

## President's Message

You've heard the phrase that the only two sure things in life are death and taxes. Well, tax season is upon us and--good news! The Federal filing deadline is moved to May 17th! The good news goes on--Illinois has also extended their deadline as well.

While we're still around, most of us will continue to need health care. Many retirees, in order to save money, choose to use TRICARE, If you're a user of Standard, which is now called Select, at zero cost, the landscape has changed. Unless you're on active duty, medically retired, or survivor of an active duty member who died on active duty, you need to enroll before the end of June 2021 and pay premiums back to January 1, 2021. Otherwise, the next opportunity is November 2021 or because of a Life Qualifying Event. Premiums are \$12.50 per month for individual and \$25 for families.

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Treasurer's Report	
Checking Account Balance ...	\$372
Savings Account Balance .....	\$6341
Certificates of Deposit .....	\$15,177
Total .....	\$21,890



Visit us on Facebook! (click logo on left)

Visit our website: [www.moaa-swil.org](http://www.moaa-swil.org)

Send your comments to [moaa.swil@gmail.com](mailto:moaa.swil@gmail.com)

## 2021 USO and Fisher House Donations Drive

### HONORING OUR BEST CONTRIBUTOR

For thirteen of the fourteen years our chapter has been collecting money and Wish List items for the USO of Missouri and later, starting in 2011, for St. Louis Fisher House, we have had one major consistent overly generous contributor. Every chapter member who has followed the year-after-year reporting of our chapter's success should know the name of this benevolent contributor. No guessing necessary, it is St. Michael's Episcopal Church of O'Fallon, Illinois.

This singular contributor, whether collecting money or Wish List items, has never failed to excel in their outstanding support of our chapter. Testimony to their responsiveness is evident in these facts with representative numbers:

- Including this year's anticipated final numbers, of the approximate \$56,000 combined the chapter will have handed over to the USO and Fisher House, about \$21,000 will have been contributed by St. Michael's. That's 38% of the total.
- To focus on collecting only money, St. Michael's stopped collecting Wish List items in 2016. Before that change, of the total of 13,700 pounds combined of Wish List items delivered

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### Featured in this Issue

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## This Month's Program

Please join us on 22 April 2021  
from 1630 to 1830 hours  
for a Virtual Happy Hour

**Program: "Aging Successfully" by Dr. Marla Berg-Werner of SLU**

**To join the Happy Hour, click this link:**

<https://wustl-hipaa.zoom.us/j/91569593732?pwd=OlpDd2puWnBtOVARMnJNaSs0RWRGZz09>

**Meeting ID: 915 6959 3732      Passcode: 816963**

**To join by phone (audio only), dial: 312-626-6799**  
*(use the meeting ID and passcode above)*

**As you know, we didn't have our annual Scholarship Charity Auction in December. We asked you to donate the money you would've bid on the gifts--thank you to those of you who did.**

**It's not too late to donate if you haven't already.**

**Send donations by check to: SW IL MOAA, PO Box 735, O'Fallon IL 62269**

### Upcoming Programs (all are tentative due to pandemic restrictions)

Date	Venue	Topic
May 2021	TBD	Annual Business Meeting
12 Jun 2021	O'Fallon Park on Hwy 50	Picnic (bring your own food, drinks, chairs, games)

**If you normally receive the newsletter via email, but received it in the mail, then we don't have your correct email address. Send your name and correct email address to [moaa.swil@gmail.com](mailto:moaa.swil@gmail.com).**

**Reminder: Please review your chapter membership status and send in your local chapter dues, \$8 per year. Send to: Southwest Illinois MOAA, PO Box 735 O'Fallon, IL, 62269.**

## USO/Fisher House Donations (continued)

in the years up to 2016, 5,700 pounds were collected by St. Michael's. That's 42% of the total.

- This year is an amazing example of the church's continuous progress. Last year's record combined collects of \$2,470 was beaten this year by 22%, to a new record high of exactly \$3,000.

