

**In this issue:**

**Taskforce on Veterans Suicide**

**Women Veterans Commission & Legislation**

**TRICARE Reserve Select Improvement Act**

**House Passes Veterans Bills**

**President Creates Taskforce on Veterans Suicide**

President Donald Trump signed a new Executive Order (EO) on the initiative-dubbed the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS). The EO is an effort by the administration to combat veteran's suicide. On average 20 veterans commit suicide every day. President Trump said, "It is a tragedy of staggering proportions." The VA Secretary noted that 14 out of the 20 veterans who die by suicide are not in the VA health care system. The FRA welcomes the task force and believes that an effective mental health care program for veterans is of paramount importance to reducing veteran's suicide. This past year, President Trump issued an Executive Order titled, "Supporting Our Veterans during Their Transition from Uniformed Service to Civilian Life." The Order directs the Departments of Defense (DoD), Veterans Affairs (VA) and Homeland Security (DHS) to develop a plan to ensure that all new veterans receive mental health care for at least one year following their separation from service.

**Women Veterans Commission & Legislation**

Rep. Mark Takano (Calif.), is the new chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee He is creating a new congressional task force to address barriers that women veterans face when trying to obtain Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and health care. The FRA works to increase access to gender-specific medical and mental health care to meet the unique needs of women service members and transitioning women veterans. Congresswoman Julia Brownley (Calif.) has been selected to serve as Chairwoman of the task force. Details about the makeup of the task force were not available at press time.

Today, women make up 14 percent of active duty military and 17 percent of the reserve component. Women are serving in combat conditions alongside their male counterparts, which raises a whole new set of issues for these veterans. That is why the FRA supports the Deborah Sampson Act that was recently introduced in the Senate, sponsored by Sens. John Boozman (Ark.), and Jon Tester (Mont.). The act was also introduced in the House,

sponsored by Rep. Julia Brownley (Calif.). It seeks to improve and expand the VA's programs and services for women veterans. Major provisions of the bill include:

- Empowers women veterans by expanding peer-to-peer counseling, group counseling and call centers for women veterans.
- Improves the quality of care for infant children of women veterans by increasing the number of days of maternity care VA facilities can provide and authorizes medically-necessary transportation for newborns.
- Eliminates barriers to care by increasing the number of gender-specific providers and coordinators in VA facilities, training clinicians, and retrofitting VA facilities to enhance privacy and improve the environment of care for women veterans.
- Provides support services for women veterans seeking legal assistance and authorizes additional grants for organizations supporting low-income women veterans.
- Improves the collection and analysis of data regarding women veterans and expands outreach by centralizing all information for women veterans in one easily accessible place on the VA website.

This bill is listed on the [FRA Action Center](#) located on the Association's website to provide members the opportunity to ask their legislators to support this bill.

#### **FRA Supports the TRICARE Reserve Select Improvement Act**

The FRA supports the TRICARE Reserve Select Improvement Act (S.164/H.R.613) that would expand TRICARE Reserve Select (TRS) eligibility to all federal employees serving in the Reserve Component. This legislation, sponsored by Sen. Steve Daines (Mont.) and Rep. John Garamendi (Calif.) respectively, would impact more than 70,000 dual status military technicians in the reserve component by providing expanded health care options. The current law prohibits access to TRS for reserve component members who serve as federal employees in their civilian employment. This can create confusion and lead to more expensive health care for these service members and their families, as well as prevent continuity of care as service members deploy or transition in or out of the federal workforce. Enactment of this legislation will ensure reservists, and their families have greater choices and equal access to competitive health coverage premiums arising from their military service. Members can go to the [FRA Action Center](#) located on the website to weigh in on this legislation.

#### **House Passes Veterans Bills**

The House recently passed two veteran's proposals and sent them to the Senate for further consideration. The VET HP Act (H.R.1271), sponsored by Rep. Marcy Kaptur (Ohio), would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to carry out a pilot program to provide

undergraduate students with clinical observation experience within the VA. The objective is to increase the awareness of medical conditions common to veterans and encourage potential careers in the VA.

The house also passed the Burn Pit Registry Enhancement Act (H.R.1381), introduced by Rep. Raul Ruiz (Calif.), would create a process to ensure that the burn pit registry may be updated with the cause of death of a deceased registered individual.

The FRA is supporting the Burn Pits Accountability Act (H.R.663/S.191). This legislation directs the DoD to provide service members in Iraq and Afghanistan periodic health assessments during deployment and during military separation. The assessment is 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 opted out. Members can weigh in on this issue by going to the [FRA Action Center](#) to ask their legislators to support these bills.