**14 June 2019 – AFSA Division 6 Legislative Update – A 25-year Lookback**

**Did You Know that Airmen Who Served 25 Years Ago Didn’t Have:**

- Annual basic military pay raises tied to the economy?

- A GI Bill near as generous as that enjoyed by today’s servicemembers?

- 100 percent Tuition Assistance?

- Privacy in Dormitories?

- Child Development Centers?

- Protected allowances for subsistence and housing?

- Storage of POVs during PCS moves?

- Leave for both Parents for Maternity, Adoption, and Rest and Recuperation?

- Absentee Voting protection?

- Significantly enhanced Guard and Reserve retirement?

- Annual automatic military retiree Cost-of Living Allowances?

- Full receipt of military retired pay and VA disability compensation for any disability rating?

*Today’s servicemembers have all these and many, many more benefits thanks to the Air Force Sergeants Association.*

**AFSA’s Impact on a Military Career.** It’s been over 25 years since I retired from the active-duty Air Force and went to work for the Air Force Sergeants Association. I personalize that comment only because I realize how much has changed in our Air Force in the past quarter of a century. At times, AFSA has worked as an advocacy leader with some other members of The Military Coalition. However, individually, the Air Force Sergeants Association has been greatly responsible for, and has had a singular and direct role in, a large majority of the military quality-of-life improvements during that time span.

Over those years, AFSA has told your story, pointed out military family challenges to Congress, and suggested needed corrections for individual Airmen and dual military couples. Additionally, AFSA has been a stalwart in keeping Congress’ focus on the needs of those who have served and their survivors. As a result, Congress has incorporated many quality-of-life improvements into annual National Defense Authorization Acts. From time-to-time, AFSA has also “carried the flag” to garner Congressional support for efforts sought by our Air Force.

Besides recognizing AFSA’s unquestioned impact on higher military pay raises over the years, I think it is a good time to contrast other aspects of military life, looking back to 1994 versus the life faced by military members and their families today. During that 25-year period much has changed for the better due to your support of our great Association and the actions taken by our legislative advocacy staff. Long-serving Senior NCOs and commissioned officers may smile as they look back on their careers and remember when these accomplishments were achieved and changes were implemented, and what military life was like in the “old days.” Currently serving members can imagine what their lives would be like today if AFSA had not advocated for the improvement of the quality of their lives.

Note: DoD is often mentioned in these descriptions. There is no negative connotation intended; these are simply statements of fact. It is also important to remember that DoD does not determine its spending budget – Congress does. It is therefore necessary, in order to fulfill its tasked and vital mission, that DoD decision are most often driven by operational priorities. Once the law is changed and benefit changes are mandated, DoD and the services positively implement the changes.

Below are just a few improvements that AFSA directly and significantly impacted since 1994. As we reflect back on these quality-of-life accomplishments, we remember numerous lobbying visits to the Hill, Congressional testimony sessions, one-on-one conversations with members of Congress and their staff members, and grass roots efforts involving our members that led to these positive changes in the law.

**COMPENSATION**

**Annual Military Basic Pay Raises**. 1994: Arbitrary. 2019: Today, formula in title 37 ties military pay raises to private sector wage growth (Employment Cost Index). Over these years, we achieved some targeted pay raises based on pay grade and longevity.

**Enlisted Flyer Incentive Pay**: 1994: None. 2019: Created and in effect.

**Hazardous Duty Pay for Enlisted Flight Crews.** Increased over these years.

**Hostile Fire & Imminent Danger Pay.** 1994: None. 2019: $225 per month.

**CONUS COLA**. 1994: Didn’t exist. 2019: Created and in effect. Permanent CONUS COLA in areas 109% of nation mean cost.

**Housing Allowances**. Over these years, targeted enlisted increases at rates above annual military pay raises. Maximum out-of-pocket expenses significantly reduced. BAH raised to cover 100 percent of median cost; later reduced to 95 percent.

**Housing Allowance for Dual-Military Couples**. 1994: Reduced for dual-military couples. 2019: DoD barred from making such reductions.

