

## LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

I had the honor along with my wife Darcey to join our President Ken Pyle and wife Sandy to attend the 78<sup>th</sup> Pensacola Lions Club Outstanding Instructor of the Year award banquet in February. For those who are unaware, this ceremony honors the Outstanding Instructors of the Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force and Coast Guard who train Pilots, Naval Flight Officers and Combat Systems Officers at the various training commands in our area. This banquet has taken place continuously for 78 years except for one during covid. Your Pensacola MOAA chapter sponsors a table, and we enjoyed being part of the celebration of men and women who are training the future Warriors that will take to the air defending our freedom. As an aside, since I am a civilian employee of the Air Force on NAS Pensacola instructing Combat Systems Officers in the T-6 Texan II simulator I feel a close bond to these instructors who are decades younger

I have chosen a few articles from recent weekly MOAA newsletters, I hope you enjoy them and take action where appropriate.

You can support those efforts by being part of the action. A way to do that is to sign up for the MOAA legislative alerts visit [https://moaa.quorum.us/sign\\_in/](https://moaa.quorum.us/sign_in/) .

To help you stay informed about issues, please consider subscribing to the MOAA Newsletter which is sent out two to four times per month on Thursdays via email. You can sign up at [www.moaa.org](http://www.moaa.org). Please let me know how you think I can make this column better for you by sending an email to me at [dave.mitchell@pmoaa.org](mailto:dave.mitchell@pmoaa.org) .

Also, if you are not aware, the Florida Council of Chapters (FCoC) publishes a newsletter every other month. It can be viewed here at <https://flmoaa.org/news/>

Your voice needs to be heard by our Florida Congressional Delegation. Please use some or all of the links available within this Legislative Affairs column and subscribe to the automatic notifications I mentioned above. The Pensacola Chapter of MOAA is a member of the Florida Council of Chapters, FCoC at [flmoaa.org](http://flmoaa.org) and an affiliate of the [Military Officers Association of America \(MOAA\)](#) who together are the nation's largest and most influential association of military officers. We are an independent, nonprofit, politically nonpartisan organization. MOAA has several critical legislative issues they are championing. Become an advocate and **Take Action NOW!** at <https://moaa.quorum.us/>

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### **MOAA: VA Must Rescind, Not Just 'Halt,' New Rule on Disability Ratings**

**By Kevin Lilley**

**From February 26<sup>th</sup> MOAA Newsletter**

While MOAA joined fellow veteran advocacy groups in support of a VA decision [to reverse course on a new rule](#) regarding veteran disability ratings, a pledge to "halt enforcement" of the provision isn't enough – the rule must be fully rescinded.

That's part of MOAA's public comment on the interim final rule – *Evaluative Rating: Impact of Medication*. The rule was [published Feb. 17 in the Federal Register](#); two days later, VA Secretary Doug Collins [announced via X](#) that the department would not enforce the measure, which he said was meant to “clarify existing policy” after recent court cases.

The interim final rule had more than 19,000 public comments as of Feb. 24, the wide majority expressing concerns that the regulation could reduce ratings and benefits for veterans whose conditions are controlled or improved by medication.

“The interim final rule, as issued, fails to account for treatment burdens, creates harmful incentives, destabilizes access to benefits, and was promulgated without adequate public input,” MOAA wrote in its public comment. In addition to rescinding the rule, MOAA also requests that the VA:

- “Clarify that effective treatment alone does not constitute medical improvement and that disability ratings should not be reduced based on ameliorative effects of medication and/or treatment.”
- “Explicitly prohibit adverse rating consequences tied to treatment compliance, ensuring veterans are not discouraged from following prescribed care.”
- End efforts to appeal *Ingram v. Collins*, in which a court ruled VA examiners should use “baseline severity” without medication when rating musculoskeletal conditions.

The rule could incentivize veterans to skip treatment prior to evaluation, MOAA wrote in its public comment. It also does not address second- and third-order effects that could disrupt a veteran's treatment and/or recovery, such as side effects from prescribed medication or changes to VA's drug formulary or treatment protocols. Additionally, beneficiaries of other programs administered by the VA, such as Chapter 35 Dependents' Education Assistance, could be impacted as eligibility is dependent upon disability ratings.

## **Process Failure**

“If the department intends to pursue a new rule, it should reengage stakeholders through a transparent notice-and-comment process,” MOAA wrote in its public comment. “Doing so will strengthen the regulation, protect veterans and their families from unintended harm, and ensure VA's disability rating system remains equitable, medically sound, and worthy of trust.”

The VA moved the rule forward under the “good cause” provision of the Administrative Procedure Act, which allowed the department to bypass regular procedure.

