

Federal Health Update

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EXECUTIVE AND CONGRESSIONAL NEWS

- **The House and Senate passed legislation to repeal the 1 percent cut in cost-of-living increases for military pensions for working-age retirees (under age 62).**

The cut in military pensions was approved in December in a bipartisan House-Senate deal that replaced two years' worth of automatic, across-the-board spending cuts known as the sequester with more targeted savings.

The pension cuts would have affected 750,000 military veterans.

If Obama signs the measure, the cost of repealing the cuts would be offset by cuts in other programs, including the Medicare healthcare program for the elderly and disabled. However, the new reductions will not take place until a decade from now.

- **President Barack Obama announced his intent to nominate Bob Work as the next deputy secretary of defense. Work is chief executive officer of the Center for a New American Security, a position he has held since 2013.** Work served as the under secretary of the Navy from 2009 to 2013. In 2008, Mr. Work served on President Obama's Department of Defense Transition Team. At the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) from 2002 to 2009, Mr. Work was the senior fellow for Maritime Affairs and later the Vice President for Strategic Studies. While serving at CSBA, Work was also an adjunct professor at George Washington University, where he taught Defense Analysis and Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces. Prior to that, he served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 27 years in various assignments, including military assistant and senior aide to the 71st Secretary of the Navy, Richard J. Danzig. Work received a B.S. from the University of Illinois, an M.S. from the

University of Southern California, an M.S. from the Naval Postgraduate School, and an M.A. from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

- **Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.) introduced legislation to empower the Veterans Affairs Secretary to fire or demote senior career civil-service officials.**

The VA Management Accountability Act of 2014 would make the process for firing a high-ranking civil servant largely the same as firing congressional staffers — who are considered at-will employees — taking away the notification and appeals rights currently offered. The legislation would require the Secretary to notify members of the Veterans Affairs committees of the removal and the reasoning behind it within 30 days of removing an official.

Sen. Marco Rubio introduced similar legislation in the Senate.

- **President Barack Obama announced his intent to nominate Maria Cancian to be the next assistant secretary for children and families (Family Support), Department of Health and Human Services.**

Cancian is a professor and university administrator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW). She has served as associate dean for fiscal initiatives at UW's College of Letters and Science since 2012, and associate dean for social sciences since 2011. She has been a professor at UW's La Follette School of Public Affairs and School of Social Work since 1993. Cancian received a B.A. from Swarthmore College and an M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Michigan.

MILITARY HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **TRICARE and Military OneSource are co-hosting a webinar to educate TRICARE beneficiaries about TRICARE Dental Options, with an emphasis on children's dental care.**

The webinar will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 19, 2014, from 1-2 p.m. EST. The featured speaker for this event is COL Gary (Chad) Martin, chief of the TRICARE Dental Care Office. COL Martin also serves as the Chief Military Consultant for Dental Public Health to the Air Force Surgeon General.

To sign up, go to www2.gotomeeting.com/register/699905834. Registration is on a first-come, first-served basis and is limited due to system capacity. Participants must avoid sharing personal health information when asking a question.

TRICARE offers dental benefits for active duty family members as well as to National Guard and Reserve families.

To get more information about TRICARE's dental program options, go to www.tricare.mil/dental.

- **For the first time in its history, Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCS) graduated two Emergency Department physician assistants from the Emergency Medicine Physician Assistant (EMPA) Fellowship program.**

The two naval officers, Lt. Joseph Baugh and Lt. Gareth Evans, had already completed tours as physician assistants (PA) and returned for postgraduate training in Emergency Medicine at

NMCS D.

During the EMPA Fellowship program, they trained alongside Emergency Medicine residents and gained experience through the Graduate Medical Education curriculum. The program is 18 months and includes rotations on the USNS Mercy (T-AH 19) and at Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton.

Currently, there are more than 20 EMPA programs (including military) across the country, but only one is accredited. NMCS D's EMPA program is the only one in the Navy and is currently going through the accreditation process.

Although NMCS D's inaugural EMPA program had only two training slots available, its future goals include obtaining additional training quotas in order to provide Navy Medicine with more Emergency Medicine physician assistants, according to Askins.