**Overseas Housing Rate Protection**. 1994: None. 2019: Created and enacted.

**Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS)**. 1994: Amount entirely determined by DoD. 2019: Tied to average moderate-cost food plan. Repealed DoD’s 1 percent cap on subsistence allowance increases. Twice convinced Congress to increase BAS above food cost index. Stopped DoD-proposed value reductions.

**BAS When TDY or Hospitalized**. 1994: BAS interrupted during these periods. 2019: Full BAS receipt without interruption.

**Hardship Duty Pay**. 1994: Didn’t Exist. 2019: Created and enacted, up to $300 per month.

**Maternity Leave:** Significant Increases in duration for birth and adoption.

**Adoption Leave**: 1994: None. 2019: Created and in effect.

**Paternity/Spousal Partner Leave for Birth and Adoption**: 1994: None. 2019: Created and in effect.

**Rest & Recuperation Leave after Combat Deployment**. 1994: None. 2019: Created and in effect.

**Adoption Expense Reimbursement**. 1994. No Reimbursement. 2019: Partial Reimbursement (up to $2,000).

**Military Participation in Thrift Savings Plan**. 1994: None. 2019: Up to 5 percent of basic pay and bonuses. Also, now TSP is part of new Blended Retirement System.

**Numerous Bonus and Special Pay** increases over these years beyond what DoD called for.

**Military Member/Family Credit Protections**. 1994: None in place. 2019: Limitations on payday lenders, chargeable interest limitations for all military members/dependents.

**EDUCATION**

**Tuition Assistance:** 1994:75 percent. 2019: 100 percent.

**Tuition Assistance Restoration**. In late 2012, upon DoD’s request, Tuition Assistance (TA) was discontinued. In early 2013, after a very intense lobbying effort, Congress passed legislation to reinstitute the program.

**GI Bill:** 1994: Veterans Education and Assistance Program and Montgomery GI Bill. 2019: Post-9/11, Forever GI Bill. Value of each of these programs has increased a few times due to Congressional support of our efforts. Transferability of benefit to family members added. Use for credentialing and licensure added.

**In-State Tuition Rates at State Colleges and Universities for TA and GI Bill Users**. 1994: No. 2019: Yes.

**VA-Sponsored Yellow Ribbon Program**. 1994: None. 2019: Yes.

**FAMILY MATTERS/SPOUSAL PROGRAMS**

**Child Development Centers.** 1994: Didn’t exist. 2019: Child Development Centers created and in effect.

**Impact Aid (financial aid for school districts serving military dependents).** 1994: Little DoD support. 2019: Annually advocated for and funded at $30 million-plus.

**Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program for those stationed overseas.** 1994: None. 2019:DoD mandated in law to administer for servicemembers/families stationed overseas.

**Dependent Dental Plan**. 1994: CONUS only. 2019: Extended to overseas.

**Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children**. 1994: None. 2019: Spearheaded by AFSA, Compact ratified by all 50 states.

**Spousal Licensure and Certification Reimbursement.** 1994: None. 2019: Up to $500 per move.

**Spousal Transferability of Licensure from State to State after PCS moves**. 1994: Not easily, and not widespread. 2019: Much progress among states for reciprocal acceptance. Ongoing advocacy effort.

**Spousal Education Programs**. 1994: None. 2019: Created and in effect.

**Military Spouse Federal Hiring Preference**. 1994: None. 2019: Created and in effect.

**Family Base Housing Eligibility**. 1994: Must be with sponsor. 2019: Programs to allow housing before and after PCS; dependents’ school completion, etc. Up to 180 days before and after PCS.

**Child Custody Arrangement Protection During PCS/TDY**. 1994: Custody could be usurped by court. 2019: Courts prevented from changing child custody arrangements while servicemember absent for duty.

**Family Medical Leave During Mobilization**. 1994: None. 2019: Authorized during deployments.

**Spousal Professional Items Shipment**. 1994: None. 2019: Up to 500 pounds for spouse’s professional items during PCS shipment.

