

NewsBytes March 22, 2019

In this issue:

Support Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans

SBP/DIC Offset Repeal Bill in Senate

Closure of VA Facilities Coming Soon

Tell President to Support Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans

The FRA has signed onto a letter to President Donald Trump with other Veteran Service Organizations, requesting that he direct the Department of Justice NOT to appeal the U.S. Appeals Court for the Federal Circuit decision in *Procopio v. Wilkie*, decided on January 29, 2019. The letter also urges the president to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to immediately begin implementing this decision so that justice is finally provided to the men and women who served off the coast of Vietnam, suffered from the devastating long-term health effects of Agent Orange exposure, but who are currently denied the benefits and health care they have earned.

Members are urged to use the [Action Center](#) to weigh in on this issue by sending a message to President Trump.

SBP/DIC Offset Repeal Bill in Senate

Sen. Doug Jones (Ala.) introduced legislation (S.622), which repeals the SBP/DIC offset for survivors and is sometimes referred to as the Military Widows Tax. Earlier, Rep. Joe Wilson (S.C.) introduced similar legislation in the House called the Military Surviving Spouses Equity Act (H.R.553).

The Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payments are paid for different reasons. SBP is purchased by the retiree and is intended to provide a portion of retired pay to the survivor. DIC is a special indemnity compensation paid to the survivor when a member's service causes his or her premature death. In such cases, the VA DIC should be added to the SBP the retiree paid for, not substituted for it. It should be noted as a matter of equity that surviving spouses of federal civilian retirees who are disabled veterans and die of military-service-connected causes can receive DIC without losing any of their federal civilian SBP benefits.

Members are urged to use the [FRA Action Center](#) to ask their legislators to support these important proposals.

Closure of VA Facilities Coming Soon

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Robert Wilkie announced at a House

Veterans Affairs Committee hearing in late February that the VA is considering closing some underutilized facilities. Currently about 63 percent of VA medical beds are in use. The Secretary also noted that veterans are moving south and west and the VA should shift facilities to reflect that change.

The VA Mission Act, signed into law last year, requires the VA to make an assessment of medical facility shortages, surpluses and other challenges. The idea of closing VA facilities has been controversial for legislators who have major hospitals in their district. The FRA will monitor this issue to ensure that veterans have adequate access to care.