Unfinished Business

Unless something strange happens, this is the last column I will write for Frontline, the last of sixty I have prepared over the past six years. I never found it hard to come up with a topic for the column, as there were always issues and thoughts I wanted to share with you. My average column, I found, was about 1800 words long, meaning that in total, my columns resulted in over 108,000 published words. Currie’s musings or blathering or ranting, however you want to regard them. But always from the heart.

This column is no different. It is my farewell to you all, officers I have attempted to serve faithfully for the past six years. I did my best, though I did not always succeed in reaching the goals I had set for myself. In the words of the nineteenth century poet Robert Browning, “Ah, but a man’s reach...

OATH Officers Represent the USPHS Commissioned Corps at the AMSUS 128th Annual Meeting

by LT Dantrell Simmons and LCDR Alexia Blyther

The AMSUS annual meeting serves as a communication platform for the advancement of health professionals in all federal health agencies, as well as in countries. The 2019 meeting took place December 2-6 at the Gaylord National Resort & Convention Center in National Harbor, MD. It featured addresses by both the Assistant Secretary for Health, ADM Brett Giroir, and the US Surgeon General, VADM Jerome Adams. Over 2,000 healthcare professionals and leaders attended the 128th AMSUS meeting. The meeting theme was “Transforming Healthcare through Partnership and Innovation.” In keeping with this theme, the USPHS Commissioned Corps was well-represented by two officers from the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Health, Office on Women’s Health. These officers presented at the AMSUS meeting.
COA Member Benefits

Capitol Hill Representation
Efforts on Capitol Hill continually support all Commissioned Corps officers – active duty and retired

Local Representation
COA Local Branches provide venues for meeting fellow officers and a forum for the discussion of issues within the Commissioned Corps

Newsletter reports on monthly activities and items of interest about the Corps & COA

Insurance Programs
Low-cost insurance programs that may continue as long as your membership in COA remains current

$7,500 for Online Degrees
$7,500 scholarships to earn online degrees, which include:
- MPH@GW
- MHA@GW
- HealthInformatics@GW
- MBA@UNC
- MBA@Simmons
- HealthcareMBA@Simmons
- IRonline (American)
- MBA@American

NYMC Online MPH
50 percent discount for the online MPH and certificate programs

Scholarship Program
College scholarships for children and spouses of COA members

Ribbon
Authorized to be worn on the PHS uniform by members in good standing when attending COA functions

Legislative Update
Senate Approves PHS Modernization Act
While House Version Languishes

by Judy Rensberger

S. 2629, the "United States Public Health Service Modernization Act of 2019," flew through the U.S. Senate on 9 January, approved by a unanimous voice vote.

To quote Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, from that day’s Congressional Record (Page S147): “I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2629, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act with respect to the Public Health Service [Commissioned] Corps.” Sen. McConnell added, “If there is no further debate, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, shall the bill pass?” There was no further debate; the bill passed. But the larger victory, at this writing, remains elusive.

The Big Picture
S. 2629 and its House companion, H.R. 4870, are part of a broader legislative effort that will ultimately help American Indians and Alaska Natives. The bills, one of which, or a compromise of the two of them, must be approved by Congress in order to become law, would create and train a USPHS Ready Reserve to fill in for active duty USPHS officers who respond to disasters, such as floods, wildfires and hurricanes. Creation of the Reserve component would provide essential medical personnel who would fill in for USPHS officers who are deployed in the event of a disaster.

Why Do We Need This?
The bill would address a longstanding problem: the fact that emergency deployments of PHS means depriving families in Indian Country of needed medical care. The Indian Health Service is already short-staffed, and native populations tend to experience poorer health than other populations, especially chronic diseases such as diabetes. Sudden deployments of PHS health care personnel makes things worse. In other words, S. 2629 and H.R. 4870 are, together, a major COA-backed legislative initiative to free the Indian Health Service from periodically losing much needed medical personnel “at home” in order to deploy.