**Domicile State Choice**. 1994: None. 2019: Won Authority of military spouses to choose same domicile state as AD member.

**COMMISSARIES AND EXCHANGES**

**Commissaries**. Stopped DoD plans to close all CONUS Commissaries. Commissary benefit mandated, codified (protected in law).

**Commissary Surcharge**. 1994: Decided by DoD. 2019: Surcharge limited to 5 percent above wholesale cost of groceries. Blocked later DoD proposals to increase surcharge

**Commissary Funding Cuts**. Over these years stopped a few DoD proposals to significantly reduce commissary funding. Example: in 2014, DoD sought a $1 billion cut in appropriations.

**HOUSING AND DORMITORIES**

**Basic Dormitory Standard**: 1994: 2 or 4 Airmen per room. 2019: One Airman to a room.

**Dormitory Upgrades**. Achieved increased funding to implement higher standard construction.

**On-base Housing Standards**. Over these years, funding achieved and standards raised. Congressional action and changes in law will be attained due to recent failings by privatized housing companies.

**PCS MOVES/TDYs**

**Permissive TDY to Take POV to Port for PCS Move Shipment:** 1994: Used own annual leave days. 2019: Permissive TDY authorized.

**Government Storage of POV During Overseas PCS Moves**: 1994: None. 2019: Created and in effect for PCS moves where DoD will not ship your vehicle.

**Temporary Lodging Expense**. Over these years: Extended from 4 to 10 days in CONUS. Extended to all PCS moves rather than “second and subsequent PCS moves.” Increased duration for overseas moves. Daily allowance significantly increased over these years.

**Family Separation Allowanc**e. 1994: $60 per month. 2019: $250 per month. Payment of two separate separation allowances if both family members deploy.

**Dislocation Allowance**. 1994: 2 times Housing Allowance. 2019: 2 ½ times Housing Allowance.

**TDY use of Dining Facilities**. 1994: Not permitted. 2019: Authorized.

**TDY Per Diem**. 1994: Up to DoD. 2019: Mandated to parallel federal civilians. Dollar amount increased. Ultimately Stopped DoD effort to decrease daily per diem rate for long-term TDYs.

**Household Good Weight Allowances**. Over these years, increased. Achieved some targeted increases for enlisted members and their families. Ongoing effort.

**Household Goods Replacement Value**. 1994: Partial reimbursement. 2019: Full replacement costs for goods damage during PCS move.

**Hospitalized Troops Pay for Food**. 1994: Yes. 2019: No.

**RETIREMENT/VETERAN/SURVIVORS MATTERS**

**Annual Military Retiree/Survivor Benefit COLAs.** 1994: Up to DoD. 2019: Mandated that annual cost-of-living allowances will parallel inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index. Over these years, stopped numerous attempts to reduce or freeze annual military retiree cost-of-living adjustments.

**Chained-CPI**. Blocked DoD proposals to replace Consumer Price Index with a Chained-CPI as the standard for determining annual military retiree COLAs.

**Permanent ID Cards for Spouses**. 1994: None. 2019: Permanent ID cards for spouses/survivors of military retirees at 75 years of age. Also for retirees’ totally disabled dependents.

**VA Healthcare Budget Increases**. 1994: Had to re-debated and legislated each year. 2019: Automatically funded increases.

**VA Healthcare Enrollment Fees**. Twice stopped VA Plan to charge enrollment fees and raise prescription co-payments.

**VA Claims Adjudication Times**. Over the years, some improvement. Constantly pressed Congress to mandate changes to speed resolution of initial claims and appeals.

**Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay (CRDP)**: 1994: None. 2019: Full retirement and disability pay for those with VA disability rating of 50% and higher. Ongoing effort to achieve full CRDP for those with VA disability ratings below 50 percent.