It is worth mentioning that about one third of the contributors at St. Michael's are also MOAA members. In effect, their contributions get credited twice – first to the credit of St. Michael's and then to the credit of the chapter. But that in any way should diminish the essence of the church's involvement. The same pattern pertains to any outside contributions, or, for that matter, to an individual giving who is a chapter member. It's just the mechanics of the collections process. Eventually, the chapter gets the full credit it deserves.

I think it's also worth observing the value of having an outside person or group contributing. With members cultivating outside contributors, the chapter's opportunity for even more successful campaigns becomes magnified, and each yearly endeavor at collections becomes a true campaign – not just members donating because the chapter has made a commitment. Just review the St. Michael's example above and envision what you might do.

Lastly, if you feel compelled, it seems appropriate for the chapter and even individual members to email a quick thank you to St. Michael's. Just send it to the attention of Amy Konieczny, Warden, at this email address: [St.Michaels62269@gmail.com](mailto:St.Michaels62269@gmail.com). Your acknowledgements surely will be appreciated.

St. Michael's parish family is our champion, our biggest contributor! Let's honor and salute them.

Nick Wartonick, Co-chair of the 2021 Campaign, 618-628-0858 (H), 618-406-6907 (M), [wartonick-59@charter.net](mailto:wartonick-59@charter.net)

## President's Message (continued)

Find more information at this [link](https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates/Archives/02_11_2021_Disenrolled_from_TRICARE_Select_How_to_Reinstate_Coverage). ([https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates/Archives/02\\_11\\_2021\\_Disenrolled\\_from\\_TRICARE\\_Select\\_How\\_to\\_Reinstate\\_Coverage](https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates/Archives/02_11_2021_Disenrolled_from_TRICARE_Select_How_to_Reinstate_Coverage))

We have another ZOOM meeting opportunity for the Chapter members during a Happy Hour event on April 22. This meeting will feature Dr. Marla Berg-Weger from SLU speaking on Aging Successfully. I'm sure everyone can benefit from the information from the presentation to help themselves as we all gain maturity for a fuller, healthier life. Details on the event are in the Program section of the newsletter.

Thank you for all those who participated in the collection of donations for St Louis Fisher House and Missouri USO. We thought there would only be monetary donations, but we did get some non-perishable goods from JROTC units in our area.

Thank you, also, for continuing to support MOAA National and our Chapter activities. We are the grass roots affiliation of MOAA standing in the gap at the community level. Even during this time of challenging pandemic constraints, you continue to serve, and I, along with your Chapter board, appreciate your continued loyalty and perseverance. We will get through this time and hopefully start meeting again in September. I look forward to that time. God bless you, your families, our men and women serving in the military, the elected representatives and Administration, and this great United States of America.

Much activity for MOAA during the current Congressional session. Most important for us is the Advocacy in Action, MOAA's new title for Storming the Hill (removed due to recent past events). Focus of this, once again, virtual effort targets toxic exposure reform, TRICARE Young Adult program, and Basic Needs Allowance for military members. And if you're not excluded from paying the premium for TRICARE Select (formerly Standard), *Continued next page*



## Legislative News (continued)

you need to enroll before the end of June 2021. Otherwise, the next opportunity is November 2021 or because of a Life Qualifying Event. Premiums are \$12.50 per month for individual and \$25 for families, and payment needs to be made back to January 1, 2021. Go to this [link](https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates/Archives/02_11_2021_Disenrolled_from_TRICARE_Select_How_to_Reinstate_Coverage) for more information. (Link: [https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates/Archives/02\\_11\\_2021\\_Disenrolled\\_from\\_TRICARE\\_Select\\_How\\_to\\_Reinstate\\_Coverage](https://tricare.mil/CoveredServices/BenefitUpdates/Archives/02_11_2021_Disenrolled_from_TRICARE_Select_How_to_Reinstate_Coverage))

## Take Action!

These important issues require your immediate attention.  
Contact your elected officials today.