Next Steps
Will the House act? It must, if the proposed legislation is to become law. As I write, the House bill, H.R. 4870, has barely moved since it was introduced. Gathering Congressional support to push it over the finish line is now the top
Visit to birth country ignites public health passion in COPH alum

by Donna Campisano, USF College of Public Health

Dr. Kimberly Nguyen, who received her DrPH from the USF College of Public Health (COPH) in 2018, left her home in Vietnam for the U.S. when she was just five years old. She didn’t return again until she was a teen.

“I didn’t know what public health was until I traveled back to Vietnam,” said Nguyen, who is now a commander in the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and a senior epidemiologist at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“My grandfather lived near a river, and my parents told me of how they used to bathe and swim in it,” said Nguyen. “But when I was there as a teenager, the river was clogged with trash. There was bad sanitation, which brought a bad smell and bugs. The pollution from all the cars and motorcycles was terrible, and there were a lot of vehicle and pedestrian accidents because they didn’t have traffic lights or crosswalks. It was after that trip that I decided I wanted to study public health. I wanted to help prevent disease and work toward healthy communities.”

In high school, Nguyen applied for and received a coveted Bill Gates scholarship. She studied public health as an undergrad at Tufts University, where she also received her MPH in epidemiology and biostatistics. From there, Nguyen went to the University of Massachusetts/Amherst for her MS in epidemiology.

After graduation, Nguyen took a job with the Connecticut Department of Health. She spent two years as an epidemiologist in the department’s Asthma Program and published several papers on asthma prevalence in Connecticut and New England. She also evaluated the effectiveness of a home environmental program to reduce asthma and allergy triggers.

She wanted to protect people’s health in the whole country, and not just in one state. So, she made her way south to the CDC in Atlanta, where she’s been involved in everything from HIV to tobacco control to violence prevention.

Despite her multiple degrees, Nguyen—the mom of three young boys—knew there was still more she wanted to learn about public health.

“I really felt a doctoral degree could help me get where I wanted to go,” she said, “which was a leadership position at the CDC.”

The plan worked. Shortly after Nguyen graduated the DrPH online program, she was offered her current CDC position. She’s one of the chief epidemiologists in the CDC’s Immunization Services Division, where she’s responsible for the scientific review of all research on vaccination coverage in the U.S.

“I chose the COPH for my doctoral work because the school is so highly rated,” said Nguyen. “It’s also close to Atlanta, and I have family in Tampa, so I knew traveling to the on-campus DrPH...
The USPHS Deploys to Provide Stress Management to FEMA Employees

by CAPT Julie A. Niven

Normally, the USPHS is deployed to work with individuals and communities directly impacted by natural disasters or man-made traumatic events. In January 2020, PHS officers were deployed on a different mission: we were sent to offer stress management services to Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) employees in Puerto Rico. Hurricanes Irma and Maria as well as the recent earthquakes there have taken a toll on the nerves and resources of the island. FEMA headquarters recognized this and requested stress management counselors staff FEMA’s four branches across Puerto Rico.

Three officers from Mental Health Team 4 (MHT4) and one from Service Access Team 4 (SAT4) were the first to be deployed on this mission. Initially together, we quickly dispatched across the island and found support in the Planning and Training departments to set up “Stress-Free Zones” within each branch. We circulated among FEMA staff to introduce ourselves and create a comfortable presence. Within the conference room from which we were based, we led stress management-based groups and conducted one-on-one confidential sessions. Federal Occupational Health (FOH) was an excellent resource providing on-the-ground intel as well as relevant handouts to use. By the time it was time to rotate out, I personally felt a part of the Branch 2 team and appreciated by the workers there. I was glad to have had the opportunity to “help the helpers!”

OASH from page 1

LT Dantrell Simmons, OASH, delivered a poster presentation entitled “Addressing the Intersection of HIV and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among Women in the US through Evidence-based Prevention Approaches.” This presentation informed public health professionals on community-level strategies to address the intersection of IPV and HIV among women and girls in geographical locations where more than 50 percent of HIV diagnoses occurred in 2016-2017. The HHS Office on Women’s Health awarded over $3 million to four two-year programs that support the HHS objective of “Ending the HIV Epidemic in America.” LT Simmons, who is currently a Public Health Advisor in the Division of Program Innovation, interacted with over fifty public health professionals on addressing HIV among women and girls.