**Military Retirement Divorce Law – the Uniformed Services Former Spouses Protection Act (USFSPA - PL 97-252).** 1994: Fully in effect allowing over half of retirement pay to former spouse with no limitations. 2019: Any award to former spouse must be prorated to grade at time of divorce. Note: The effort to fully repeal the USFSPA continues.

**Transition Assistance Program**. 1994: Local determination. 2019: DoD-wide improvements and requirements with VA involvement.

**Death Gratuity**: 1994: $60,000. 2019: $100,000. Ongoing effort to further increase value.

**Survivor Benefit Plan**: 1994: Annuity only for Death of Retiree. 2019: SBP for active duty and IDT deaths added. Fees also lowered. Provision added to allow opt outs during 3rd year of enrollment. 30-year, 70 years of age paid-up provision added. Age-62 SBP annuity reduction repealed.

**SGLI**. 1994: Max is $100 K. 2019. Max is $250 K.

**Retirement**. 1994: Must serve 20 years for eligibility. 2019: Tenure guaranteed after 18 YOS for both active duty and Selected Reserve service. Stopped DoD effort to deny annual retiree cost-of-living adjustments until age 62. Guard and Reserve IDT points creditable toward retirement. Stopped REDUX Retirement plan.

**Dual Compensation Penalties for Military Retirees**. 1994: Military Retirees working as federal civilians penalized. 2019: Dual compensation penalties fully repealed.

**Arlington National Cemetery**. Space expanded several times.

**Burial Honors**. At least 2 uniformed members required for burial honors detail. Stipends to encourage retiree/reservist participation in funeral details.

**Special Compensation for Severely Disabled Retirees**. 1994: None. 2019: Created and in effect. Creation and further increases in Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC).

**Education Benefits for Survivors & Children of Survivors**. Over these years, significantly increased benefits and annual COLA adjustments enacted.

**VA Compensation Claims Assistance**. 1994. VA refusal to assist. 2019. Mandated that VA must assist.

**Social Security Earnings Test**. 1994: Social Security beneficiaries age 65 to 69 penalized for earnings. 2019: Social Security Earnings Test and penalty repealed for this group.

**DoD vs. VA Healthcare Choice for Retirees**. During these years, prevented DoD Plan to require military retirees to choose between DoD and VA health care.

**CHAMPVA Benefits Eligibility**. 1994: Stopped for survivors at age 65. 2019: Age-determined eligibility repealed.

**VA Home Loan Guarantees**. Over these years, increased the top dollar-value guarantee limit several times.

**Education Benefits for Survivors & Dependents of Those Who Died of Service Connection**. 1994: None. 2019: Benefits created and in place.

**Agent Orange**. During these years, the VA denied but was eventually forced to implement Agent Orange compensation. Adult Onset Diabetes (Type II) added to list of diseases to be recognized and compensated as related to Agent Orange.

**Dependency & Indemnity Compensation (DIC)**. 1994: Ends if widow remarries. 2019: Can remarry at age 57 or older without loss of compensation.

**Veterans’ Legally Authorized to Salute During National Anthem**. 1994: No. 2019: Yes

**Special Survivors Indemnity Allowance (SSIA) for Survivors of Disabled Retirees; those who Died on Active Duty**. 1994: No. 2019: Yes.

**VA Caregiver Compensation**. 1994: None. 2019: Authorized for wounded warriors/disabled veterans’ caregivers.

**Local Community Civilian Healthcare Options for Veterans**. 1994: None. 2019: “VA Choice Act,” then “VA Mission Act” in place allowing community care when VA care is not timely or available.

**Women Veterans’ Benefits**. Over these years, VA directed to provide targeted care and open all benefits to female veterans.

**GUARD AND RESERVE MATTERS**

**Reserve Commissary Privileges**: 1994: 12 visits per year. 2019: Full year-round privileges. Also extended eligibility to 2 years after service; then to all gray area reservists as well.

**Retirement Points Credit**. 1994: 60 IDT points creditable toward retirement. 2019: 130 points creditable toward retirement.