To pursue acceptance into the program, Navy physician assistants can apply through the annual Medical Service Corps Duty Under Instruction (DUINS) request. Each year, training quota numbers are determined by the needs of the Navy. Once the training quotas have been determined, applicants may apply for consideration. The Medical Service Corps DUINS board meets annually to select trainees for the following fiscal year.

For more information about Naval Medical Center San Diego, visit www.med.navy.mil/sites

VETERANS AFFAIRS NEWS

- **The Senate, by voice vote, confirmed the nomination Sloan Gibson to be deputy secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.**

Sloan has been president of the USO since 2008. Prior to joining the USO, Sloan spent more than 20 years in banking in Charlotte, N.C.; Atlanta, Ga.; Nashville, Tenn.; and Birmingham, Ala. In 2004, he retired from AmSouth Bancorporation, where he served as vice chairman and chief financial officer.

Sloan is a 1975 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point. He earned both Airborne and Ranger qualifications and served as an infantry officer in the U.S. Army. He earned a Masters in Economics from the University of Missouri in Kansas City and a Masters in Public Administration from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

GENERAL HEALTH CARE NEWS

- **Enrollment in the Health Insurance Marketplace continued to rise in January, with a 53 percent increase in overall enrollment over the prior three month reporting period, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced this week.**

Nearly 3.3 million people enrolled in the Health Insurance Marketplace plans by Feb. 1, 2014 (the end of the fourth reporting period for open enrollment), with January alone accounting for 1.1 million plan selections in state and federal marketplaces. In January, 27 percent of those who selected plans in the federally-facilitated Marketplace are between the ages of 18 and 34, a three percentage point increase over the figure reported for the previous three month period. Young adult enrollment grew by 65 percent in January, from 489,460 at the end of December to 807,515 as of Feb. 1, while all other age groups combined grew by 55 percent.

The report for the first time also includes information on the type of plans selected (Bronze, Silver, Gold, etc.) distributed across demographic factors such as gender and age. For example, it shows that 81 percent of young adults ages 18 to 34 selected plans at the Silver

metal level or higher (Silver, Gold and Platinum plans).

Nearly 3.3 million (3,299,500) people selected Marketplace plans from Oct. 1, 2013, through Feb. 1, 2014, including 1.4 million in the state-based Marketplaces and 1.9 million in the federally-facilitated Marketplace.

Of the almost 3.3 million:

- 55 percent are female and 45 percent are male;
- 31 percent are age 34 and under;
- 25 percent are between the ages of 18 and 34;
- 62 percent selected a Silver plan, while 19 percent selected a Bronze plan; and
- 82 percent selected a plan and are eligible to receive Financial Assistance, up from 79 percent during the Oct. 1 through Dec. 28, 2013 reporting period.

The report features cumulative data for the four-month reporting period because some people apply, shop, and select a plan across monthly reporting periods. Enrollment is measured as those who selected a plan.

To read the report visit:

http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/2014/MarketPlaceEnrollment/Feb2014/ib_2014feb_enrollmen t.pdf

- **The U.S. Food and Drug Administration expanded the approved use of Imbruvica (ibrutinib) for chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) patients who have received at least one previous therapy.**

CLL is a rare blood and bone marrow disease that usually gets worse slowly over time, causing a gradual increase in white blood cells called B lymphocytes, or B cells. The National Cancer Institute estimates that 15,680 Americans were diagnosed and 4,580 died from the disease in 2013.

Imbruvica, manufactured by Sunnyvale, works by blocking the enzyme that allows cancer cells to grow and divide. In November 2013, the FDA granted Imbruvica accelerated approval to treat patients with mantle cell lymphoma, a rare and aggressive type of blood cancer, if those patients received at least one prior therapy.

- **The United States joined 26 countries, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), to accelerate progress toward a world safe and secure from the threat of infectious disease, and committing to the goals of the Global Health Security Agenda.**

Over the next five years the United States plans to work with at least 30 partner countries (containing at least 4 billion people) to prevent, detect and effectively respond to infectious disease threats, whether naturally occurring or caused by accidental or intentional releases of dangerous pathogens.

Countries joining the United States to meet the Global Health Security goals at today's launch were Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, and, Vietnam.

In FY 2014, CDC and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency have jointly committed to

accelerate progress on global health security by co-developing a strategy and devoting \$40 million toward activities focusing on advancing the U.S. government's GHS objectives in ten nations.

