Defense bill expands benefits for veterans

Service-connected disabled veterans and their families will soon have access to certain new privileges under the recently signed John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019—several of which have been longstanding DAV legislative priorities.

Beginning in January 2020, service-connected veterans and their caregivers will be eligible to use base commissary stores and some morale, welfare and recreation facilities on bases worldwide. This provision—located under section 621 of the NDAA—comports with DAV Resolution Number 270.

In addition, veterans with a service-connected disability rated as permanent and total will soon be eligible to use space-available (Space-A) travel on DOD aircraft, in accord with DAV Resolution Number 274. Eligibility does not extend to spouses, significant others or caregivers, and those wishing to travel Space-A must have a DD Form 2765.

For more than a decade, DAV members have adopted national resolutions and advocated for enactment of federal legislation to extend these military-related benefits to disabled veterans.

“These policy changes have been important priorities for our members for many years,” said DAV National Commander Dennis Nixon. “For veterans whose ability to work is impacted by a service-connected disability, the cost savings associated with access to base commissary and exchanges and Space-A flights will be a significant benefit.”

Other notable provisions passed in the legislation include improvements to the DOD Transition Assistance Program—or TAP—that helps prepare transitioning service members for
civilian life. This program includes mandatory instruction on preparation for civilian employment, VA benefits and other transition assistance. It also allows for transitioning service members to elect two days of specific training of their choice. These improvements are called for in DAV Resolution Number 304.

Also, in accordance with DAV Resolution Number 085, the NDAA calls for more VA research on availability of long-term care options for veterans with combat related disabilities.

Further details regarding implementation of these legislative provisions are expected to be released in September 2019.

“This is a hard fought win for veterans and we’re glad to see it finally come to fruition,” Nixon added.

Follow the DAV Commander’s Action Network (DAV CAN) at davcan.org to stay up to date on this and other critical legislation impacting disabled veterans.