**Early Retirement for Mobilized Active Duty Service**. 1994: No. 2019: Authorized and implemented.

**Retirement Credit for State Duty**. 1994: None. 2019: Authorized for certain state duty.

**TRICARE Deductibles.** 1994: G/R members must pay full deductibles, regardless of activation period. 2019: Waiver of TRICARE deductibles when called to active duty less than one year.

**Housing Allowances**. 1994: None. 2019: Full housing allowance when activated 30 days.

**Dental Plan Costs**. During these years, enhanced Reserve dental plan, since replaced by new program.

**Reserve Disability Retirement**. 1994: No guarantees. 2019: Permanent authority for Reserve disability retirement for Reservists with at least 15 years of qualifying service & 8 years on active duty. Improved disability compensation for G/R who suffer a heart attack/stroke during IDT.

**Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Coverage.** Automatic after 20 years of service, unless declined by member & spouse.

**Dependence and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for IDT Deaths.**  1994: None. 2019: Eligibiilty for survivors of G/R members who suffered a stroke or heart attack during IDT that led to death.

**FEHBP Premiums Paid by DoD when Activated**. 1994: No. 2019: Yes.

**VA Home Loan Guarantee for G/R**. 1994: Didn’t have it. 2019: Eligibility now guaranteed in law.

**Education Benefits**. Worked several value increases to the Reserve Montgomery GI Bill; the creation and implementation of current education benefits.

**Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act (Now Service members’ Civil Relief Act)**. During these years, numerous upgrades, protections, family/spousal protections.

**Reemployment Rights**. 1994: Pretty much up to employer. 2019: Under USERRA, strengthened reemployment rights. USERRA upgraded, strengthened a few times over the years.

**Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR)**. During these years, greatly supported and strengthened.

**Travel-for-Training Reimbursement**. 1994: None. 2019: Provided.

**HEALTHCARE MATTERS**

**TRICARE for Life (TFL).** 1994: Didn’t exist. 2019: With AFSA’s direct leadership, this Medicare supplement coverage for senior military beneficiaries fully funded and implemented. Retiree Health Care Trust Fund created. Responsibility for Retiree Healthcare Trust Fund taken from DoD and now managed by Treasury Department to avoid DoD funding decisions conflicts.

**TFL Enrollment Fees/Eligibility Means Test**. Since the creation/implementation of TFL, DoD has sought to implement TFL annual enrollment fees, and to apply a means test for eligibility; successfully convinced Congress to disapprove such proposals.

**TRICARE Prime Remote**. 1994: None. 2019: Program created and implemented. Later, added family members to Remote coverage.

**TRICARE Retail Pharmacy.** 1994: DoD subsidized, funded drugs available on base only. 2019: Retail pharmacy negotiated, implemented, and in effect.

**Retail Pharmacy co-pays**. DoD sought to significantly increase several times. Successfully lobbied to cap future RX cost increases to military retiree pay increases.

**TRICARE Mail-Order Pharmacy**. 1994: Didn’t exist. 2019: Created and in effect.

**Provider Payment Cuts for Medicare/TRICARE Providers**. Over these years, DoD sought to greatly decrease provider reimbursement. Successfully convinced Congress to prevent this.

**TRICARE Catastrophic Cap**. 1994: $10 K. 2019: $3 K.

**TRICARE Annual Enrollment Fee Increases for Retirees and Survivors.** 1994: Up to DoD with No Limit. 2019: Limited to percent growth in retirement pay.

**Guard and Reserve Healthcare**. 1994: No mobilization programs. 2019: Mobilization/Dental insurance programs created and in effect.

**Guard and Reserve TRICARE Pre- and Post-Callup**. 1994: None. 2019: Program established and in effect.

**TRICARE for Gray Area Retirees**. 1994: None. 2019: Authorized and in effect.

**Retiree Dental Plan**. 1994: None. 2019: DoD directed to create; lasted until program replaced in 2019. Coverages expanded for retirees, family members, and survivors.

**TRICARE Catchment Area**: 1994: 40 miles. 2019: 100 miles in some cases.

**Long-Term Care Program**. 1994: None. 2019: Program created and in effect.

**Family Member Copayments/Annual Enrollment Fee**. 1994: Required. 2019: None.

**Care for Disabled Dependents**. Over these years, added benefits for dependents with severe physical or psychological conditions.

**Funded Parent/Guardian Travel to Accompany Beneficiary who Can’t Travel Alone.**  1994: None: 2019: Funded.

**Healthcare Administration of Service.** Over these years, numerous statutory provisions to improve care, reduce preauthorization requirements, speed up processing claims, protection of prescription drug costs, etc.

**Medicare/TRICARE Rate Increases**. Over these years, successful in holding down rate increases.

**Healthcare After Separation**. 1994: None. 2019: Covered 180 days after separation.

**Transitional Healthcare for Separates Entering Selected Reserve**. 1994: No. 2019: Yes.

**Care for Special Needs Dependents**. Over these years, coverage increases and maximum payment caps raised.

**Waiver of TRICARE Fees for Preventative Services**. 1994: None. 2019: DoD directed to waive TRICARE fees for a range of preventative services for all beneficiaries.

**VA Counseling for Families of Wounded Warriors**. 1994: No. 2019: Yes.

**TRICARE Coverage to Age-26 for Dependents**. 1994: None. 2019: Authorized.

**Suicide Prevention Programs for Active Duty and Veterans**. 1994: Very weak. 2019: Prevention programs created; significantly enhanced attention.

**OTHER MATTERS**.

**Universal Acceptance of Military-Prepared Wills**. 1994: Up to individual states to accept. 2019: Universal state acceptance required by the law.

**Voting Rights**. 1994: Military absentee ballots routinely discounted on technicalities. 2019: States now must send out ballots 45 days in advance. Severe penalty for states discounting votes on technicalities.

**Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act**. Numerous upgrades during these years.

**Restrictions on “Payday Lenders” Serving Servicemembers**. 1994: No legal restrictions on interest charged for a loan. 2019: Major restrictions and interest limitations on loans to military members/dependents.”

**Social Security Number on ID Cards**. 1994: Yes. 2019: No

**Military Homeowner Tax Equity**. 1994: Military Homeowners not eligible for several federal tax breaks. 2019: Full equity with other citizens.

**Homeowner Assistance Plan**. 1994: Military members ineligible. 2019: Full equity.

**Space-A Travel Opportunities**. Over these years, greatly expanded for retirees, survivors, family members, and members of the selected reserve, including Gray Area Retirees.

**Tax Credits for Those Who Hire Veterans**. 1994: None. 2019: Established in law.

**AFSA’s Federal Charter**. 1994. AFSA didn’t have one. 2019. In 1997, AFSA’s legislative team wrote the legislation, obtained Congressional sponsorship (Sen. John McCain), and successfully lobbied for AFSA’s Congressional Charter which was passed in an NDAA.

**Pitsenbarger Medal of Honor**. In the late 1990s, at the request of a group of PJs from Hurlburt Field, AFSA obtained Congressional sponsorship (Rep. John Boehner, R-Ohio), wrote the legislative language, did the coordination through the military services, and successfully lobbied to get Pitsenbarger’s Medal of Honor incorporated in the 2001 NDAA. Pitsenbarger’s Air Force Cross was upgraded to the Medal of Honor. The Medal was presented posthumously in December 2000 to Bill Pitsenbarger’s elderly father.

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Today’s “senior” military members can reflect back on these many changes, appreciate, and perhaps remember when they happened. This information should also make it crystal clear to those serving today that AFSA’s contribution to the quality of military life is great. They can ask themselves, “What would my military life be like if AFSA hadn’t been there?”

Please help tell our story. Please make it clear to current and past servicemembers, their family members, and survivors that their lives have been greatly improved by our efforts. Please explain that our achievements have been, to a great extent, possible because we are a large association. Finally, if they are not members, urge them to join our family, to make us even stronger. Simply put, those Associations with larger membership levels have a greater ability to make changes and preserve benefits.

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