The FY 2015 President's budget will include an increase of \$45 million within CDC to prevent avoidable catastrophes, detect threats early, and mobilize effective responses to contain outbreaks. The increase also would allow CDC to partner with up to ten countries in 2015 to begin implementation and accelerate successful CDC efforts including training of field epidemiologists, developing new diagnostic tests, building capacities to detect new pathogens, building public health emergency management capacity, and supporting outbreak responses.

HHS, State, USDA, and DoD will work closely with global partners to build countries' global health security capacities in areas such as surveillance, detection and response in order to slow the spread of antimicrobial resistance, establish national biosecurity systems, reduce zoonotic disease transmission, increase routine immunization, establish and strengthen national infectious disease surveillance and laboratory systems, and develop public health electronic reporting systems and emergency operations centers.

For more information on the Global Health Security Agenda, visit www.globalhealth.gov/global-health-topics/global-health-security/index.html.

REPORTS/POLICIES

- **The GAO published “Drug Shortages: Public Health Threat Continues Despite Efforts to Help Ensure Product Availability,” (GAO-14-194) on Feb. 10, 2014.** In this report, GAO reviews the trends in recent drug shortages and describes what is known about their effect on patients and providers; examines the causes of drug shortages; and evaluates the progress FDA has made in addressing drug shortages. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/670/660785.pdf>
- **The Institute of Medicine published “Gulf War and Health, Volume 9: Long-Term Effects of Blast Exposures,” on Feb. 13, 2014.** In this report, IOM assesses the relevant scientific information and offer conclusions regarding the strength of the evidence of an association between exposure to blast and health effects. <http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2014/Gulf-War-and-Health-Volume-9-Long-Term-Effects-of-Blast-Exposures.aspx>

HILL HEARINGS

- The House Veterans Affairs Committee will hold a hearing on **Feb. 20, 2014**, to examine veteran access to traditional and alternative forms of mental health therapy.
- The House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees will hold a joint hearing on **Feb. 25, 2014**, to receive the legislative presentation of the American Legion.
- The House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees will hold a joint hearing on **Feb. 25, 2014**, to receive the legislative presentation of the Disabled Americans Veterans Association.
- The Senate Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing on **March 5, 2014**, to examine the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2015 and the Future Years Defense Program.
- The House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees will hold a joint hearing on **March 5, 2014**, to receive the legislative presentation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Association.

- The House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees will hold a joint hearing on **March 6 and 12, 2014**, to receive the legislative presentation from various veterans services organizations.

LEGISLATION

- **H.R.4035** (introduced Feb. 11, 2014): To amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide Medicare beneficiaries coordinated care and greater choice with regard to accessing hearing health services and benefits was referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Ways and Means.
Sponsor: Representative Jim McDermott [WA-7]
- **H.R.4053** (introduced Feb. 11, 2014): To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish standards for the provision of mammograms at health care facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
Sponsor: Representative Gloria Negrete McLeod [CA-35]
- **S.2007** (introduced Feb. 10, 2014): A bill to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to provide for regulating clinical and health software was referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.
Sponsor: Senator Deb Fischer [NE]
- **S.2009** (introduced Feb. 11, 2014): A bill to improve the provision of health care by the Department of Veterans Affairs to veterans in rural and highly rural areas, and for other purposes was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.
Sponsor: Senator Tim Udall [NM]

MEETINGS/WEBINARS

- The AAMA 2014 Conference will be held on **Feb. 25-28, 2014**, in Las Vegas Nev. <http://aameda.org/p/cm/ld/fid=98>
 - The HIMSS Annual Conference and Exhibition will be held on **Feb. 27-29, 2014**, in Orlando, Fla. <http://www.himssconference.org/>
 - The ACHE Congress on Healthcare Leadership will be held on **March 24-27, 2014**, in Chicago, Ill. <http://www.ache.org/congress/>
 - The 11th Annual World Health Care Congress will be held on **April 7-9, 2014**, in National Harbor, Md. <http://www.worldcongress.com/events/HR14000/>
 - The Heroes of Military Medicine Awards will be held on **May 1, 2014**, in Washington, DC. <http://www.hjfc3.org>
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If you need further information on any item in the *Federal Health Update*, please contact Kate Theroux at (703) 447-3257 or by e-mail at katetheroux@federalhealthcarenews.com.