



SHOALS MOAA

NEWSLETTER FOR May 2017

From the Chapter President

Fellow members, I hope this month's newsletter finds you all well. Our chapter had a good month in April, with another good meeting at Post 11 and continued work to broaden our relationships with our community and our fellow service organizations. We have some challenges, but I am continually encouraged when I talk to members, whether in person or when we are emailing and calling, that we share the same enthusiasm to grow continue our mission.

I was pleased to have MAJ Tim Collins speak to us at our April meeting and share his story of growing up as the son of a Baptist minister and the influence that several special veterans had on him during his formative years.



MAJ Collins explained that the examples those vets gave him were major reasons he chose to serve in the Army Reserve, even

after he had already become a tenured professor at UNA. I know that MAJ Collins has become a great example to the many students he interacts with now as professor and chair of the political science department. I believe his story is very much in keeping with the spirit of the MOAA and I hope to have him back to speak again sometime.

Although we had a great speaker and the much-improved meeting environment of Post 11, our attendance in April was very low. Some members had scheduling conflicts or travel and just couldn't make it, but I want to make sure that we are doing our best to let everyone know about upcoming meetings. We discussed this at the meeting and decided we'd like to divide the list of members and ensure that everyone gets a phone call a few days prior to the next meeting. I'll start calling members in the next few days, and ask members whom they would like to call. This way I believe we'll help to remind each other and get a chance to catch up with our fellow members.

Our meeting for May will be on Thursday the 25th and we'll again meet at Post 11. The Ladies Auxiliary will provide the lunch for us, and the cost will be \$11 each. At the April meeting I was happy to present the adjutant for Post 11, Ms. Mary Day Smith, with a MOAA certificate of appreciation for working with our chapter to provide us a great place to meet.

We are honored to have the president of UNA, Dr. Ken Kitts, scheduled to speak to us this month. I'd like to thank Nick Winn for reaching out to Dr. Kitts and giving us this opportunity to get to know him and learn about his vision for his school where I believe



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we have many more opportunities to become involved and build relationships.



Sincerely yours,

Phill Green, MAJ, USA (Ret)

VA Health Care

From the MOAA website:

Trump Signs Order to Create VA Accountability Office

By Gina Harkins, senior staff writer

“This executive order makes it clear that we will never ever tolerate substandard care for our great veterans,” President Trump said during a press conference. “With the creation of this office, we’re sending a strong message: Those who fail our veterans will be held - for the first time - accountable.”

The new office stems from a top-down review directed by VA Secretary David

Shulkin, who pledged to improve accountability when he took over the department. He has said he wants his department to start seeing veterans as their customers. Under Shulkin's leadership, the VA recently launched a new website, which shows patients' wait times.

“We’re moving quickly to remove bad employees,” Shulkin said Thursday. “We simply will not tolerate those who act counter to our values or put our veterans at risk.”

The move comes after troubling high-profile reports of patients facing unreasonable wait times at VA facilities, some even dying while waiting for care.

“They were waiting in lines for seven days, eight days, nine days, two weeks,” Trump said. “Some instances were horrible. They had a very curable problem and they’d die before they got to see the doctor. It’s not going to happen any longer.”

Trump vowed on the campaign trail to put an end to those problems with his 10-point plan to reform the VA. He said during debates and rallies that he wanted the VA secretary to have the authority to “terminate any employee who has jeopardized the health, safety, or well-being of a veteran.”

When he signed the executive order, surrounded by representatives from veterans service organizations including MOAA, Trump called the move “another bold step forward.”

“This is something that, since the beginning of the campaign, does not get any more important to me than making life really great for our phenomenal veterans,” Trump said.



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Shulkin has stressed that bad employees are an exception at the VA, not the rule. The majority of them care deeply for veterans, and many often go above the call of duty. Trump said those employees must be retained and rewarded, and that anyone who reports wrongdoing at VA facilities will be protected.

The new accountability office and whistleblower protections are just some of the ways Trump says he plans to improve the VA. Veterans now have access to same-day mental health services and can continue seeing doctors closer to home following the extension of the Choice Act, he said.

“And so much more is coming,” Trump said. “We will always stand with those who stood for freedom and stood for us.”

MOAA News

The following is an article from the MOAA website about opportunities for grants to be used by chapters to provide needed services in their local communities:

Alexandria, Va. - The MOAA Military Family Initiative (MMFI), a 501(c)(3) charitable subsidiary of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), announced the launch of its Community Outreach grant program today.

The new grant program, open to MOAA's councils and chapters across the country, will award no fewer than five grants ranging from \$250 to \$5,000 each. All MOAA councils and chapters are equally eligible to receive a grant.

The MMFI funds national programs and services for the families of servicemembers and veterans. Through its network of more

than 400 MOAA councils and chapters across all 50 states, it also funds programs and services helping military and veteran families in local communities. MOAA and its councils and chapters positively impact the lives of more than 50,000 military and veteran family members each year.

The MMFI Community Outreach grant program awards grants to MOAA councils or chapters providing programs or services to their local communities in eight critical areas of military and veteran family need: housing, food assistance, employment, health (including behavioral health), family strength, community reintegration, financial and legal assistance, and transportation.

[Click here to read the full story](#)

Military Readiness

Jeff Brown was selected as one of two Alabama MOAA members to serve on the Governor's Veterans Advisory Staff. Having two MOAA members serve as advisors to the Governor is a great accomplishment for our Alabama Council. The other member to serve in this capacity is Pat Downing from Mobile. Pat was Skip Butler's boss in the Pentagon and skip describes him as a first class officer.