LCDR Alexia Blyther, OASH, delivered a poster presentation entitled “Youth Engagement in Sports: Collaboration to Improve Adolescent Physical Activity and Nutrition” (YES Initiative). The Office on Minority Health (OMH) and the Office on Women’s Health (OWH) jointly funded over $6 million to eighteen two-year programs that support youth and sports. The initiative aligns with both U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ strategic goal of protecting the health of Americans where they live, learn, work and play, as well as the Office of the President’s Council on Sports, Fitness, and Nutrition. The YES Initiative intends to identify characteristics of effective collaborations that improve physical activity and nutrition via increased sports participation, physical activity, and nutrition programs. LCDR Blyther, who is a Public Health Advisor in the Division of Program Innovation, interacted with over fifty public health professionals on addressing physical activity, nutrition and youth engagement.

The OASH officers interacted with other conference attendees and engaged with other presenters who covered an array of health-related topics. Each officer was approached by attendees interested in learning more about the USPHS Commissioned Corps, and they provided advice to civilians interested in joining the PHS and becoming public health leaders. Additional information about the AMSUS annual meeting can be found at https://www.amsus.org/events/annual-meeting-2/2019-amsus-annual-meeting-schedule/
Meet Lieutenant Steven Lee, DPT, OCS, who is a Physical Therapist assigned to the Indian Health Service in Anchorage, AK.

LT Lee co-chaired the development of an interdisciplinary education series about diagnostic imaging and its role in the diagnosis, management, and prognosis of neuromusculoskeletal conditions. This series has expanded to include over twenty providers at two different clinics, and over fifteen hours of education regarding the role of imaging in physical therapy clinical management.

In 2018, LT Lee obtained credentialing as a board certified orthopedic clinical specialist (OCS) through the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialists, a credential held by less than 8% of physical therapists in the U.S.

LT Lee joined RDF-3 in September of 2017 as a member of the medical records section. He deployed to Mission Florence in September of 2018 for fourteen days and operated as both a medical records officer and clinical physical therapist, providing care and aid to the victims of Hurricane Florence.

In October of 2018, LT Lee was nominated by TPAC leadership to participate in the TPAC Opioid Taskforce and co-author a white paper illustrating the TPAC’s strategies for combating the opioid epidemic. The whitepaper was presented before the TPAC CPO and the Surgeon General and has since been accepted for journal publication.

LT Lee was selected for the competitive United States Military Neuromusculoskeletal residency for the 2019 cohort. As such, LT Lee attended the 2019 OZO course at the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA), where he participated in nine days of advanced clinical training with physical therapists of all branches.

**NGUYEN from page 3**

Institutes [there are three over the course of the program] wouldn’t be a problem.”

Nguyen credits the program with giving her the skills she’s needed to become an emerging leader in public health.

“I took a lot of courses in scientific writing, research design, leadership, epidemiology and statistics,” said Nguyen, who has had all her dissertation research—mostly on violence and sexual violence against children—published in different journals.

“They all really enhanced my writing, leadership, presentation and public speaking skills.”

Those skills have come in handy at both the CDC and in her work with the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, which she joined in 2012 as a way to serve her country and advance the health of the nation. She’s traveled to Houston to support the emergency response to Hurricane Harvey, to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria and to New York State to help combat the outbreak of measles.

“I’m expected to be ready and able to deploy anywhere in the U.S. or around the world at a moment’s notice to support public health emergencies or disasters,” Nguyen explained.

Nguyen’s ultimate career goal is to become the associate director for science at the CDC. “I’d like to review more of the scientific work at a higher level among more staff and make a larger impact on scientific research at CDC. “This degree is helping me get there and I’m really glad I’m making a difference in the work that the CDC does.”

**Alumni Fast Five**

What did you dream of becoming when you were young?

