

MEMORANDUM

To: FMA Regional Directors

From: Greg Stanford and Katie Maddocks

Re: FMA Government Affairs Update for September 2015

Date: October 9, 2015

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a brief narrative and status of ongoing government relations and public affairs activities the FMA government relations department worked on in September 2015 on behalf of FMA members. Please share this information with chapter presidents, legislative action team leaders and others in your region.

Shutdown Averted

On Wednesday, September 30, members of the House of Representatives and the Senate agreed on a short term spending plan that funds the federal government through December 11, 2015. By passing this continuing resolution (CR), Congress keeps funding levels stagnant, and allows federal departments and agencies to continue congressionally-mandated missions and goals. This spending plan also averts another federal government shutdown.

In September, FMA prepared an action letter for all members to send to their Representatives and Senators urging them to fund the government for Fiscal Year 2016. The government affairs department also drafted a letter from National President Patricia Niehaus that went to every member of Congress with the same message.

Immediately after Congress voted on the CR, FMA sent a press release urging Congressional leaders to develop a sustainable spending plan that provides certainty for all Americans. In the release, Niehaus commented that about the impact continuous threats of a government shutdown have on the federal workforce. Even when a looming shutdown is averted at the last minute, there are untold costs and a waste of precious government resources in the planning and preparation in the build-up to a potential shutdown. Further concerning, when the latest CR expires on December 11, 2015, Congress will also face the expansion of the debt ceiling, the expiration of the of several tax exemptions, and the holiday recess set to begin on December 18. Congress will have limited time to develop a spending plan for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Wounded Warriors Legislation passes the House

On Monday, September 28, the House passed, without contention, FMA's initiative, the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act (H.R. 313), which would provide 104 hours of sick leave up front to first year



federal employees who qualify under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as thirty percent or more disabled due to a service-related disability. The bill, introduced by Representative Stephen Lynch (D-MA) and cosponsored by Representative Blake Farenthold (R-TX), would provide necessary leave to attend medical appointments for service-related injuries without exhausting both sick and annual leave.

FMA is continuing to work with committee staff and the bill's sponsors in both the House and the Senate to determine the best way to reconcile the House-passed version with the Senate version (S. 242), which passed in that chamber in July 2015 in order for the language to become law.

Competitive Service Act passes the Senate

On Thursday, September 17, the Senate unanimously passed the Competitive Service Act (S. 1580). The bill, as introduced by Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), would allow federal agencies to share access to highly qualified job candidates who already went through a rigorous, competitive assessment. It would promote hiring efficiency throughout the federal government and increase recruitment. FMA worked closely with Senator Tester on this issue and expressed thanks to his office for his dedication on S. 1580.

Representatives Gerry Connolly (D-VA) and Rob Wittman (R-VA) introduced companion legislation in the House, H.R. 2827, which is currently being reviewed by the House Oversight and Government Reform (OGR) Committee. The government affairs department has discussed this issue with several offices in the House of Representatives.

LMRC Meeting

As one of the first pieces of business during its most recent meeting on September 16, Council Co-Chair and Acting Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director Beth Cobert commented on the coverage offered to federal employee affected by the most recent security breach that compromised the information of SF-86, SF-85, and SF-85P security clearance forms. OPM, the Department of Defense (DOD), and Identity Theft Guard Solutions, LLC will work together to notify those impacted, who will also be automatically enrolled in three years of identity theft protection and have an option for additional years of coverage at no cost. Impacted employees will receive notification from DOD about coverage provided at the end of September.

While the federal workforce continues to face barriers in recruitment and retention, labor and management in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) made strides to promote skills development and career growth. The EPA's Skills Marketplace gives employees an opportunity to work on a project in a different part of EPA for up to 20 percent of their time throughout the year. EPA employees work with their managers to ensure productivity and use skills they already have for other duties and tasks. The Skills Marketplace promotes collaboration and one project supervisor commented, "It provided my team with technical skills that are not resident."

FEHB Premium Rates and FEHB Advisory Group

Greg attended a briefing at OPM where the 2016 Federal Employee Health Benefit Program plan year premium rates. Non-postal federal employees and annuitants should expect a 6.4 percent increase, the largest since 2011. OPM Director of Healthcare and Insurance John O'Brien commented the increase is due to increases in prescription drug prices. Also in 2016, FEHBP enrollees will be able to sign up for a Self Plus One option for enrollment, which offers coverage for a federal employee and one dependent. The FEHBP Open Season runs from November 9 through December 14, and OPM encourages all enrollees to examine available health care plans to see which one is best suited for them.

Probationary Period

Last month, we reported that the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee was planning to mark-up legislation (H.R. 3023) that would extend the probationary period from two years from the completion of training. Earlier this week we learned that, while the committee still intends to consider this bill in the near future, it will not be considered at the committee's mark-up on October 9. FMA has conducted many meetings in support of reform to the probationary period. In September, we discussed the issue with OGR Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT) at a fundraiser. Chaffetz signaled support for extension.

TDY

The House and Senate Armed Services Committee signed off on the conference language for the NDAA. Unfortunately, it does not include language to repeal cuts made to TDY per diem allowances, which FMA previously called for. However, it does call for a study of the impact of the cut, which was originally called for in the Senate NDAA. At this point, FMA will work with DOD to ensure testimony from FMA members on how these reductions to the per diem allowances impact them personally and professionally.

FMA on Federal News Radio

Sep. 2 – Katie on Your Turn with Mike Causey

Sep. 30 – Greg and Katie on Your Turn with Mike Causey

FMA-PAC Fundraisers

Sep. 18 – Katie and Greg went to a breakfast sponsored by the GMC for Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-UT)

Sep. 29 – Katie went to a lunch for Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA)