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Dramatic changes in military pay focus of new study

By Leo Shane III
Military Times

Lawmakers want Pentagon leaders to launch a full review of military basic pay to see if troops' salaries are high enough to keep up with the needs of military families, and whether the current pay tables need to be overhauled.

The idea is included as part of the compromise defense authorization bill unveiled by House and Senate leaders Tuesday night. The sweeping military budget policy legislation includes plans for \$817 billion in Defense Department spending for fiscal 2023 and a 4.6% pay raise for troops in January, the largest in 20 years.

But while the pay raise will put more money in all troops' wallets in coming months, the pay review could lead to dra-

matic changes in what service members earn in coming years.

Lawmakers have been focused on the idea of military pay over the last year as inflation costs have risen and recruiting efforts have lagged.

Defense Department leaders have lamented that their ability to bring in and retain individuals with in-demand skills has been hampered by the inflexibility of military personnel rules.

The new pay study — to be conducted by an outside research group — is designed to provide answers to some of those problems.

The authorization bill calls for researchers to look into "whether to update the current [military pay] model to meet the needs of the 2023 employment market" and "an assessment of whether to modify current basic pay tables to consider higher rates of pay for

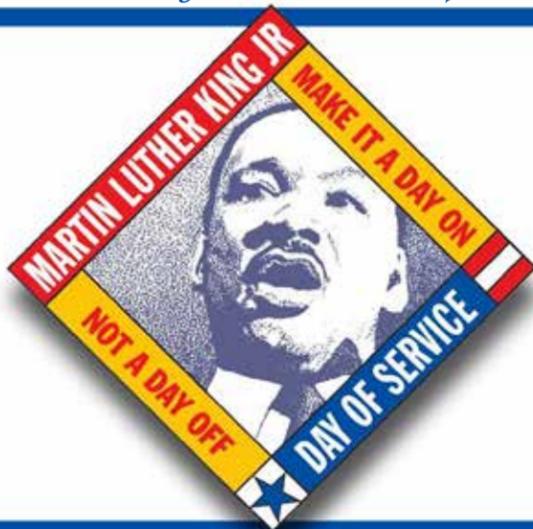
specialties ... in critical need of personnel." Military basic pay is currently based wholly on an individual's rank and time in service. Military leaders have emphasized that it is only one part of a range of compensation for troops, including housing stipends, health care coverage and future veterans benefits.

A junior enlisted service member with two years service makes about \$22,000 a year in base pay, regardless of their job responsibilities. An officer with 10 years in service makes about \$95,000.

Troops can earn extra money through recruitment bonuses and specialty pay for certain jobs. But Pentagon leaders have long debated whether those kinds of incentives should be included as part of a new base pay standard for certain skills, rather than income add-ons.

● **Military Pay, page 2**

NAS Meridian Chapel hosts
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Service
Tuesday, Jan. 17 ~ 1 p.m.



Guest Speaker ...
Bishop LaBaron Hedgemon
Senior Pastor
Freedom Rock Cathedral, Meridian



US Army photo

A newborn baby sleeps peacefully at 549th Hospital Center, Brian D. Allgood Army Community hospital, Korea.

DOD releases memo expanding Military Parental Leave Program

By Jim Garamone
DoD News, Defense Media Activity

The Defense Department has released guidelines for the expansion of the military parental leave policy.

The memo — released yesterday — is signed by Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr., the undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

The memo applies to all service members and is effective as of January 4, 2023.

"It is important for the development of military families that members be able to care for their newborn, adopted or placed child or children," Cisneros says in the memo.

● **Parental Leave, page 2**

Veteran, Apollo 7 astronaut Walter Cunningham dead at 90

By Seth Borenstein and Jake Bleiberg
The Associated Press

Walter Cunningham, the last surviving astronaut from the first successful crewed space mission in NASA's Apollo program, died Jan. 3 in Houston. He was 90.

NASA confirmed Cunningham's death in a statement but did not include its cause. His family said through a spokesman, Jeff Carr, that Cunningham "died in the hospital of natural causes."

Cunningham was one of three astronauts aboard the 1968 Apollo 7 mission, an 11-day spaceflight that beamed live television broadcasts as they orbited Earth, paving the way for the moon landing less than a year later.