A teacher

Where would we be able to find you on the weekends?

Probably at one of my kid’s soccer games or a piano recital

What was the last book you read?

“Goodnight Moon,” by Margaret Wise Brown. I read it to my son last night.

What superpower would you like to have?

I would like to transport myself, so I can get to places faster and do twice as much as I’m doing now.

What’s your favorite movie?

“Lord of the Rings”
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In an email to COA Executive Director Col. (Ret.) Jim Currie on 21 February, Col. (Ret.) Dan Merry, Vice President for Government Relations of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), announced that the US Air Force has changed its policy on military courtesy and now includes both the USPHS Commissioned Corps and the NOAA Commissioned Corps among those groups that are to be saluted by Air Force personnel. Here’s the exact wording from Air Force Handbook 1:

**Department of the Air Force**

**Air Force Handbook 1, Airman**

1 October 2019

**Saluting Uniformed Forces and Other Services**

Salutes will be exchanged between officers (commissioned and warrant), and enlisted personnel of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Salutes will also be exchanged between U.S. Armed Forces personnel and the Uniformed Services of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Public Health Service, as appropriate.

COA’s effort to get the Air Force to render proper military courtesy to USPHS officers dates back to 2015. It is described in detail in this month’s Executive Director’s column, which was written before we found out about this change in Air Force policy.

COA thanks its friends at MOAA for their efforts to make this happen. We specifically recognize MOAA President and Chief Executive Director Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Dana Atkins and MOAA Vice President for Government Relations Col. (Ret.) Dan Merry for their tireless work on this issue. It is not going too far to say that it would not have been brought to a successful conclusion without their effort.
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“The DNP program provides me with the knowledge and skills to become an effective leader who can identify problems and use evidence-based practice to make meaningful change.”

- Dynasty Stokes
  current student
Evergreen COA collaborates with FDA Office of Regulatory Affairs for Lynnwood Food Bank

by LCDR Steven Galvez and LCDR Kelsey Volkman

On January 28-29, 2020, the FDA Seattle District Office - Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA) held their first OneORA Conference. The conference was attended by almost 200 ORA personnel, including many USPHS officers from within ORA. Evergreen COA officers recognized an opportunity to help the local community and led the charge to host a food drive. The goal of the drive was to collect non-perishable human and pet food items, diapers, and hygiene products each day before the conference started. Evergreen COA, in collaboration with the FDA ORA, was able to donate over 600 items weighing a total of 521 pounds. All donations were delivered to the Lynnwood Food Bank in Lynnwood, WA. The food bank assists people in the City of Lynnwood and South Snohomish County. The food bank also has a partnership with Edmonds Community College, Edmonds School District/Nourishing Network, and an outreach distribution for homeless. Members of the Evergreen COA branch were grateful for the opportunity to help others in the local area.

General George C. Marshall on Leadership

by Col. (Ret.) Jim Currie

The Association of the US Army recently published in its magazine an article about General George C. Marshall’s interaction with a new Army brigadier. In a letter to the new brigadier, Marshall advised him that, “You have always worked too hard; you have done too many other people’s work.” Marshall meant that as a senior officer, the new brigadier was sticking his nose too much into business that was done by his subordinates. “I woke up at about [age] thirty-three,” continued Marshall, “to the fact that I was working myself to death… and that I was acquiring the reputation of being merely a pick and shovel man. From that time on I made it a business to avoid, so far as possible, detail work…” Marshall may have been the greatest and most successful general our country has ever produced. Senior officers of all seven uniformed services could profit from his example and his words of wisdom.
For Americans, Christmas and the holidays evoke a plethora of memories, attitudes, emotions, and activities. One unique aspect of this time of the year is the generosity in gifting to others. As we wait for the scheduled BAH and base-pay raises in 2020, sharing becomes more feasible and enjoyable.

This Christmas, 2019, the Central Texas PHS Commissioned Officers Association, made up of eleven commissioned corps officers, chose to adopt a local family for the holidays. The single mother of four children was finding it financially difficult to provide a Christmas celebration for her children. During this season, we found that it was more enjoyable to give than to receive.