Moving forward on the rule without input from veterans groups and other stakeholders “materially weakened the rule,” MOAA wrote. The move also caused uncertainty and concern throughout the veterans community, many expressing their frustration via comments on the rule and through interactions with veterans groups.

Public comments on the rule can be submitted [via the Federal Register website](#) until April 20. Consider these [suggestions from Regulations.gov](#) for making an effective comment.

Editors Note: I first became aware of this issue through another advocacy group the Association of the United States Navy (AUSN <https://ausn.org/> of which I am the recently appointed LCDR Cash Barber Chapter President). For those of us who have been around the block we have seen support for our Military and Veterans go from the reprehensible during and post Viet Nam war to the heights of post 9/11. I have no doubt that there are elected representatives looking at the funds going to this looking for ways to cut and that is exactly what this rule that appears to have been sneaking through the system was intended to do. That is one of the reasons that I joined MOAA and belong to just about every other Veterans group I am eligible for. Of course, the camaraderie of our Pensacola MOAA chapter is a wonderful part of that advocacy!

## **MOAA Life Member Awarded Medal of Honor During State of the Union Address**

**By Kevin Lilley**

**From February 26<sup>th</sup> MOAA Newsletter**

More than seven decades after a heroic – [and secret](#) – dogfight in the skies of Korea, 100-year-old Capt. Royce Williams, USN (Ret), received the Medal of Honor on Feb. 24 during President Donald Trump’s State of the Union address in Washington, D.C.

“His story was secret for over 50 years,” Trump told the audience near the conclusion of his address. “He didn’t even want to tell his wife. But the legend grew and grew. But tonight, at 100 years old, this brave Navy captain is finally getting the recognition he deserves.”

Williams, a MOAA Life member, was the second Medal of Honor recipient in an evening that included a [number of awards](#) – Chief Warrant Officer 5 Eric Slover, USA, [was honored](#) for his role in [the January capture](#) of Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro. Slover, still recovering from injuries suffered during the mission, received the award alongside his wife.

Follow-up ceremonies honoring Williams are planned in San Diego in the near future, but full details have not been released. Williams was honored Feb. 25 at the Pentagon with a formal [induction into the Hall of Heroes](#):

The dual awards marked the first time Medals of Honor were presented during a State of the Union address; with Trump at the podium, Slover received his from Lt. Gen. Jonathan Braga, former head of Army Special Operations Command and [nominee to serve as the next leader of U.S. Special Operations Command](#), and Williams received his from first lady Melania Trump.

### **Battle over Korea**

Piloting his F9F-5 Panther, Williams engaged with seven Soviet MiG-15s in near-blizzard conditions over Korea in 1952. He’s credited with shooting down four of the planes, though full details of the encounter weren’t made public for decades. He spoke of the mission in a [2022 interview with MOAA](#).

Williams initially earned a Silver Star for shooting down one of the MiGs and damaging another. The award was upgraded to a [Navy Cross in 2023](#) as work continued to secure Williams a

Medal of Honor – first through military pipelines and later through legislation, which ultimately succeeded in the FY 2026 National Defense Authorization Act.

President Trump called Williams on Feb. 3 to inform him of the award. The retired Navy captain who also served in World War II and Vietnam is not only the newest honoree, he's also the oldest to wear the medal in the award's history – days older than Lt. John Finn, USN (Ret), who [earned the award](#) for his actions during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and passed away in 2010 at age 100.

## **Partial Shutdown Could Mean No Pay for Some in Uniform**

**By Kevin Lilley**

**From February 19<sup>th</sup> MOAA Newsletter**

Coast Guard members and some U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps officers would not receive scheduled paychecks Feb. 27 if the Department of Homeland Security does not receive full funding – a ripple effect of a broken federal budget process, and an ongoing threat to readiness and retention in the all-volunteer force.

While the bulk of uniformed servicemembers are finally covered by full-year funding after agreements reached last month, approximately 41,000 Coast Guard active duty and activated reserve personnel, as well as hundreds of USPHS members assigned to the Department of Homeland Security, continue their duties with no guarantee of compensation at month's end. The shutdown also means a stoppage in some training and maintenance programs, along with vessel inspections and routine patrols.

### **[TAKE ACTION: [Ask Your Lawmakers to Protect Servicemember Pay During a Shutdown](#)]**

“Shutdowns cripple morale and directly harm our ability to recruit and retain the talented Americans we need to meet challenging demands,” Vice Adm. Thomas Allan, the Coast Guard's acting vice commandant, told House members in [Feb. 11 testimony](#). “The work our Coast Guard crews perform every day is dangerous and challenging, often involving interactions with those who would do them and our way of life harm. Our people deserve to have the resources they need so they can perform their duties safely and efficiently.” Others in uniform faced similar uncertainties last year during a record-setting 35-day federal shutdown, and as a result of previous funding lapses.