Cunningham, then a civilian, crewed the mission with Navy Capt. Walter M. Schirra and Donn F. Eisele, an Air Force major. Cunningham was the lunar module pilot on



Photo by Phelan M. Ebenhack/AP, File

Apollo 7 astronaut Walter Cunningham acknowledges the crowd before an Alliance of American Football game between the Orlando Apollos and the Atlanta Legend in Orlando.

the space flight, which launched from Cape Kennedy Air Force Station, Florida, on Oct. 11 and splashed down in the Atlantic Ocean south of Bermuda.

NASA said Cunningham, Eisele and Schirra' flew a near perfect mission.

Their spacecraft performed so well that the agency sent the next crew, Apollo 8, to orbit the moon as a prelude to the Apollo 11 moon landing in July 1969.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said Tuesday that Cunningham was "above all" an explorer whose work also laid the foundation for the agency's new Artemis moon program.

The Apollo 7 astronauts also won a special Emmy award for their daily television reports from orbit, during which they clowned around, held up humorous signs and educated earthlings about space flight.

● **Apollo, page 2**

Bills: Safety Damar Hamlin showing ‘remarkable improvement’

By John Wawrow
The Associated Press

Buffalo Bills safety Damar Hamlin has shown what physicians treating him are calling “remarkable improvement over the past 24 hours,” the team announced Thursday, three days after the player went into cardiac arrest and had to be resuscitated on the field.

“While still critically ill, he has demonstrated that he appears to be neurologically intact,” the Bills said in a statement. “His lungs continue to heal and he is making steady progress.”

Hamlin’s agent, Ronald Butler, told The Associated Press that Hamlin was awake and has been able to grip the hands of family members at his hospital bedside.

The developments came as the Bills were scheduled to return to practice on Thursday for the first time since Hamlin collapsed when his heart stopped after making a tackle and was rushed to the University of Cincinnati Medical Center during the first quarter of Buffalo’s game against the Bengals on Monday night.

The second-year player spent the past two days sedated and listed in critical condition.

Bills rookie cornerback Kaiir Elam posted a message Thursday on Twitter that said Hamlin “is doing better, awake and showing signs of improvement.”

The Bills’ announcement comes as they prepare to play a home game against the New England Patriots, and with the team still dealing with the shock of seeing their teammate collapse on the field, his heart not beating.

“Life is bigger than this game. And I think this is one of those humbling moments for all of us,” Belichick said.

As to how his players were dealing with preparations for the game scheduled for Sunday, he said they are navigating it by the moment.

“I think we’re all doing the best that we can,” Belichick said. “All of those questions are out of our control. I’m not going to worry about any of those. We’re trying to control what we can control. That’s what we’re doing here and how we’re doing it. And we’re doing the best we can.”

After returning home early Tuesday once the game was suspended, the Bills held meetings and a walkthrough

practice without any media availability on Wednesday. On Thursday, players were spotted arriving at the facility, though the team has not yet released a practice schedule.

Numerous players across the league — former teammates and those who didn’t know Hamlin until Monday — voiced their support, while saying they were shaken by what unfolded in front of a North American TV audience. Colts safety Rodney Thomas made the two-hour drive from Indianapolis to Cincinnati on Tuesday just to be by the side of his former high school teammate.

“He’s a fighter. I know he’s a fighter and there’s no other thought in my mind other than him walking out under his own power,” Thomas said Wednesday.

Minnesota Vikings defensive tackle Harrison Phillips, who spent the previous four seasons playing for Buffalo, had dinner delivered to the hospital for Hamlin’s family and medical staff.

Hamlin’s marketing representative, Jordon Rooney, said Wednesday that the player’s family was buoyed by the words and acts of kindness.

[Read more, click here](#)

Formal establishment of Commander, Space Command

By PO1 William Sykes

U.S. Fleet Cyber Command / U.S. 10th Fleet

Effective Jan. 1, 2023, Commander, Navy Space Command (NAVSPACECOM), Fort Meade, Maryland is formally established.

On April 26, 2019, the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) directed the establishment of NAVSPACECOM to serve as the Navy’s component to US Space Command (USSPACECOM). A Subsequent CNO letter of March 6, 2022 conveyed intent to formally establish NAVSPACECOM as a separate command under Commander, Fleet Cyber Command (FCC).

NAVSPACECOM is Navy’s effort in maintaining maritime superiority from the sea floor to space with a core emphasis on lethality, readiness, and capacity, conducting space-enabled targeting and protection of critical maritime assets.

By working with USSPACECOM and service counterparts, FCC is able to provide the best integration possible of space capabilities throughout the Fleet.

NAVSPACECOM develops, integrates and conducts full-spectrum space domain operations as the Navy service component to United States Space Command, in concert with coalition, joint, inter-agency and other partners. NAVSPACECOM advocates on behalf of the Fleet to obtain space capabilities in support of maritime operations, establishes requirements for training and integration of space capabilities and provides space planning and operations expertise to the Fleet.

FCC is responsible for Navy information operations, offensive and defensive cyberspace operations, space operations, and signals intelligence.

Comprised of more than 19,000 Sailors, Reservists, and civilians stationed across the world, Commander, U.S. 10th Fleet (C10F) is the operational component of FCC and executes its mission through a task force structure similar to other warfare commanders. In this role, C10F provides support of Navy and joint missions in cyber/networks, cryptologic/signals intelligence and space.

● Military Pay

In addition, pay is set so that military personnel earn more than 70% of civilians with similar backgrounds and education. That number has fluctuated over the years as annual pay raises have exceeded or fallen short of civilian raises.

The congressionally mandated study will also look into whether that 70% mark is still adequate for recruiting and retention purposes, and whether the Employment Cost Index (a measure of growth in private-sector wages) should still serve as the basis for military pay calculations.

House lawmakers are expected to pass the authorization bill into law this week, with Senate action anticipated next week. If the pay study language remains part of the final law, an interim report on the compensation issues would be due to the House and Senate Armed Services committees by April 1, 2023.

That would put the findings in the hands of lawmakers as they are crafting the fiscal 2024 authorization bill, a potential vehicle

for those pay reforms.

House Armed Services Committee ranking member (and expected incoming chairman of the panel) Mike Rogers, R-Ala., and several other top committee leaders have already expressed an interest in adjusting military pay, both to better respond to rising inflation costs and to better compensate enlisted personnel.

The interim report could be key in justifying those moves.

Additional findings on the pay issues would also be reported to Congress one year and two years after the start of the research project.

Regardless of the authorization bill’s fate, the 4.6% pay raise is scheduled to go into effect at the start of next month.

For junior enlisted troops, a 4.6% hike over 2023 salary levels would mean about \$1,300 more next year in take-home pay. For senior enlisted and junior officers, the hike equals about \$2,500 more. For an O-4 with 12 years’ service, it’s more than \$4,500 in extra pay.

● Parental Leave

The memo further says that commanders must balance the needs of their units versus the needs of service members to use parental leave.

The memo specifically says that service members who give birth “will be authorized 12 weeks of parental leave following a period of convalescence to care for the child.” Service members who are the non-birth parent will also be authorized 12 weeks of leave to care for the child.

The memo explains that convalescent leave may be authorized for the recovery of the mother from giving birth if a doctor recommends it to address a specific medical condition and it is approved by the unit commander.

Service members who adopt a child or who have long-term foster care children placed with them will also be authorized 12 weeks of parental leave to care for the child.

Members who were on maternity convalescent leave or who had unused caregiver leave when the new policy went into effect will transition to the new policy without any loss of benefit and will receive the expanded benefit.

The twelve weeks of parental leave may be taken in the first year of the child’s life. “Parental leave may not be transferred to create a shared benefit, even between members of a dual military couple,” according to the memo.

“Members will be afforded the opportunity to take full advantage of the Military Parental Leave Program consistent with their desires [and the] operational requirements and training workloads of their unit,” Cisneros wrote.

● Apollo

It was NASA’s first crewed space mission since the deaths of the three Apollo 1 astronauts in a launch pad fire Jan. 27, 1967.

Cunningham recalled Apollo 7 during a 2017 event at the Kennedy Space Center, saying it “enabled us to overcome all the obstacles we had after the Apollo 1 fire and it became the longest, most successful test flight of any flying machine ever.”

Cunningham was born in Creston, Iowa, and attended high school in California before enlisting with the Navy in 1951 and serving as a Marine Corps pilot in Korea, according to NASA. He later obtained bachelor’s and master’s degrees in physics from the University of California at Los Angeles, where he also did doctoral studies, and worked as scientist for the Rand Corporation before joining NASA.

In an interview the year before his death, Cunningham recalled growing up poor and dreaming of flying airplanes, not spacecraft.