(Note: for more details about issues you can carry to our legislators, see the Take Action article in Council and Chapter News, or go to <https://takeaction.moaa.org/moaa/?0>)

**Watch for the opportunity to send a message to Congress in the coming months on the bills listed here.**

- Federal - HR 5995: A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to expand eligibility to certain military retirees for concurrent receipt of veterans' disability compensation and retired pay or combat-related special compensation, and for other purposes.
- Federal - HR 413: A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow the work opportunity credit to small businesses which hire individuals who are members of the Ready Reserve or National Guard, and for other purposes.
- Federal - HR 847: A bill to provide interim appropriations for the Coast Guard Retired Serviceman's Family Protection and Survivor Benefits Plans for each fiscal year after fiscal year 2018, and for other purposes.
- Federal - S 3393: A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide for concurrent receipt of veterans' disability compensation and retired pay for disability retirees with fewer than 20 years of service and a combat-related disability, and for other purposes.
- Federal - S 21: A bill making continuing appropriations for Coast Guard pay in the event of an appropriations act expired prior to the enactment of new appropriations (official title to be confirmed).
- Federal - S 1047: A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to create a dependency and indemnity compensation allowance for surviving spouses receiving dependency and indemnity compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

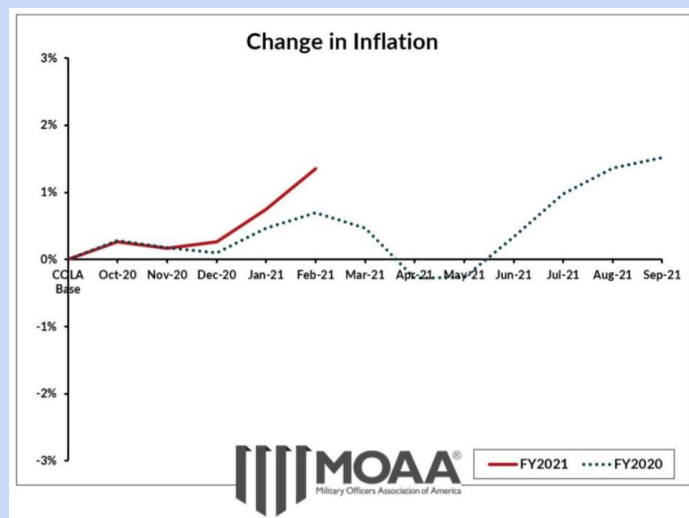
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### COLA Watch

[moaa.org/content/take-action/cola-watch](https://moaa.org/content/take-action/cola-watch)

The February 2021 CPI is 256.843, 1.4 percent above the FY 2021 COLA baseline.

The Consumer Price Index for March is scheduled to be released April 13. The CPI baseline for FY 2021 is 253.412.



## Legislative News (continued)

- Federal - S 2216: A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to formally recognize caregivers of veterans, notify veterans and caregivers of clinical determinations relating to eligibility for caregiver programs, and temporarily extend benefits for veterans who are determined ineligible for the family caregiver program, and for other purposes.
- Federal - S 2981: A bill to reauthorize and amend the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002, and for other purposes.
- Federal - HR 2406: A bill to amend the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Act of 2002 to make certain changes to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's commissioned officer corps, and for other purposes.
- Federal - S 2629: A bill to amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to the Public Health Service Corps.
- Federal - S 2297: A bill to authorize appropriations for the Coast Guard, and for other purposes.
- Federal - HR 333: A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to permit retired members of the Armed Forces who have a service-connected disability rated less than 50 percent to receive concurrent payment of both retired pay and veterans' disability compensation, to extend eligibility for concurrent receipt to chapter 61 disability retirees with less than 20 years of service, and for other purposes.

## Congress Pulls Plug on TRICARE Dental Program Transition to FEDVIP

By: Karen Ruedisueli | February 10, 2021 ([Link](#) to article)

The FY 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) stops the planned transition of active duty and National Guard/Reserve families who use the TRICARE Dental Program (TDP) to the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP). MOAA supports this move and will continue working to ensure Congress and the Defense Health Agency (DHA) remain committed to addressing known problems with TDP networks.

