

UPDATE FOR SPOUSES AND SURVIVING SPOUSES March/April 2019

1. **Storming the Hill.** MOAA's 2019 mission and legislative goals were addressed by two Maryland Teams (a total of 8 of us) during the "Storming the Hill" week this April 8th through April 11th, 2019. The Sheraton Washington Hotel (on the high ground behind the Pentagon in Arlington, VA) was our "base of operations" this year. Each team visited both of our United States Senators (or their staffers) as well as 4 House Members/staffers. Team A visited Representatives Steny Hoyer, Andy Harris, Anthony Brown, and Jamie Raskin. Team B visited Representatives David Trone, Elijah Cummings, Dutch Ruppersberger, and John Sarbanes. In the afternoon, our two teams went on to the offices of Senator Ben Cardin and Senator Chris Van Hollen.

The "**Widow's Tax**" (i.e., the SBP-DIC Offset) and TRICARE fees and copayments are the two key MOAA 2019 issues facing spouses and surviving spouses today--and on which we "stormed." These subjects plus pay and benefits for currently serving spouses/families were discussed at the various meetings during the week. I've already covered many of the details in previous issues of the Update. The latest MOAA Fact Sheets on our 2019 issues are available on the MOAA website. These contain comprehensive updates on the three issues on which we "Stormed the Hill" earlier this month.

- My husband Harvey and I, with two other members of our Team B, met personally with Senator Van Hollen, Congressman John Sarbanes, and our own new Congressman David Trone. On the day of Storming both Rep. David Trone and Rep. Elijah Cummings agreed to sign on as cosponsors of the "Widow's Tax" Bill to end the SBP-DIC Offset in the House [H.R. 553].
- Both of our Maryland Senators already support the parallel S. 622 in the Senate. Most of our members of the Maryland delegation now are supporters of legislation to end the "Widow's Tax" completely.
- Our Council Webmaster, Jim Shiffrin, recently updated the list of Members and Key Staff of our Maryland Delegation. Scroll down the Home Page of the Council's website, mdmoaa.org, to click on the link to the **Points of Contact for the Maryland Congressional Delegation**.
- Council President LTC Bryon Hartzog (USA, Ret.) headed up Team A. Council 1st VP COL Robert Norton (USA, Ret.), CAPT Kathy Thorp (USN, Ret.~Surviving Spouse), and Col. Brad Jewitt (Currently Serving, USMCR~National MOAA Board Member/MD Council Member) rounded out the Team. Past Council President COL Harvey T. Kaplan (USA, Ret.) headed up Team B. As Council Spouse and Surviving Spouse Liaison, I served on that Team with RADM Tom Jurkowsky (USN, Ret.~National MOAA Board Member) and Regina Chavis (National MOAA VP/CFO/Staff Member and MOAA Surviving Spouse). We had two great Maryland Teams on Capitol Hill this year. All Team members are current members of Maryland Chapters.
- During the week and at the special session conducted by Lt. Col. Shane Ostrom (USAF, Ret.) of the MOAA Staff, spouses and surviving spouses talked about how best to help each other and what is new information regarding issues of concern. One idea is by having virtual chapters meet electronically or by phone at times convenient especially for younger members who have young children. Another suggestion was to encourage members of all ages to visit one another in person, by phone, or electronically to "brighten up the day." Much discussed was setting up virtual chapters and an electronic newsletter to keep all spouses informed and demonstrate that their input is valued. I have retained a copy of the PowerPoint presentation shared by Shane Ostrom, which furnished a comprehensive update on the full range of issues of interest to spouses, surviving spouses, and family members.
- Several MOAA partner and exhibitor displays were set up in the lobby of the hotel. These included (among others) the MOAA Store (Target Marketing), MOAA Vacations, (Brenneco), Mercer Consumer (insurance products), the Pentagon Federal Credit Union, and United Services Automobile Association (USAA). Many of the MOAA partners participated in an informational series of presentations to MOAA members present from around the country.
- Aside from attendance at meals with key guest speakers, and the full-day visit to Capitol Hill for Storming of our Senators and Representatives, spouses and surviving spouses were free to attend sessions and/or engage in sightseeing around Arlington. Some spouses shopped in

Alexandria's lovely boutiques or visited the Marine Corps Exchange (MCX) adjacent to the hotel at Henderson Hall. Others strolled along the heights overlooking the Potomac or spent a few hours visiting some of the local sights. Luckily, the weather was mostly lovely!