Lawmakers frequently scramble to ensure servicemembers receive paychecks during these periods, and last-minute solutions were reached during the 2025 funding lapse to ensure servicemembers were paid, but the resulting financial chaos weakens the force and adds stress to an already-stressful occupation. That's why MOAA supports the Shutdown Fairness Act (S. 3186), which would protect the pay of those in the armed services, to include National Guard and Reserve members, during a shutdown.

### **[RELATED: [3 Ways to Protect Servicemembers and Veterans From the Next Shutdown](#)]**

“Short-term solutions only provide temporary relief,” Allan told Congress. “No one in our military should be forced to live with this uncertainty, paycheck to paycheck.”

MOAA also is working with lawmakers to add the commissioned corps of the U.S. Public Health Service and NOAA to the list of protected branches. There are over 700 USPHS members

assigned to the Department of Homeland Security who could go without pay because of this lapse in appropriations.

Without these protections, and without a timely and complete federal budget, some or all of our servicemembers and their families must continue to make financial contingency plans, operating under threat of missing multiple paychecks throughout the year. Continuing resolutions may provide temporary fixes, but legislation like the Shutdown Fairness Act would give these members the ability to serve without distraction ... and show future members of the force that our nation will pay those in uniform what they've earned.

Lawmakers may be on recess this week, but that doesn't mean they won't be monitoring constituent feedback: Send a message today [through our Legislative Action Center](#) and lend your voice to this important cause.

## **MOAA-Backed Caregiver Bill Takes Major Step Forward in House**

**By Rene Campos**

**From February 19<sup>th</sup> MOAA Newsletter**

Bipartisan legislation that would provide much-needed support to veteran caregivers took a significant step toward becoming law last week, advancing out of the [House Veterans' Affairs Committee](#) alongside other important [MOAA-supported bills](#).

The progress of the Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement (3R) Act (H.R. 2148) highlights growing bipartisan commitment to strengthening support for caregivers, families, and some of the most severely wounded, injured, and disabled veterans in the country.

### **[TAKE ACTION: [Ask Your Lawmakers to Support Veteran Caregivers](#)]**

The legislation represents a major step forward for the caregivers who form the backbone of veterans' long-term care. By expanding access to education, easing reemployment barriers, and enhancing retirement planning resources, the bill helps ensure caregivers have the tools they need to maintain stability while supporting those who served.

Without targeted reforms like [those in the 3R Act](#), caregivers could be left to rely on public assistance, shifting costs between government agencies rather than reducing them.

MOAA is grateful to every member and veteran advocate who contacted their lawmakers urging action on this critical measure. Your engagement made a real difference. Now that the bill has passed out of both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, it is more important than ever to keep the pressure on this priority. We encourage you to [continue urging your elected officials](#) to bring H.R. 2148 and S. 879 to the floor in both chambers and ensure it becomes law before the end of this year.

The legislation will be a key part of [MOAA's upcoming testimony before a joint Feb. 24 hearing](#) of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. That testimony will cover a range of veterans' priorities, such as protecting veterans from [unaccredited "claim sharks"](#) via the Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act and [ending the "wounded veteran tax"](#) faced by tens of thousands of combat-injured veterans via the Major Richard Star Act.

## More Bills Move Forward

Along with the 3R act, House Veterans Affairs Committee members advanced other MOAA-supported legislation in their Feb. 12 hearing:

- The **Fisher House Availability Act** (H.R. 3726), which would allow TRICARE beneficiaries, including active duty families, to stay in VA Fisher Houses on a space-available basis. This change would expand access to lodging for families traveling for specialty or emergency care, reducing financial strain and ensuring they can remain close to their loved ones during treatment.
- The **Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act** (H.R. 6047), which would increase the rate of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to provide additional financial support for survivors and increase the rate of Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) to boost financial support for catastrophically service-connected disabled veterans. The bill is named for Sharri Briley, widow of an Army Black Hawk pilot killed in Somalia in 1993, and for Eric Edmundson, a former Army sergeant who suffered shrapnel wounds, a heart attack, and a brain injury after his Humvee struck a roadside bomb in Iraq in 2005.

## Your Advocacy Remains Essential

The hearing delivered meaningful momentum, but much work remains to get MOAA's legislative priorities across the finish line. MOAA urges all members and supporters to continue contacting their lawmakers to ensure these bills move swiftly to the floor and are enacted into law. Add your voice to our cause [via our Legislative Action Center](#).

MOAA will continue to monitor developments closely and keep you informed as these important measures progress.

**Compiled and Edited by  
Captain Dave Mitchell, USN (Ret)**



**USAF Instructor of the Year Honorees along with their leadership and spouses.**