

Legislative Liaison Report
To Board and Members
WNY Chapter
September 10, 2016

Each year, I visit the offices of our federal elected officials promoting issues of interest to our members and other military personnel. This year I was accompanied by COL Bob Pecoraro and LTC Mark Kreyer (both retired) on a morning visit to Congressman Chris Collins office, then later, BG Anthony Caruana, COL Pecoraro, CWO4 Pichard Scalfani (all retired) and I visited the offices of Senators Gillibrand and Schumer as well as Congressman Brian Higgins. All this took place on August 8.

Congress earlier had passed a defense appropriation bill signed by the President, but an authorization bill must be passed directing where that money should be spent. Such bills were passed in late spring by both houses but need to be reconciled in a conference committee. It was our job to present arguments favoring MOAA's interests. Our objective was to encourage our representatives to intercede on our behalf with the conferees in their house.

At issue is a provision in the Senate version reducing housing allowances for active duty service members and we requested removal of this provision as being a disincentive for retention. Another issue is disproportionate increases in TRICARE fees which we obviously oppose.

MOAA supports a 2.1% pay increase for service members based on the statutory Employment Cost Index model, not a 1.6% increase as requested by the President. Lastly, we brought up the need to phase out the so-called "Widows Tax" that deprives spouses from receiving their VA indemnification for deceased members when they become eligible for their SBP insurance payments.

There is an element of hope when it comes to asking congressional staff at a local office to convince their bosses to intercede in reconciliation conferences supporting our positions. Do the staffers present our arguments, and do the elected officials actually contact their committee members? MOAA staff in the legislative department are certainly visiting the conference committee members and members are sending support e-mails reinforcing our arguments. Let's hope our efforts contribute to benefitting those Americans who served or are serving and need to preserve pay and benefits for our most deserving citizens.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dennis A. Beagle

Dennis A. Beagle
LTC, USAR Ret
Legislative Liaison