“We never even knew that there were astronauts when I was growing up,” Cunningham told The Spokesman-Review.

After retiring from NASA in 1971, Cunningham worked in engineering, business and investing, and became a public speaker and radio host. He wrote a memoir about his career and time as an astronaut, “The All-American Boys.” He also expressed skepticism in his later years about human activity contributing to climate change, bucking the scientific consensus in writing and public talks, while acknowledging that he was not a climate scientist.

Although Cunningham never crewed another space mission after Apollo 7, he remained a proponent of space exploration. He told the Spokane, Washington, paper last year, “I think that humans need to continue expanding and pushing out the levels at which they’re surviving in space.”

Cunningham is survived by his wife Dorothy, his sister Cathy Cunningham, and his children Brian and Kimberly. In a statement, Cunningham’s family said, “the world has lost another true hero, and we will miss him dearly.”

The Skyline ~ Naval Air Station Meridian, Miss.

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Local Happenings

JANUARY

14: Storytelling Festival from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Mississippi Children's Museum – Meridian. Come out and take part in the fun of this storytelling festival, lots of fun for the whole family. Tickets are \$10; for information, email meridian@mcm.ms.

21: A Night with MCC Baseball at 7 p.m. at MSU Meridian Kahlmus Auditorium. Join us for a "Hot Stove" discussion with former Eagles, now NCAA Division 1 head baseball coaches. Individual tickets are \$50; and includes dinner and is open seating. You can also purchase an entire table for \$500 and get preferred seating, sponsorship sign and MCC gifts. E-mail chollad1@meridiancc.edu for information.

21: The Temptations & the Four Tops at 7:30 p.m. at the MSU Riley Center. Soul music royalty will grace the stage when The Temptations and The Four Tops showcase their staggering treasuries of classic American songs. For information, Call 601-696-2200.

27: Dinner Theatre @ The Threefoot Hotel at 6 p.m. at the Threefoot Hotel. Join us for a unique dinner curated by The Threefoot Hotel's Executive Chef, combined with an intimate private concert featuring Rockefeller Center's Michael Andrew & Sweden's Queen of Swing, Gunhild Carling. Seating is limited to the first 54 patrons. Tickets are \$150 per person. Call 601-693-2224 for reservations.

FEBRUARY

4: St. Paul & The Broken Bones at 8 p.m. at the MSU Riley Center. Paul Janeway's impassioned vocals drive the eight-piece band, still based in their hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. They drew their original inspiration from classic soul. Tickets to be announced; call 601-696-2200.

9: Jane Austen's Pride & Prejudice at 7:30 p.m. at the MSU Riley Center. Join us for an evening with the Aquila Theatre group. Tickets are \$20 adults, \$10 students; call 601-483-9810.

17: Masquerade at Merrehope from 6-8 p.m. at Merrehope. You'll enjoy live entertainment, the very best King Cakes ever, party fare . . . plus some fun Merrehope Mardi Gras surprises. It's BYOB with a \$10 admission at the door. Throw some beads around your neck, dress all out in Mardi Gras attire or come as you are. For information, call 601-483-8439.

18: Meridian Mardi Gras from noon- 6 p.m. at City Hall. Join us downtown event featuring parades, delicious food vendors, amazing bands, and MORE! Free to the public. Contact annagrace@mitchellcompanies.com.

BAH rates increase by average of 12.1%

The Defense Department has released the basic allowance for housing, or BAH rates for 2023. Those rates have risen, on average, by 12.1%, said the Pentagon press secretary during a briefing today.

"The significant increase in average BAH rates is reflective of the unique market conditions experienced across many locations nationwide over the past year," said Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder. "The department is committed to the preservation of a compensation and benefits structure that provides members with an adequate standard of living to sustain a trained, experienced and ready force, now and in the future."

The BAH increase is not unexpected. In a memo dated Sept. 22, 2022, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III outlined an array of efforts to address the

needs of married service members and their families, as well as single service members.

"The Department of Defense has a sacred obligation to take care of our service members and families," Austin wrote in the memo. "Doing so is a national security imperative. Our military families provide the strong foundation for our force, and we owe them our full support."

Part of that effort was a review of the prospective 2023 basic allowance for housing rates to ensure they reflect unusual fluctuations in the housing market. Additionally, in the 28 areas DOD identified as having a more than 20% spike in rental housing costs above BAH, the secretary directed automatic increases in BAH, which took place in October.

