

NewsBytes  
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### **VA Secretary Recommends DOJ Not Appeal AOBWN Case**

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Robert Wilkie announced during a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee hearing that the VA is recommending the Department of Justice (DOJ) **not** appeal the U.S. Appeals Court for the Federal Circuit decision in *Procopio v. Wilkie*, decided on January 29, 2019.

Earlier, the FRA signed onto a letter to President Trump on January 29, 2019, along with other Veteran Service Organizations, requesting that he direct the DOJ not to appeal *Procopio v. Wilkie*. 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. Those service members who are suffering from the devastating long-term health effects of Agent Orange exposure are still denied the benefits and health care they have earned. The deadline for the DOJ decision is April 29, 2019.

From 1964 to 1975, more than 500,000 servicemembers were deployed off the coast of Vietnam and may have been exposed to Agent Orange, a herbicide used in Vietnam. Past VA policy (1991-2001) allowed service members to file claims if they received the Vietnam Service Medal or Vietnam Campaign Medal. In 2002, the VA implemented a "boots on the ground" limitation on obtaining an Agent Orange presumption connection.

Members are urged to use the [Action Center](#) to ask President Trump to direct the VA to provide this presumption to Blue Water Navy Vietnam veterans as they did before 2002.

### **NED Meets with DoD Undersecretary for Personnel and Readiness**

NED Thomas J. Snee attended a working lunch with the Under Secretary of Defense

for Personnel and Readiness, the Honorable James Stewart with three other VSO's to discuss Personnel, Readiness and Reserve concerns as noted. Subjects discussed were: Blended Retirement, DD-214 distribution for Active Duty and Reserves, Defense Health Agency priorities, Health Care Record arrangements between DoD and the VA, Family Health Care, and the Housing, PCS, & Dependent Schools. The Secretary Stewart was very amiable on all subjects and provided updates of the funding and legislation issues that affected by some of these topics. He was very open, and for some, the first time he was made aware, especially those Medical and Family Readiness issues. The Under Secretary agreed that having smaller groups brings a much broader sense of sharing of ideas from across the entire VSO community and the individual concerns they had expressed. He valued our inputs, and while could not promise a 'take action' did say it did sway his thinking of where the VSO community are coming from.

### **TRICARE Fee Increases in 2019?**

The FRA is thankful that the Administration's proposed FY2020 budget recently submitted to Congress does not include any TRICARE fee increases. Unfortunately, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) submitted a report to Congress in December recommending various TRICARE fee increases and other benefit cuts for military retirees and active duty military. Concern in Congress about the growing annual spending deficit for the current and upcoming fiscal years is increasing and legislators may consider these drastic cuts to reduce the deficit. Some of the many recommendations in the report include:

- A new TRICARE-For-Life (TFL) annual enrollment fee of \$485 for individual coverage and \$970 for family coverage, and increased cost-shares
- Increasing TRICARE Prime and Select enrollment fees beyond the current annual CPI increase
- Reduce active duty BAH to 80 percent of actual cost
- Limit active duty annual pay increases
- Eliminate VA's Individual Unemployability payments to disabled veterans at the full retirement age for Social Security

Members can tell their legislators NOT to reduce the deficit on the backs of our active duty military, veterans, retirees and their families by going to the [FRA Action Center](#) and scroll down to Don't Enact CBO Proposed Budget Cuts! campaign listed on the Center.

### **President Selects New USMC Commandant**

Lt. General David Berger has been nominated by President Trump as the next (38th) Marine Corps commandant. He is currently in charge of the Marine Corps Combat

Development Command. Berger would replace General Robert Neller, who has been Commandant since September 24, 2015, and is scheduled to retire later this year.

Berger was commissioned as a Marine infantry officer in 1981 and before his current assignment, he commanded U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific. He also deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. Berger is set for a promotion to four-star general as Commandant. This appointment requires Senate confirmation.

#### **FRA Thanked for Supporting USFF SOY**

Vice Admiral Bruce Lindsey, deputy commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, acknowledged the FRA's support for the 2019 Fleet Forces Sailor of the Year (USFF SOY) with a letter to NED Thomas Snee. The letter thanked the Association for the \$2,000 payment used to help underwrite the recent USFF SOY event held in Virginia Beach, Va.

NP Bob Washington, RPEC Randy Phillipp, NED Thomas Snee, and RVPEC S. D. Martin attended the awards event representing FRA. The FRA Auxiliary members in attendance include: NP Christina Murray, RPEC Christina Dickenson, and RVPEC Virginia Jordan.