

## STORMING THE HILL - June 2018

Each year, all Council President's are invited to Washington, D.C. to participate in MOAA's "Storming the Hill" program. We lobby in Congress on two or three issues deemed a priority. 2018 was no exception. This year 180 stormers, including Council Presidents, personnel representing the Surviving Spouse Advisory Committee, the Currently Serving Spouse Advisory Council, MOAA Directorates, and staffers, all "stormed the hill" and represented all 50 states.

This year's issues were: 1) Military Pay and Benefits—MOAA is concerned about Regular Military Compensation and its importance an impact on recruiting and retention for the All Volunteer Force (AVF). MOAA appreciates the president's proposed 2.6 percent pay raise, consistent with current law, in his budget request and strongly encourages congressional support to ensure it is included in the FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. 2) MOAA wants Congress to stop reducing pay for medical retirees. Referred to as Chapter 61 (a chapter in Title 10 of the U.S. Code, they are service members who were unable to complete 20 years of service through no fault of their own and should have their retirement and disability pays computed equal to those who retire with 20 or more years of service. A Chapter 61 retiree is anyone medically retired from military service with a 30% or greater disability. There are approximately 210,000 Chapter 61 retirees, nationally—more than 90% of whom are in enlisted. Until 2001, a retired service member who also received VA disability compensation had the amount equal to VA compensation deducted from his or her military retired pay. A coalition of associations, led by MOAA, crafted a very limited first-step legislative provision to authorize a modest allowance (initially \$50-\$300 monthly) for retirees who received a VA disability rating of 60% or more. It became law December 28, 2001.

In 2004, the Military Coalition and several grassroots efforts persuaded Congress to eliminate the offset for combat-related disabilities; and, phase out, over a 10-year period, the offset for retirees with 20 or more years of service with noncombat disabilities rate at 50% or greater. MOAA's position is that all service members should receive both retirement and disability. So, we continue to fight for fairness under the law. MOAA remains committed to working with Congress to find solutions consistent with previous efforts to enable these retirees to receive all the compensation they earned through both their service and their sacrifice.

MOAA's positions on the issues were generally met with wide acceptance among members of Congress. Leading the way was Congressman Mac Thornberry-(R-Clarendon) Texas Congressional District 13 and Chairman, House Armed Services Committee. I cannot say enough about his efforts throughout the year.

Our Texas Delegation consisted of 11 "hearty souls" who called on all 36 of our Representatives plus both U.S. Senators. Those who lobbied were: Texas Council President, LTC Larry Petrash, his wife, Paula; Wes Lloyd (Wife, Currently Serving); Major General K.C. McClain, MOAA Board Member, Courtney Power, Currently Serving Spouse Advisory Committee; RADM Clare Helminiak, MOAA Board Member, Col (Chaplain) Bob Certain; COL Barbara Ramsey, MOAA Board Member; Naval Captain Charles Starnes and his wife, Susie; Gail Joyce, Surviving Spouse National Committee Chair;

The lobbying effort is not an easy task. In addition to the preparation time, i.e., organizing the 4 teams, scheduling appointments, etc., it is a full day of meeting schedule demands, walking from Congressional offices, located in multiple building locations around the U.S. Capitol. Most of those participating this year have done so for multiple years. I want to recognize, and applaud, their commitment to this effort. Thanks to all who helped make this event a great success. Despite the effort it takes, it's actually quite fun. Can't wait until next year.

**Larry Petrash, President**

Texas Council of Chapters

Military Officers Association of America