Because of the generosity of the officers, the children ages 6, 8, 12, & 14 were each gifted an age appropriate present and the single mother was gifted $220. Many of us can remember, when we were children, receiving “hoped for” gifts. We trust that these gifts provided to this family in need allowed them a memorable, thankful, and enjoyable family Christmas. May the generosity continue in 2020.

The Christmas presents delivered to the fire station in preparation for the family.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from page 1
should exceed his grasp.” Strive for more than you think possible. Try for the unattainable. Never give up. Act boldly. In the words of an eighteenth century French revolutionary leader, who was asked why France’s citizen army was successful against the professional armies of the time, “L’audace, l’audace, toujours l’audace, et encore l’audace.” “Audacity [audacious behavior], audacity, always audacity, and again, audacity.”

I admit to having been audacious sometimes. I also admit to having exceeded my grasp. I dreamed big for the Commissioned Corps and never accepted artificial limits that others—some within the Corps itself—would place on you. You all are unique, and just as the American military was slow to accept the value of unconventional special forces, many high-level officials in our government (I’m thinking specifically of the Office of Management and Budget) simply do not understand what you can do, and they hobble your ability to demonstrate your strength, despite the fact that you have been doing your job since 1889—even earlier if you go back to service in the marine hospitals.

A couple of columns ago I outlined some of what we at COA have accomplished on your behalf and on behalf of public health over the past six years. There were some signal victories during that time, ranging from paid maternity leave for PHS officers to official representation on Veterans Day at Arlington National Cemetery to the Veteran ID Card to the Congressional Public Health Caucus to discount tickets at Disney World. But, there were other places where the prize slipped from my grasp and remain for my successor to pursue, if they wish to do so.

National Native American Veterans Memorial. I was ordered to stand-down from my efforts to have the memorial design include the US Public Health Service, and for the most part, I did so. I continued to needle the Smithsonian and members of Congress, and the last communication I received from the Smithsonian on this topic inadvertently provided an official document that absolutely confirmed the case I had been making with them. In a letter dated December 6, 2019, the Director of the Museum of the American Indian provided what the Smithsonian termed the “Consultation Report,” which detailed the results of its outreach to Native Americans during the period October 2015 to June 2017. It’s an interesting document which can be accessed on the COA website at https://cdcn.ymaws.com/coauspshs.org/resource/resmgr/lettersandnewsmedia/nativeamericans/from_kevin gover_.with_attac.pdf. On Page 7 of this report is the following (top of the page):

“Attendees communicated clearly a number of universal themes:

The memorial must be inclusive, honoring all Native American veterans, including American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians, both men and women, and from all eras and branches of service;”

Please note the first words in this theme: “must be inclusive, honoring all Native American veterans,” and at the end, the words “from all eras and branches of service.” It could not be any clearer than that, yet the Smithsonian disregarded its own consultations and decided, for reasons that are still not clear to me, to exclude PHS and NOAA officers from the memorial. Even though construction on the memorial has started, it is not too late to modify the design. As far as I am concerned, COA should not stop working this issue, ever. Even after the memorial is complete and dedicated, its design could be modified to include the two forgotten uniformed services.

Billets at the VA. I wrote about this topic in my last Frontline column (January-February 2020). The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the VA in January 2017 under which thirty PHS officers (twenty physicians and ten nurses) would be assigned to VA billets. As of December 19, a total of five PHS officers had been assigned. I find this inexplicable. If I were staying on, I would be pushing PHS leadership to expand this agreement and open hundreds of VA billets to PHS officers. There are VA hospitals and clinics all across the country, and it would be logical for PHS officers to be able to practice their professional skills at them. The idea that federal prisoners are more worthy of PHS officer care than are veterans who served our country in uniform simply does not sit right with me. Yes, federal prisoners have the right to healthcare, but they don’t have the right to be cared for by PHS officers. I just do not get it.