-- By C. Todd Lopez, DOD News

[Read more, click here](#)

Navy signs new Red Hill administrative consent order

On Dec. 20, 2022, the Department of the Navy (DON) and Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) signed a new Administrative Consent Order with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to address the defueling and closure of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility (RHBFSF), and improvements to the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam drinking water system. The Consent Order is not yet effective; it will be subject to public comment through February 6, 2023, after which EPA will consider whether to sign the Order and bring it into effect, or to modify specific terms in light of public comments.

This 2023 Consent Order will work in concert with the Hawaii Department of Health's (DOH's) Emergency Order of May 2022, and the 2015 Administrative Order on Consent signed by DON,

DLA, DOH, and EPA. Collectively, the requirements of these orders ensure that the DON may continue to deliver safe drinking water, and the DON and DLA may continue the progress that they have made in planning for defueling and closure, operate under a clear framework to address the impacts of past petroleum releases from the RHBFSF, and perform the work safely and expeditiously.

"This Consent Order is an important instrument to maintain our progress in safe and effective defueling and closure at Red Hill, as well as the ongoing improvement of the drinking water system at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam," said Karnig Ohannessian, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Environment and Mission Readiness.

-- From US Navy

[Read more, click here](#)

USS Forrest Sherman returns to Norfolk after NATO deployment

The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Forrest Sherman (DDG 98) returned to Naval Station Norfolk from deployment, Dec. 22.

Forrest Sherman's return to homeport marks the completion of a six-month deployment as the flagship for Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) 2, commanded by Rear Adm. Scott Sciretta.

As the flagship, Forrest Sherman led a multinational maritime group in operations throughout the Mediterranean Sea, ensuring security and stability in the region while supporting deterrence and defense of NATO territory. The ship

conducted five multi-national exercises with NATO Allies and partners.

Sailors assigned to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Forrest Sherman (DDG 98) heave in mooring lines as the ship returns to Naval Station Norfolk, Dec 22. Forrest Sherman returned to Naval Station Norfolk following a scheduled deployment with Allies and partners as the flagship for Standing NATO Maritime Group Two (SNMG 2) conducting presence operations and exercises in the European Theater.

-- From Commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet

[Read more, click here](#)

Sale... Or

BOATS/CAMPERS/TRAILERS

New Price 21 foot - 2021 Jayco Travel Camper. Like new; beige & walnut interior and mattress kept in original plastic. Selling to upgrade to larger size - Price is \$15,000 some accessories included. To view or request pics please contact: Gary 601-575-5062.

2018 Mallard M185 Travel Trailer. Sleeps 4 with 1 queen bed/2 bunks. Easy to tow at 3,575 lbs; only selling because mili-

tary member is moving overseas. Great living quarters with lake view. Hooked up and ready to live in, including cables, hoses, plus the \$500 towing kit. Asking \$17,000. Call 360-434-3035.

AUTOMOBILES, ETC.

New! 2012 VW Jetta Turbo diesel, Auto trans, 118-K Miles. Asking \$5,500; call 601-479-1456.

2018 Subaru Outback 2.5 limited, 12k miles; Subaru safety features and warranties included.

Asking \$29k. Call 601-480-5100.

2017 Dodge Challenger, grey with racing stripe. \$24k. Call 601-880-3237.

HOMES/APARTMENTS

New! For Sale: 3BD/2BA Home with 2,560 sq. ft. Sits on 1 & 1/2 lots on dead end with privacy woods on 3 sides. Asking \$180,000. Contact: lucindawnichols@gmail.com, call (601)527-7829 or (601)917-6145.

New! For Rent: 2 BD/1 1/2 BA 1100 square foot home in Dalewood with

main lake access. Asking \$1300 a month. Email: rosscandeloproperties@gmail.com for information..

For Rent: Lake Cabin near NAS Meridian. 1 BD/1 BA; \$700 month. Unfurnished.

For Rent: 3BD, 2BA home with washer/dryer, wifi, lawn service and water included. \$1500/month. Call 601-917-8594.

For Rent: 3BD/2BA private gated home with 2-car garage in West Lauderdale; 15 minutes from the base. Call 601-737-4569 or 601-934-0739.