TDP is a voluntary dental plan available for purchase by active duty family members, transitional survivors, and Guard and Reserve members and their families. A similar move did take effect

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Chapter Officers	
President	Col (ret) Bob Norman
2nd VP/Comm	Maj (ret) Rick Sunner
Secretary	Lt Col (ret) Ann Morey
Treasurer	Col (ret) Bob Koss Col (ret) Phil Yavorsky
Membership	Maj (ret) Sabrina Luttrell-Andrews
Programs	Yasemin Koss
ROTC Liaison	CDR (ret) Tim Grout
Spouses Liaison	Narni Cahill

**Call for Articles!** If you want to submit an article for the Eyes to the Skies, just send the draft article to me at [moaa.swil@gmail.com](mailto:moaa.swil@gmail.com). Please keep these things in mind:

- Submit your article by the 10th of the month prior
- The article must be in MS Word or text format

We reserve the right to edit the article so it fits in the newsletter and meets our (and MOAA's) editorial policy.

### Editorial Policy

The Southwest Illinois Chapter Newsletter is published monthly by the Southwest Illinois Chapter which is an affiliate of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). MOAA and its affiliated chapters and councils are nonpartisan.





for the TRICARE Retiree Dental Program (TRDP): The FY 2017 NDAA sunsetted TRDP and made military retirees eligible for dental and vision coverage through FEDVIP as of Jan. 1, 2019. There are no changes to retiree dental and vision coverage – military retirees are still eligible for FEDVIP.

MOAA and other advocacy groups took this issue to Capitol Hill, and Congress responded by including language in the FY 2019 NDAA that would have made TDP beneficiaries eligible for FEDVIP effective Jan. 1, 2022. The FY 2021 NDAA reverses these plans. The TRICARE Dental Program will remain in place.

For most TDP beneficiaries, DoD pays 60% of the plan premium while the servicemember contributes 40%. Complications related to DoD's premium contribution, among other issues, hampered efforts to transition TDP to FEDVIP.

MOAA supports this move by Congress to ensure all TDP beneficiaries have continued access to affordable dental coverage, and we are encouraged by recent steps the DHA has taken to address issues with TDP.

## **Advocacy in Action: Details on MOAA's Spring Campaign**

By: Dan Merry | February 9, 2021 ([Link](#))

The big event this year is Advocacy in Action, the new name for our annual legislative push on Capitol Hill.

Last year, due to the pandemic, we were forced to pivot our engagement to virtual platforms — this gave us an opportunity to include others in these meetings over the month of May. Not quite a bright silver lining, but it did give many others the opportunity to be part of our advocacy mission from home and helped generate over 19,000 letters spread out over every congressional office — all 535! Our members conducted 253 meetings in virtual platforms — on top of those letters and phone calls — to ensure 100% contact.

Based on too many unknowns this year, MOAA will repeat the virtual meetings, again targeting the month of May. Check your MOAA Newsletter and MOAA's Advocacy News page (at this [link](#)) for updates.

Topics this year address those who are currently serving, veterans and recent retirees, and members of the National Guard and Reserve forces.

### **Topic 1: Comprehensive Toxic Exposure Reform**

This focus on comprehensive toxic exposure reform highlights those currently serving, veterans, those recently retired from active duty, and the Guard and Reserves. When most people hear about toxic exposure, they think of Agent Orange and Vietnam, and we work that, too. However, there is a significant lack of awareness of the current toxic exposures for those in uniform today and since 9/11.

Among one of the more notable and impactful exposures are from the burn pits and other fires during the Gulf War in Afghanistan and Iraq. Additionally, there are exposure risks from firefighting chemicals and contaminated drinking water, to name a few.

### **Topic 2: TRICARE Young Adult Parity**

There is a glaring disparity between commercial health care plans that cover adult children to age 26 and TRICARE, which requires a separate premium for young adult coverage. In 2013, TYA monthly premiums were \$152 for Standard and \$176 for Prime; today, those monthly fees are \$257 and \$459 respectively, which is an unsustainable curve, charting a course for TYA plan failure.

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The Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act of 2021 (H.R. 475), sponsored by Reps. Elaine Luria (D-Va.) and Michael Waltz (R-Fla.), expand TRICARE eligibility to young adult dependents up to age 26. Learn more about the legislation at this [link](#).

(<https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2021-news-articles/advocacy/bipartisan-legislation-would-fix-tricare-young-adult-coverage-gap/>)

### **Topic 3: Basic Needs Allowance**

This proposed allowance would address our servicemembers and their families who are most vulnerable to food insecurity and are finding it difficult to make ends meet. The subsistence allowance would be provided automatically to servicemembers whose gross household income (not including their Basic Allowance for Housing, or BAH) is below 130% of the federal poverty line. This recurring struggle was exacerbated by COVID-19 layoffs.

While a small number of servicemembers qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), many do not because their BAH is considered income. These families turn to food pantries instead: The Armed Services YMCA reported a 400% increase in grocery demand at their food pantries on and near military installations during the pandemic.

### **What's Next**

Upcoming online materials will have all the information you need to start making appointments and garnering support from your legislators on these important issues.

Please remember our entire Government Relations staff, along with The Military Coalition and other partners, continues to work MOAA's other legislative priorities throughout the year.

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## **Senate Reintroduces Concurrent Receipt Legislation, With Strong Support ([Link](#))**

By: Mark Belinsky | February 24, 2021

Nine days after Major Richard Star, USAR, lost his battle with cancer from toxic exposure, Sens. Jon Tester (D-Mont.) and Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) reintroduced the Major Richard Star Act (S. 344) with 42 Senators as original cosponsors.

The legislation will authorize concurrent receipt of DoD retired pay and VA disability for those injured in a combat zone and forced to medically retire under Chapter 61.

Senators are growing bipartisan support for this legislation – part of an incremental strategy to chip away at the larger concurrent receipt problem that has an associated \$33 billion price tag.

“When it comes to our nation’s disabled veterans, we’ve got to cut through the bureaucratic red tape that’s prevented them from getting the full benefits they’ve earned,” Tester said. “The Major Richard Star Act would fix the unfair offset that prevents thousands of veterans living with the wounds of war from accessing both their disability benefits and retired pay. And it honors the service and sacrifice of Major Richard Star, whose legacy lives on in our continued fight to ensure our men and women in uniform get the assistance they deserve.”

### **Where Is the Legislation in the House of Representatives?**

The House is on a different schedule than the Senate and will also reintroduce the Major Richard Star Act very soon. Reps. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.) and Raul Ruiz (D-Calif.) will champion the

legislation again this year in the House. Last year, the bill ended in the 116th Congress with support from 101 representatives. Increasing support for this legislation is critical for the bill to pass – either as a standalone measure or as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

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## **MOAA Asks DoD to Implement Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts ([Link](#))**

By: Eryn Wagnon | February 10, 2021

MOAA has prioritized child care as a key military family issue for 2021 and is actively promoting recommended solutions to DoD and Congress. In our latest effort, MOAA partnered with the National Military Family Association to author a white paper to persuade DoD to implement Dependent Care Flexible Spending Accounts (DCFSAs). The Military Coalition, a group of advocacy organizations representing a combined 5.5 million members of the military community, sent a letter along with the white paper to senior leaders at DoD, asking them to consider the move as “one of many reforms” required to address child care issues.

### **What Are DCFSAs?**

DCFSAs are a pre-tax reimbursable employer benefit program allowing an employee to designate up to \$5,000 per plan year out of their paycheck for child care or adult care expenses. These dollars can be used not only for traditional day care services, but for before- and after-school programs, babysitting, and nanny services. DoD has the statutory authority to implement this benefit, but decided against doing so after a 2007 implementation study, citing tax and usability concerns. The difficulty in finding and paying for child care has continued to increase in the 14 years since DoD last considered offering DCFSAs.

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## **AAFES Will Offer Chiropractic Services at Select Locations ([Link](#))**

By Jim Absher, Military.com | February 17, 2021

The Army and Air Force Exchange Service, or AAFES, is opening more dental and medical equipment service centers on military installations in 2021. And in a first, it will also bring chiropractic services to selected locations in the U.S.