National Park Service. Despite the fact that close to fifty PHS officers are assigned to the NPS to help it accomplish its mission, the Park Service refuses to give the same discounts and free park passes to PHS officers that it does to members of the military services. We think the NPS is being unreasonable and arbitrary in denying PHS officers these benefits. We also think they are complete hypocrites for accepting the assistance of PHS officers while treating them like second-class uniformed service personnel. We have written numerous letters to the NPS over the past few years, the most recent one in January 2020. This letter can be found on the COA website at https://cdn.ymaws.com/coauspshs.org/resource/resmgr/lettersandnewsmedia/cc/letter_to_national_park_serv.pdf

USO. For reasons that remain very unclear to me, the national USO has decided that PHS officers are not allowed to use the USO lounges found in airports across the country. Some local USO chapters make exceptions to this rule, but the national answer is absolute: you as PHS officers cannot enter their lounges. It’s not as if there are so many of you that the airport lounges would be overrun. As with the Park Service, COA has written numerous letters to them and their lame excuse is that their charter directs them to serve the armed forces. I reject this construction and ascribe their antipathy toward the PHS to someone’s personal prejudice. Our most recent letter to the USO can be found on the COA website at https://cdn.ymaws.com/coauspshs.org/resource/resmgr/lettersandnewsmedia/cc/letter_to_uso_January_2020.pdf. We did not receive the courtesy of a response from USO.

Military Courtesy. It was brought to my attention several years ago that the Air Force, alone among the other six uniformed services of the federal government, does not accept the Commissioned Corps as a peer and extend simple military courtesy to its members. For those to whom the term “military courtesy” is a foreign concept, it means saluting. That’s it. There are other aspects of...
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR from page 11

military courtesy, but its essence is that a commissioned officer is saluted by those of lower rank. The concept goes back hundreds of years and is thought to have originated as a means of demonstrating that you, the lower-ranking person, were not carrying a weapon that you intended to use on your superior. This evolved into a simple exchange of recognition with an open hand—the salute. Unless you are the PHS and the Air Force is involved.

When I first heard of this slight, I could hardly believe it. The first time it was brought to my attention, the incident had taken place at the entrance to Joint Base Dix-McGuire in New Jersey. A PHS officer in civilian clothes had shown his ID card when seeking entry to the base and had then inquired of the air police enlisted servicemember why there was no salute rendered to him, a commander in the PHS. “Oh, we don’t salute you all,” was the AP’s answer. The COA member reported it to me, so I looked into it. First, I called the Provost Marshal’s office at Dix-McGuire and was told that the young AP had gotten it right: folks in the Air Force don’t salute PHS officers.

Now, those of you who have never been in uniform in another service—that’s seventy percent of you—may not understand why I am making such a big deal of this incident. After all, there are many larger problems to work on. I agree. There are hundreds of issues out there that I wish I could solve and attend to, but this one is really big. I am making a big deal of this because it is at the heart of respect for the Commissioned Corps. It means that you are—or in this case, are not—on the same plane as members of the Army, Navy, and so on. As the young Air Force sergeant at Dix-McGuire told me, “We don’t salute civilians.”

I thought this would be easy to fix, so I wrote to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force asking him to change the regulation that specifies who is to be saluted. I included with my letter the comparable regulations from the Army and Navy in which the PHS is specifically named as entitled to salutes. I got no answer from the Air Force. I went to the Surgeon General at the time and explained the situation to him, thinking that a three-star might get more respect and attention than a retired colonel. I provided a draft letter. No luck. He chose not to get involved, as did other high-ranking PHS officers at other, later times.

I sent a second letter to the Air Force Chief of Staff. Same result. No response.

I then decided to go to our friends at MOAA and ask for help. The MOAA Executive Director is a retired Air Force three-star general, and I thought he might be able to stir them up. Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Dana Atkins took on the issue and reached out to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force. Bingo! He got an immediate response saying that they would fix the problem. I wish I could tell you that this solved the problem, but it did not. Despite Lt. Gen. Atkins’ going back to the Air Force several times, it has been nearly two years now, and the Air Force has still not changed its policy on saluting. If I were going to be around longer, I would continue to follow-up on this issue, but this will be my successor’s issue to pursue.

DD-214. This is the gold standard for proving that you have served honorably in one of the uniformed services. It works at auto dealers and other places. It is issued by the Defense Department’s four uniformed services to those leaving the service, plus the Coast Guard. In a memorandum dated May 24, 2016, the Defense Department gave the PHS permission to issue DD-214s to PHS officers who left the service. This has never been done. The reason: “The IT system at headquarters won’t support it.” Totally lame excuse, as far as I am concerned. The DoD memo can be found on the COA website at https://cdn.ymaws.com/coausphs.org/resource/resmgr/lettersandnewsmedia/cc/dd_214_memo.pdf

TSA Pre-Check. At one time the TSA was willing to offer the pre-check free of charge to officers in the PHS, same as it did to personnel of the Army, Air Force, and so on. Headquarters of the PHS would not sign off on the required form, so TSA did not issue the pre-check to PHS. We wrote to TSA again, but they did not respond.

There are many other niggling issues of PHS officer parity such as the ski resorts at Vail and other locations that won’t provide discount lift tickets to PHS officers and the stubbornness of Home Depot, which does not follow the PHS-friendly policy of its rival, Lowe’s. My successor can decide which ones of these issues merit their attention and which ones should be dropped as hopeless causes. I am sure they will not find a lack of issues on which to concentrate their talents. You are an incredible group of officers, and you should never settle for being regarded as second-best, in any venue. We at COA certainly do not see you as such, and we will continue to fight for you and do our best to advance your cause. “L’audace, l’audace, toujours l’audace, et encore l’audace.” That’s what it will take. Now, and probably forever.

Farewell. It has been a great honor and privilege to represent you.
Behind the Scenes

The Senate win seemed sudden and caught many by surprise. It actually took a while, and success is largely due to behind-the-scenes efforts of John McElligott, COA’s former Deputy Executive Director. (John left COA in mid-November to become Executive Director of the Maricopa County Medical Society in Phoenix, Arizona.) John visited Congressional staffers to explain and promote the legislation, respond to questions or objections, and solicit co-sponsors. He also drafted the letter of support that was signed by the three dozen organizational members comprising The Military Coalition (TMC), then delivered to Capitol Hill.

House Companion HR 4870

In the House of Representatives, the lead sponsor is Republican Michael C. Burgess of Texas, a physician. He represents the state’s 26th Congressional District. He was first elected to Congress in 2002, then re-elected eight times. The first three co-sponsors, all Democrats, are Representatives Anna Eshoo, 18th Congressional District, California; Lisa Blunt Rochester, At-Large, Delaware, and Denny Heck, 10th Congressional District, Washington. A fourth co-sponsor signed on as I was writing this account for Frontline. He is Rep. Gus Bilirakis, the Republican who has represented Florida’s 12th Congressional District since January of 2007. That is a very nice bipartisan start.

What Can You Do?

Write and send a short, one-page letter to your U.S. Representative, asking him or her to sign on to H.R. 4870 as a co-sponsor. Please do NOT do this on government time or using government equipment. Do it at home, on your own time, using your own computer.

In your letter, note the purpose of the bill and include these four elements: (1) the bill number, which is H.R. 4870; (2) the title, which is “U.S. Public Health Service Modernization Act of 2019;” (3) who you are, i.e., a career medical professional in the USPHS Commissioned Corps, and (4) passage of the Senate version, S. 2629 in January.

Not certain who your elected U.S. Representative is? Visit https://www.house.gov/ and type in your ZIP code. Write only to that official, not to lawmakers who represent Congressional districts other than yours. Need assistance? I’m here to help. The best way to reach me is through office e-mail jrensberger@coausphs.org

OBITUARY

CAPT (Ret.) Marilys Porter Brown

CAPT Merilys Porter Brown, USPHS (Ret.), aged 101, a Life Member of COA, passed away on December 17, 2019, at the Wilmot (SD) Care Center. A private family burial will take place at a later date.