For Rent: 2BD/1.5BA Home at 3702 Rollins Dr, Lauderdale in Dalewood. 2136 sq ft on a .29 acres lot. Beautiful newly renovated single family home. Call 973-876-5006.

For Rent: 2BD/1.5BA single family home in Dalewood - fully renovated. Fenced in back yard with boat slip & pier. Pets allowed. Pet deposit \$300. \$1,300 rent per month. Call 973-876-5006.

For Sale By Owner: 3BD/3BA brick home with sunroom, large fenced in yard. Convenient to shop-

ping and base. \$139K. Call 601-513-3395 or 601-227-1870.

MISCELLANEOUS

Service for hire: Dixie Lawn LLC, lawn care in Meridian. Call 850-376-4499. Military owned company.

To submit an item to the "Sale...Or" column, e-mail adam.prince@navy.mil. Deadline is the Wednesday prior to publication.

Listings in the "Sale...Or" column are free for anyone who works at NAS Meridian. To include your announcement, email adam.w.prince.civ@us.navy.mil

Breaking down the number of veterans in the 118th Congress

By Leo Shane III
Military Times

When lawmakers formally convene the 118th Congress today, they'll do so with 97 veterans representing 36 states, the most members with military experience since 2015.

The new session begins with five more veterans than the last Congress, a small increase (up from 17% of members in 2021 to 18% this year) but a significant one. It's the first time since 1965 the number of veterans has gone up by five or more individuals, and only the fourth time in the last 50 years there has been any increase at all in the total veterans elected.

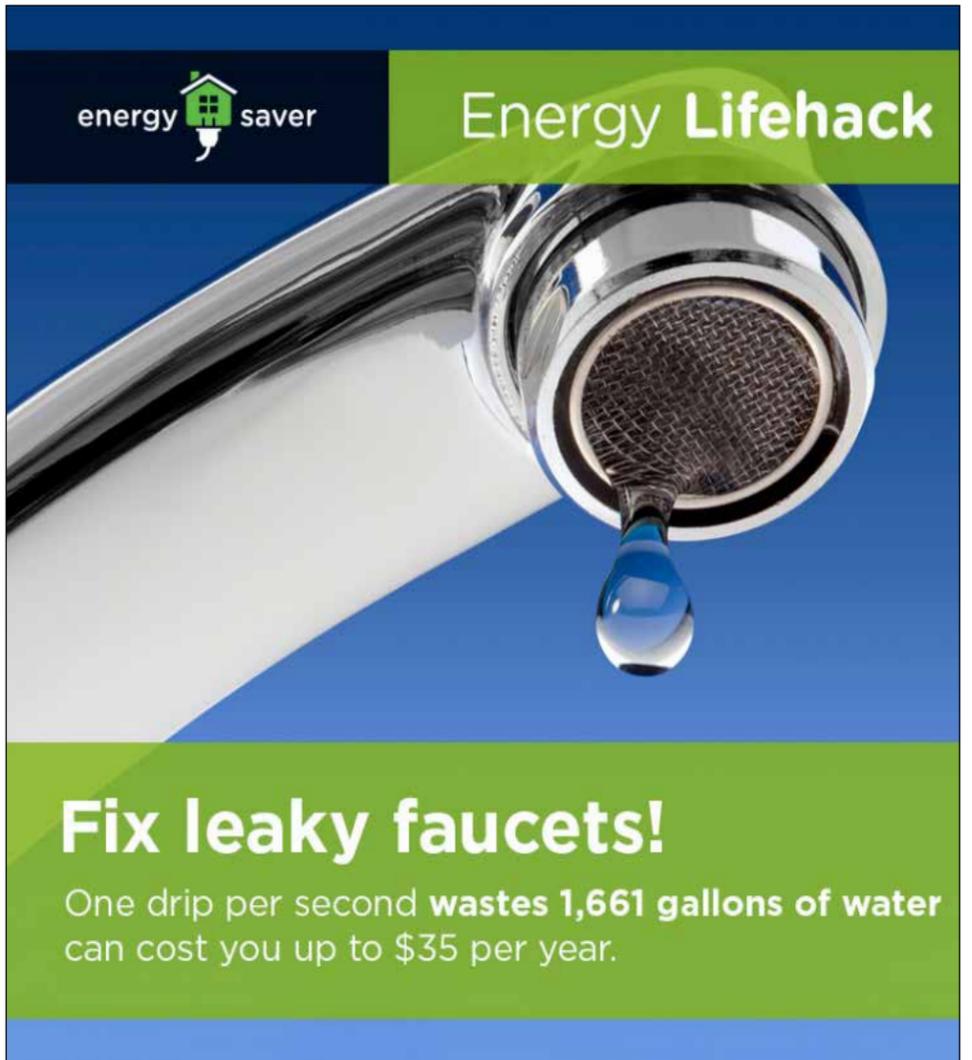
The number of veterans in Congress has declined almost steadily since the mid-1970s, as the military shifted from an end strength of largely drafted individuals to an all-volunteer force.

