwe>) (Stateside only);
- By telephone: Call your TRICARE regional contractor: West Region 1-844-866-9378 East 1-800-444-5445; and
- By mail: Send your enrollment form to your [regional contractor](#).

The Federal Benefits Open Season also ended on December 10, 2018. If you were eligible, this open season allowed you to enroll in the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP).

If beneficiaries wanted to enroll in FEDVIP, but missed the open season for reasons beyond their control, you may have a chance to apply for belated enrollment. To find out what options you have, visit the FEDVIP enrollment [website online](#). You can also call 1-877-888-3337 for assistance.

## **Fewer Veterans Overall in Congress, but There Are More Female Veterans**

There are now fewer veterans in Congress, which is significant because the loss of institutional military life style knowledge and the hardships veterans can experience, unlike any other career. At the beginning of the 116th Congress, only 18 percent of its members will have military experience. There has been a steady decline from the high point in 1971, where 71 percent of Congress had served in the military. The breakdown of veterans in the new Congress is as follows, 30 Democrats, 65 Republicans with 19 of them coming from the freshman class. Eighteen will serve in the Senate while 77 will serve in the House. Forty Seven served in the military after 2000 and 21 served in the military in the 1960s. Four served in the 1950s. Six are women, which is the largest number of female veterans in Congress to date.

The following list shows the Veterans in Congress by service:

- 50 served in the Army, Army Reserve or Army National Guard;
- 17 served in the Marine Corps or Marine Corps Reserve;
- 16 served in the Air Force, Air Force Reserve or Air National Guard;
- 13 served in the Navy or Naval Reserve; and
- 1 served in the Coast Guard.

In total 95 veterans will serve in the 116th Congress (two Congressmen served two different branches).

How these new members will influence Congress has yet to be determined, but it is highly likely that some will sit on important committees and subcommittees that will directly impact FRA members. Congressman Mark Takano (Calif.) will be the House Veterans Affairs Chairman and Congressman Adam Smith (Wash.) will be the House Armed Services Chairman. Neither will be new to their committees, however, neither served in the military.