Merilys Porter was born on May 25, 1918, in Wilmot, SD, to Clement and Florence (Hill) Porter. After graduating from Wilmot High School she attended the University of Minnesota School of Nursing graduating with a Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing in 1942.

From 1943 – 1946 she was a Flight Nurse with the 816th Medical Air Evacuation Squadron in the European Theater of Operations, flying with Troop Carrier Squadrons of the 9th Army Air Corps. She evacuated wounded soldiers, including the first squadron in Normandy after D-Day and during the Battle of the Bulge. After World War II she returned to the University of Minnesota and completed her Master’s in Public Health in 1949.

From 1951 – 1971 she served as a commissioned officer in the United States Public Health Service, with service in Washington, D.C., Phoenix, AZ, Charlotte, NC, Arctic Health Research Center in Alaska and USPHS Nursing Research Center in San Francisco, CA. Her last assignment was with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, GA. In 1965 CAPT Porter had a short-term assignment with the World Health Organization (WHO) at the National Tuberculosis Institute in Banglalore, India, and at WHO Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland.

On May 25, 1965, CAPT Porter married Daniel G. Brown in Geneva, Switzerland. Together they lived in Arizona, Georgia, and California, where they were active in the Beyond War Movement. They returned to Arizona in 1990 and lived in Green Valley for many years. CAPT Brown returned home to South Dakota in 2017.

CAPT Brown was an active member of the League of Women Voters of Greater Tucson and the American Association of University Women. She volunteered at the Adult Day Care Center at Casa de Esperanza. She was an active member of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Green Valley and was a strong supporter of Common Cause.

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legislative priority of COA and its Legislative Affairs Committee.
Soup’s On!

by CDR Trish Corbin

Officers of the West Virginia Commissioned Officers Association have an annual tradition of volunteering at the Preston County Empty Bowls event each year in Kingwood, WV. Empty Bowls is a program in which a soup supper is held, and the proceeds are used to feed the hungry within the county, particularly children and families. Many counties in West Virginia sponsor these events. Local students create handcrafted ceramic bowls, small plates, and other items; and these are offered for sale as well. The officers have been volunteering for the past five years and look forward each year to this opportunity for community service. Many hands are needed to set up for the event, serve the soup and other items, and then clean up.

This year the Empty Bowls event was held on February 1, 2020. The officer workforce was reduced a bit, as some officers had been called upon to deploy for the coronavirus health emergency or were on duty elsewhere. Nonetheless, two officers and their family members were on hand to represent the WV COA. CDR Jason Ham and wife Tracey were present, as well as CDR Trish Corbin and her daughter Mei Lin.
PHS Commissioned Officers Foundation
Donations Received, February 1, 2020 to February 29, 2020

Platinum ($1,000)
CAPT James Sorenson

Gold ($500)
CAPT Iris Valentin-Bon

Silver ($250)
CAPT James Minor

Bronze ($100)
CAPT Walter Schaffer
CDR Rebel Nelson
CAPT Rita Chow

Friends (Under $100)
CAPT George Durgin
CAPT Maria Benke
Ms. Christina Nurse
CAPT Peter Putnam

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Founder’s Society...$2,500
Platinum............$1,000
Gold.................$500
Silver...............$250
Bronze..............$100

We Welcome New Members of COA,
February 1, 2020 to February 29, 2020

CDR Travis Chapman
CDR Ranjodh Gill
LT Anna Huff

LT Regina Kahue
LT Tina Kinney
RADM Krista Pedley

LT Eni Rotimi
LCDR Leon Snyder
Mr. Robert Webber

COA Donations
Commissioned Officers Association of the USPHS
Donations Received, February 1 to February 29, 2020
CAPT Kevin Dermanoski

Symposium Registration Scholarship for Junior Officers

COA members at O-3 and below can receive free registration to the 2020 USPHS Scientific and Training Symposium in Arizona.

See details and apply online at phscof.org/registration