In 1973, nearly three in every four members of Congress had some type of military service. In 2023, it'll be about one in every six members who have military experience.

Because of their backgrounds, veterans serving in the House and Senate are often seen as critical to discussions of Defense Department operations and Veterans Affairs procedures, and tapped to explain those issues to colleagues who lack direct personal experience on the topics.

Here's a look at the incoming class of veterans:

- The new Congress includes 80 veterans in the House and 17 in the Senate.
- There are seven female veterans in Congress now, the most for any session.
- Congress has 42 Army veterans, the most of any single service.
- Nearly half of the veterans caucus (47) served a deployment in a combat zone.
- The list includes 19 newly elected veterans.
- The political breakdown of the veterans in Congress is 72 Republican veterans, 25 Democratic veterans.
- Of the group, 60 veterans served at least part of their career in the 2000s.
- Texas' delegation includes 10 veterans, the most of any state.

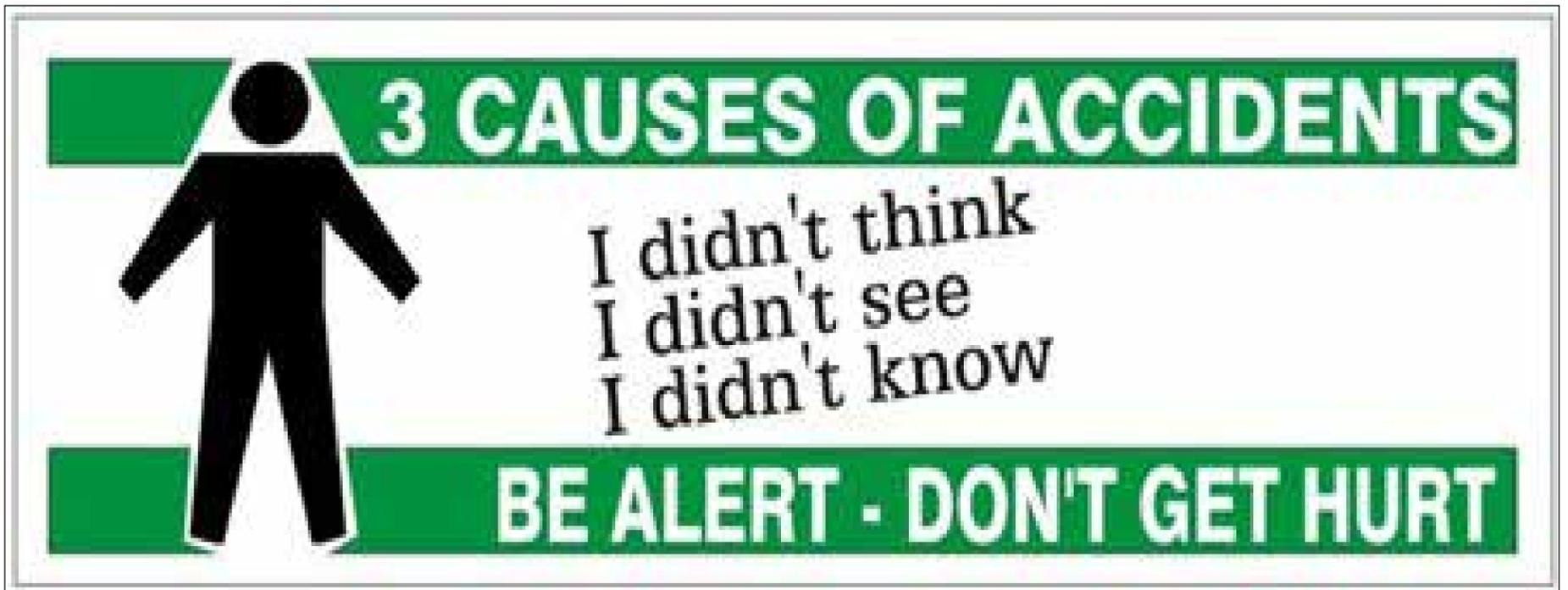


energy saver

Energy Lifehack

Fix leaky faucets!

One drip per second wastes 1,661 gallons of water can cost you up to \$35 per year.



3 CAUSES OF ACCIDENTS

I didn't think
I didn't see
I didn't know

BE ALERT - DON'T GET HURT

Finding the way home

Waiting for the McQuaid's Market cashier to check the price of an item, I watched as the familiar faces of local postal workers, construction workers and landscapers came in to grab something for lunch. In the adjoining check out aisle, they chatted casually with the other cashier.

"Hey, [Jack, Betty, Dave] how've you been?" the young cashier said.

"Not bad, how 'bout yourself?" the customers replied.

I was envious.

Five years ago, my husband, Francis, retired from the Navy after 28 years on active duty and many PCS moves. We bought a house in a charming Rhode Island village, intending to finally put down roots and become part of the local community. We met neighbors, attended church, took part in special events, and joined Rotary, American Legion, VFW,

Historical Society, Ladies Golf League (me) and Stiff Guy Yoga (Francis).

But, as I waited and watched in our village market that day, I realized that no one in the store knew who I was.

My mind wandered to my childhood hometown 500 miles away.

At age eight, I'd pedal my yellow Schwinn as fast as my stubby legs could propel me, down Chestnut Street in my neighborhood. Just before the S-curve where the street joined North Seventh before continuing right on its way eastward, I'd look for traffic. Seeing no cars, I'd whiz by the stop sign at top speed. Feeling the slope of the hill take over my momentum, I'd lift my hands from the handlebars and stand on the pedals.

With my arms raised, my knees locked, and my sandy blonde pig tails aloft, I'd fly. I'd traverse the Chestnut Street S-curve with ease, using only the weight of my husky yet compact frame to lean my yellow Schwinn left then right along the S-curve.

On my way home, I'd often stop at the Stankowitz's maple tree. I'd climbed the tree a thousand times and had memorized the exact gestures needed to lift myself into its branches. I'd place my left hand in the crook where a low bough met

the trunk and my right Converse-shoed foot on a knot in the trunk. With one heave, I'd swing myself upward, hooking my legs over the next branch, and using my momentum to shift myself smoothly into a seated position.

From my well-worn perch in the tree, I'd look over the familiar scene of my neighborhood domain. The Butterbaugh house where we'd suck on sour stalks of wild rhubarb. The school bus stop where kids ran amok every morning. The steep part of the sidewalk, where boys would jump the concrete stairs on bikes, skateboards and sleds. The Schok's backyard where we played kick the can. The spooky Victorian house on North Ninth, where an old lady gave us lots of candy every Halloween.

Later, in my teen years, our family upgraded to a brick ranch on the outskirts of town. Too old for my yellow Schwinn, I'd drive my powder blue Volkswagen Beetle from our house to high school, church, Patti's house, the mall, and my babysitting job. By that time, I knew the streets like the back of my hand, chugging along self-assuredly between familiar streetlights and stop signs.

In that place — my hometown — I was never lost.

Watching the customers in McQuaid's Market, I longed for that sense of groundedness I'd had during childhood, when I knew exactly where I was and was known by others. I wondered, can military retirees like us ever achieve the security that comes with being truly local?

"Hey, aren't you Francis' wife?" the young cashier suddenly interrupted my thoughts. "We met in town over the summer."

"Yes!" I burst out, so happy to be recognized. "I'm Lisa, nice to see you again!"

"I'm Matt, great to see you, too," he said with a smile. We chatted for a minute or two while my cashier bagged my items and handed me a receipt.

On my way out the door, I waved and yelled a bit too enthusiastically, "Bye, Matt!"

"Bye, Lisa!" he called back.

I took a right on West Street out of the parking lot, feeling confident that I'd find my way home.

Lisa Smith Molinari's self syndicated columns appear on her blog, www.themeatandpotatoesoflife.com and she recently co-authored *Stories Around the Table: Laughter, Wisdom, and Strength in Military Life* Follow Lisa@MolinariWrites.com.

COLUMN



Molinari



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