Currently, AAFES offers wellness services on several military locations worldwide, including:

- 139 optical and optometry clinics
- 17 durable medical equipment shops
- 9 dental offices

AAFES is planning to open seven additional durable medical equipment shops and eight dental offices at locations worldwide this year.

New to the exchange wellness program in 2021 will be six chiropractic clinics, slated to open at Fort Campbell, Kentucky; Fort Carson, Colorado; Fort Stewart, Georgia; Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington; MacDill Air Force Base, Florida; and Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada.

All exchange wellness locations accept Tricare and most private insurance programs.

"With exchange wellness offerings, service members and families can get what they need without having to go off the installation," said Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Kevin Osby, exchange senior enlisted adviser. "The exchange remains committed to making life better for military communities throughout 2021."

The services are available to all authorized exchange customers including active-duty members, retirees, family members and all disabled veterans.



# COUNCIL AND CHAPTER NEWS

## News from National MOAA

For more information about the articles in this month's newsletter and how you can get more involved in other issues, visit the MOAA [Take Action Center](#) or [News](#) webpages.

- [Support Health Care -- Children of Disabled Vets/Vets \(Died Due to Service-Connected Disability\)](#)
- [Urge Your Senators to Support Legislation to Repeal the TRICARE Select Enrollment Fee](#)

## SW IL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE

The [VSO](#) provides free assistance to veterans, their dependents, and survivors in navigating complex services and benefits. The nearest VSO is in Belleville, and can be contacted at 618-233-8445/5140.

Visit the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs by following this [link](#).

For information on services available to the aging population, please visit the [Illinois Department on Aging](#).

Use the links below to read some timely veteran-related articles.

- [Send a Vet a Message](#) -- Send a message of support to Illinois Veterans' Homes residents or staff.
- [Illinois Veterans Newsletters](#) -- Award-winning email newsletter created by IDVA, delivers important news and information to the Illinois veteran community. (March 2020 edition at this [link](#).)
- [Operation Rising Spirit](#) -- Challenges service organizations, volunteers, and patriots of Illinois to raise the spirits of military veterans and the heroic staff who care for them at state veterans' homes.
- [Veterans Drivers License](#) -- Veteran's designation helps ensure military veterans receive the services and benefits for which they are entitled.

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## MOAA on the Hill: Testimony Outlines Legislative Priorities for Veterans (Excerpt, read full article at this [Link](#))

By: Amanda Dolasinski | March 3, 2021

MOAA is looking out for veterans' access to health care – a topic increasingly important as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to stifle daily life across the country.

Cory Titus, MOAA's director of government relations for veteran benefits and Guard/Reserve affairs, outlined the association's legislative priorities for the VA during a joint Veterans Affairs Committee virtual session on March 3rd. MOAA is advocating for examining the department's COVID-19 response, eliminating health disparities for women and minorities, and passing comprehensive toxic exposure reform, among other priorities.

Video of MOAA's opening testimony at the hearing: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgEs9\\_jvd6A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgEs9_jvd6A)

Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, said the hearing provides an opportunity for lawmakers to hear directly from veterans on their needs.

“This is one platform that allows us to hear many voices,” Takano said. “... it gives us the opportunity to discuss ways to build better veterans programs that can ... address problems for all veterans.”

MOAA's priorities are focused on improving services in the Veterans Health Administration, which oversees the VA's health care facilities, and Veterans Benefits Administration, which includes a wide range of benefits, such as disability compensation and transition programs.

MOAA offered details on its 2021 priorities in written testimony to the joint committee. Read the full testimony at <https://www.moaa.org/uploadedfiles/moaa-hvac-svac-2021.pdf>.

Southwest Illinois Chapter  
Military Officers Association of America  
P.O. Box 735  
O'Fallon IL 62269

## **Meeting Announcement**

This Month's Meeting will be a virtual one--our second Virtual  
Happy Hour.

Check out This Month's Program (page 2) for details.