- Now that Storming the Hill week (and the Conference) has ended for 2019, we need to keep the goals in mind and continue to inform our Delegation about why and how our continuing issues need to be addressed by current bills as well as proposed and reintroduced legislation.

One important additional note about Storming: The Vice President for Government Affairs at MOAA asked all the storming teams to bring up one new issue with our Congressional Delegations. It concerned a just-announced planned cut in military medical staffing of 18,000 across DoD medical facilities (hospitals and clinics around the world). The U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS) envisioned Commissioned Corps cuts of up to 1/3 of its active duty personnel had already been announced via the Surgeon General and the Department of Health and Human Services. The USPHS has only about 6,400 members on Active Duty--and such a cut would also be harmful to its customers (including the Federal agencies it helps to staff--both within and outside DoD). This matter proved to be new information to our members of Congress and their staffs, and many were bewildered and apparently somewhat angered by the DoD/DHA plan -- which, according to Col. Dan Merry at MOAA HQ, would play havoc with the delicate "military medical infrastructure" and have "devastating" effects on both readiness and support for years to come. I am certain that we'll be hearing more about this personnel challenge and that MOAA HQ will be pursuing the veritable needs of the Services with the Principals and with their Committee staffs in the weeks to come. Watch for more news on this issue.

I've included several (seven in total) of my own photos I thought you would enjoy viewing from Storming the Hill. I've added titles to these .jpg files to help you make sense out of them. [Scores of other great pictures of the Stormers from around the USA are included on links from MOAA's website, moaa.org .]

2. New Weekly Discount Starts Every Monday at Kohl's. This offers a 15% discount to all currently-serving members as well as veterans. The discount applies to most merchandise when purchased at retail stores in Maryland and elsewhere in the U.S. Proof of Veterans Status: You must present a military, veterans, or dependent identification or a State-issued ID that includes the "Veteran" status, such as a current Maryland Drivers License. The DD Form 214 also is accepted at Kohl's. The new license in MD identifies the holder with the word "Veteran" on the face of the card. The older version, which is being phased out, identifies the Veteran with a numerical code (see the reverse side of license for code explanations). Please be aware that a Veteran can update his or her Maryland license at no cost (at any time before renewal) to add the word "Veteran" to the document. The DD Form 214 (or its equivalent from USCG/Dept. of Homeland Security, USPHS/Dept. of HHS, NOAA/Dept. of Commerce, or the former USC&GS, etc.) needs to be scanned at your local MVA office to verify one's status as a Maryland Veteran. [This information about Kohl's was published by *Stars and Stripes* for worldwide distribution on April 15, 2019.]

3. Informative Digital Subscription. On a related note, *Stars and Stripes* newspaper now is available on-line, with a one-year subscription available for \$19.99. This is called Stripes Digital. It includes award-winning photography, (including an Archive Photo of the Day), special features on current issues, Veterans topics, unlimited access to the Stripes.com website, and a range of *Stars and Stripes* mobile apps. If you have an interest in this, please make sure to check it out before the price reverts to \$40 per year (expected to occur at the end of Spring 2019). The email to make contact is memberservices@stripes.com .

4. Military Kids Connect. This program has been around for 7 years, and it now is operated by the Defense Health Agency (DHA). Its purpose is to help military youngsters--and it now has a bright new appearance. Officials at DHA are optimistic that it will prove of assistance to families in working through the emotional and complicated elements of life for children in military families (e.g., adjusting to new schools, making new friends, deployment of a parent, etc.). If this topic is relevant to you, check out the newly-updated Military Kids! Website: <https://militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil> . Kelly Blasco, the psychologist who leads the program, suggests that "parents and other adults working with military kids

review the resources and content" now on the website. That will put them in a position of knowledge when a challenging situation arises.

