

Retiree Council Makes Annual Case for Retiree Benefits

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WASHINGTON (NNS) -- The Secretary of the Navy Retiree Council met at the Washington D.C. Navy Yard April 13-17 to discuss significant issues for Navy and Marine Corps retirees.

The council meets once yearly to develop a list of priorities and recommendations to present to the secretary of the Navy. This year's top issue was the same as the past three years.

"We recommended that the Navy fund nine paid RAOs (retired activities officers) to be positioned at major installations in regions throughout the country," said retired Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy (MCPON) Duane Bushey, council co-chair.

According to Bushey, the last time this proposal went up, former Secretary of the Navy Donald C. Winter concurred with the recommendation, but didn't fund it.

"However, one highlight is that the Marine Corps did approve and fund 16 RAOs," said retired Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Frank Libutti, council co-chair. "So, we're halfway there. We're very pleased with the leadership of the Marine Corps. This is a big deal. It's important for the retirees to have someone to talk to."

The council also tackled Tricare concerns. "We try to crusade and support veterans on the Hill ... we recoil against any action what would reduce veteran's benefits," Libutti said regarding proposed increases in Tricare Prime rates.

"From my perspective, the most important issue we discussed was how best to focus the incalculable hours our retirees provide in supporting the quality of life of the active and reserve components and their families," said Annie Fowler from the Personnel Readiness and Community Support in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Manpower and Reserve Affairs). The council debated the potential establishment of a Naval Auxiliary League among other possible ways to engage and channel volunteerism among Naval retirees.

In these days of reduced budgets and shrinking resources, volunteerism may be a common-sense approach to dealing with certain issues. However, there are several barriers to volunteering on a Naval installation, according to Libutti and Bushey. One is the lack of common access cards (CAC) which precludes volunteers from accessing Navy or Marine Corps computer systems. Another barrier is the shrinking number of Retiree Appreciation Days and seminars where many retirees get information about volunteering and other important issues.

"Retirees can influence leaders across the country," Libutti said. "If Navy leaders would put more effort into reaching out to retirees, it would send a positive signal that would embolden retirees to be the link between bases and the local community."

Both Libutti and Bushey felt this year's recommendations were well-received and they hope

there will be action. "The acting secretary really wanted to move out smartly on our recommendations," Libutti said.

"This year's council was particularly successful because the council prepared a report that provides the secretary a succinct outline of the issues that are particularly important to our retiree community," said Fowler.

"By tradition and law, retired Navy and Marine Corps personnel are individuals with a continuing military status who are also subject to recall to active duty at the discretion of the President. They, as well as their family members and survivors, are entitled to certain rights, benefits, and privileges, and are subject to responsibilities arising from these entitlements," Fowler explained.

The Retiree Council was established in 1968 by the secretary of the Navy to consider issues of significant importance to retired military personnel and their family members. The council is made up of 24 members – 17 from the Navy and seven from the Marine Corps. There are two co-chairs, one of whom must be a retired three-star flag or general officer and the other a retired MCPON or Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. Members currently serve for three years.

More information about the Secretary of the Navy Retiree Council, visit www.npc.navy.mil/CommandSupport/RetireeCouncil.

The Navy and Marine Corps retiree newsletters serve as sources of information for the council and from the council to retirees.

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