Montgomery in Competition for the F-35 Program

The following is an excerpt from the Montgomery Adviser. The story is about the possibility that the 187th Fighter Wing, also known as the Red Tail Squadron that was once the home of the Tuskegee Airmen, could be selected for the F-35 program. The 187th currently flies the F-15. Click the link below for the entire story.



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WASHINGTON — Alabama's congressional delegation continues its "full court press" to land the Air Force's F-35 program in Montgomery.



"We're making the case to the Air Force why Montgomery, Alabama, and the 187th Fighter Wing are an ideal fit," said Rep. Martha Roby, R-Montgomery. "This would be a really big deal for the River Region and for our state. It's too early to say whether we'll get the opportunity, but I promise you we're doing everything in our power to land the F-35." program.

Roby, who serves on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, and other Alabama lawmakers say they're on a mission to get the program to the 187th Fighter Wing at Dannelly Field Air Guard Station. Their effort is bolstered by the fact that several members of the delegation serve on key committees, including the House and Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committees in both chambers.

Montgomery is one of five finalists for the F-35 Lightning II fighter jets. The others are Boise, Idaho; Jacksonville, Florida; Detroit; and Madison, Wisconsin. A decision is expected this summer.

[Alabama delegation pushes for F-35](#)

Proposal to Reduce Alabama G.I. Dependents Scholarship Program

by Phillip Green

A bill currently being considered by the Alabama Senate, SB315, was discussed at the council of chapters meeting that I recently attended. This bill proposes the reduction of payouts for the Alabama G.I. Dependents' Scholarship program to the level of community college tuition while increasing disability criteria from 20% to 40%. In addition it would create an additional oversight board to cover new GPA requirements for qualifying students. The MOAA legislative affairs representatives explained that they are officially opposed to most of these measures, but stated they had agreed with the rating increase 20% to 40%.

At the meeting I asked the presenter if, during discussions with legislators, the rapidly declining population of veterans had ever been mentioned, and was told that it hadn't. The presenter said that "growth in the program" had been cited by lawmakers as the reason the program was unsustainable in its present form.

In the story from the Tuscaloosa News at the link below, lawmakers cite recent increases in enrollment in the program and the associated cost increases as reasons for reducing benefits to maintain the sustainability of the scholarship. However, the rate of decline in the veteran population is never mentioned.

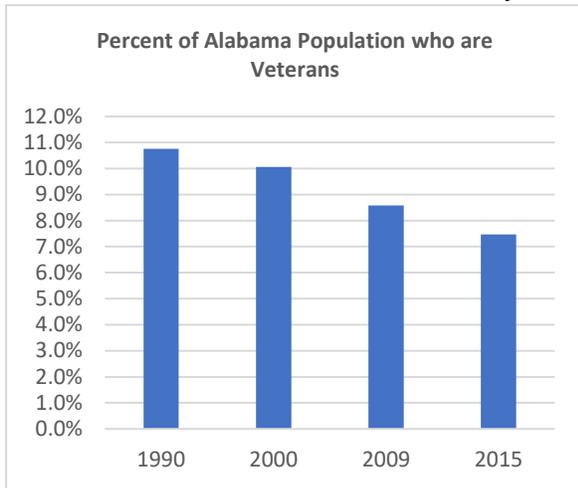
Since the meeting, I have sent email correspondence to legislators about the bill, and I encourage others to do so as well. The important point is to remind lawmakers that the population of veterans in our state has



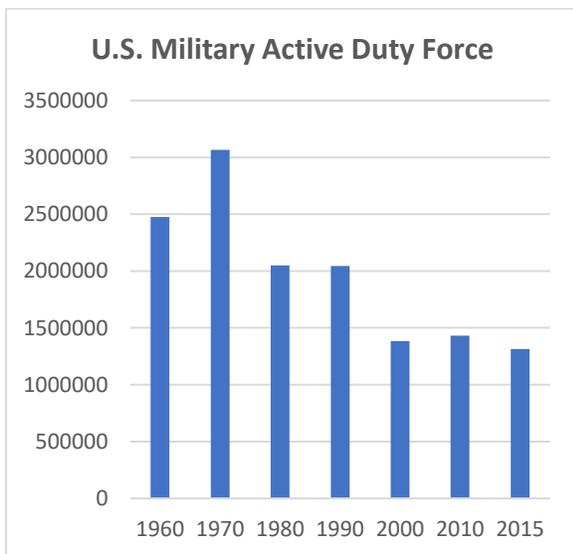
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been shrinking rapidly, and will continue to decline in years to come. In fact, just since 1990 the number of veterans in Alabama as a percentage of the general population has fallen from 10.8% to just 7.5%, a decrease of over 30% in the last 25 years.



The reason for this trend is of course that the size of the active force has been steadily shrinking for the past 45 years to the point that it is currently only 43% of the size it was in 1970.



(sources for data include U.S. census, Veterans Administration, and the Defense Manpower Data Center).

Another important point to make about the chart above is that the size of the force was never significantly increased after 9/11, but still tasked with deployments of hundreds of thousands of troops in support of occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. These two contingencies have required both active and reserve force members to serve multiple deployments of 6-18 months at a time, adding up to several years away from their homes and families. Considering significant reductions in G.I. benefits while such operations, and their strain on service members, seem to have no end in sight is unprecedented.

[Lawmakers work to reform scholarship program for dependents of disabled vets](#)