5. **Possible Consolidation of Commissaries and Exchanges.** The final decision has not yet been made on this issue, as it has not yet been proven that combining Commissary Sales Stores and all exchanges (AAFES, NEX, and MCX, plus perhaps some other smaller resale activities) makes sense when measured in terms of benefits (i.e., dollar savings and overall convenience to the customers). DoD and its Defense Commissary Agency (DCA) probably can economize through consolidation, but what evolves may very well represent a deterioration of services and benefits. On another note, the DCA's Spring Sidewalk Program offers substantial dollar savings through the end of May at most locations. Special deals are expected on drinks, canned goods, boxed mixes, a range of health items, and food for pets. Check with your local Commissary Store by consulting <https://commissaries.com/shopping/store-locations>. By way of example in Maryland, Fort Meade will be holding its Sidewalk Sale from May 2-4. Joint Base Andrews has set the sale dates from 16-18 May. Forest Glen (in Silver Spring near NSA Bethesda): 2, 3, and 4 May. Annapolis NSA: 24-26 May. Aberdeen Proving Ground: Just announced as 2-4 May. [Don't forget to verify the schedule before driving to the site for the local Commissary Sidewalk Sale.]

6. **Change in TV Policy.** According to Military.com earlier in April, TV's in common areas (e.g., military food courts, malls, customer service centers, etc.) at Military Exchanges, will no longer be broadcasting news show channels. The reason, according to AAFES (headquartered in Dallas) is a result of the "divisive political nature" of the broadcasts. They used to frequently show a loop of news channels including Fox, CNN, and MSNBC. My husband and I recently have noticed implementation of a similar policy at clinics and public areas of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC), where the current offerings are now programs related to health and medicine. AAFES is going to play informational content as well, including sports channels and sports programming. The full article had been posted on Military.com. Not all military members are pleased with this new policy affecting some 2,700 facilities worldwide.

7. **Shingles Shingrix Vaccine. A large percentage of our MOAA population is highly susceptible to shingles, based on exposure to measles in earlier years.** The Shingrix vaccine that is now offered is 80%+ effective in preventing the horribly painful and prolonged disease. The Shingrix Vaccine is designed to be administered in two doses, with some months in-between. It replaces the former vaccine for shingles, which had only about 1/4 the effectiveness of the new vaccine. The USPHS and the CDC recommend getting the new Shingrix Vaccine even if you have had the older Shingles Vaccine. However, Shingrix is not available right now in adequate supply through our military hospitals and clinics within the DoD/DHA system, through the Hospitals of the Maryland VA System (or its Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Maryland), or the private sector (such as TRICARE-authorized pharmacies in local supermarkets and facilities). **Question:** Have you had the Shingrix Vaccine (at least your first of the two doses), are you on a list to receive it, or are you unable to find a local source to be vaccinated? It has been suggested that the situation may represent a medical emergency -- and possibly should be evaluated on a priority basis immediately by the FDA and even declared as such by the Surgeon General. There is precedent for such action, and it could result in increased production by alternate sources for the vaccine. [I have asked that I be notified by my local Safeway Pharmacy when the Shingrix Vaccine again becomes available. We are on the list.]

8. **Mailing List for these Bi-Monthly Updates.** My e-mailing list for these Updates contains all of our Chapter Presidents in Maryland, our Maryland Council officers, plus those of you who requested to be included. I also send copies to a few staff members at National Headquarters. COL Terri Coles of Council and Chapter Affairs continues to forward the Updates to a number of MOAA addressees around the country for their general information. [Most of the content certainly is not targeted only to Maryland addressees.] Of course, I hope that our Maryland Chapter Presidents will continue to share the material (by whatever means they find most appropriate) with the spouses and surviving spouses within their Chapters.

Naomi M. Kaplan
Spouse and Surviving Spouse Liaison
MOAA Maryland Council