

December 2024

ILCouncilMOAA.org

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Never Stop Serving!!!

***“NEVER
STOP
SERVING”***



President's column

Whew! Election 2024 is behind us. However, as Colonel Smith will tell us, the current Congress has much unfinished business. The probability of them “kicking the can” into the next Congress is very high.

We need to encourage our members to remind our legislators (most of whom retained their seats) that these important veteran focused initiatives still need congressional action.

As you have probably seen, the near real time (NRT) link at MOAA National still is “in progress” along with the committee module and the most important data base containing contact for our non-chapter affiliated members. “Soon” they say. We’ll see.

Did you catch the name change for Councils & Chapters? It would appear that National wants to more clearly articulate the “affiliate” nature of our organization. And they wonder why many question their commitment to chapters and councils. In a changing world, with decreasing chapter membership, most fraternal organizations face similar challenges. As these major shifts happen, what will we do to serve our members and keep them actively serving America’s veterans?

As the calendar pages turn, we are rapidly approaching the Jolly ‘Ole Elf’s favorite day. We have much to be thankful for this season, not the least of which is our friends and families. Since we are no longer “deployed”, and even though we “*Never Stop Serving*”, let’s be sure to spend some quality time with our loved ones. Merry Christmas, and Happy New Years!

Semper Fi – Bob

Legislative Column

COL (USAF, Ret) Smith

Well, the election is over and now we have a “lame duck” Congress until January next year, but not sure what bills, if any, will be passed this month before the new congress is in session next year. Even with a lame duck Congress, MOAA still has a mission to protect the benefits of our veterans and active-duty forces. That means MOAA must keep the momentum going to ensure our priorities are made known to Congress now and in the upcoming 119th Congress next year. And yes, the slate is wiped clean and all the bills that were proposed, but not passed, must be reinitiated. Our advocacy campaigns remain an important component of MOAA’s mission. Many issues remain. The entire list is on the MOAA website under the Legislative Action Center. Please take time to review this list, and if not previously taken action to make your voice known, please do so.

MOAA states “What the year-end legislative sprint may mean for pay and benefits” in the November 26, 2024 MOAA Newsletter:

The 118th Congress returned to Capitol Hill the week of December 2nd and is set to end its work on or before Dec. 20. Lawmakers in this lame-duck session have a long list of tasks left to accomplish in that short span, many of which will affect the pay and benefits of those who serve and have served, their families, and their survivors.

As legislators and their staffs scramble, MOAA will continue its work across multiple channels to preserve service-earned benefits and strengthen military readiness. While this will take many forms – from supporting new legislation near the end of the session to pushing older bills past the finish line – three key priorities are taking shape as the year winds down.

Here’s a look at these areas, what the outcomes might mean for you in the coming year and beyond, and how you can support MOAA’s efforts. Keep up with the latest on all these issues and more at MOAA’s Advocacy News page.

The NDAA

The annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) serves as a vehicle for many MOAA-backed legislative priorities, and the FY 2025 version is no exception. The House-passed version includes:

A 15% pay raise for junior enlisted servicemembers, in addition to the 4.5% pay boost for all ranks – a meaningful step toward strengthening the current and future force.

A restoration of the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to cover 100% of housing costs, albeit for a single year; an expansion of the Basic Needs Allowance (BNA) to reach more lower income servicemembers; and a review of Basic Allowance for Subsistence (BAS) rates aimed at assisting military families.

TRICARE updates such as adding pregnancy as a Qualifying Life Event (QLE) under a pilot program, and improvements designed to align family planning benefits with commercial plans.

Family support ranging from more in-home childcare locations to better benefits for DoD childcare employees to flexibility for federally employed military spouses seeking to keep their position during a PCS move.

Senate actions on these initiatives are currently undetermined.

MOAA members should remain engaged with their representatives on the many important issues that make up the NDAA. MOAA's Legislative Action Center offers several prewritten messages that can be sent with only a few clicks and convey your feelings as a constituent; these messages can be personalized for a greater impact:

Support a Substantial Pay Raise for Junior Enlisted

Support a TRICARE Pregnancy QLE Pilot Program

Pay Full Housing Costs for Servicemembers

The Budget

Continuing a trend lasting decades, Congress did not pass a budget before the end of the fiscal year and instead put forth a continuing resolution (CR) to keep the federal government running. That resolution runs out Dec. 20 – just before the end of the congressional session – meaning lawmakers will need to pass a full budget by that point, pass another CR ... or allow the government to shut down.

A shutdown would prove disastrous for servicemembers who would work without pay, and for veterans and retirees seeking care and benefits from agencies which would be working with only the most essential personnel available. But a follow-up CR comes with its own long list of problems – misaligned funds leading to waste across DoD and other departments, a full stop on new construction that could benefit quality of life programs, and potential disruptions to training and other military activities which would denigrate mission readiness.

By passing full DoD and VA appropriations as part of a comprehensive (if overdue) FY 2025 budget, lawmakers can show their true commitment to supporting our servicemembers and veterans. MOAA will continue its work with the 118th Congress on this issue and stands ready to press the 119th Congress to move faster on these critical budget bills to avoid uncertainty and confusion for the wider uniformed services community.

The Dole Act

Many of Congress' year-end legislative priorities will take the form of omnibus bills, and the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (H.R. 8371) is a prime example. The Dole Act, supported by MOAA and more than 50 other organizations, represents a bipartisan bundle of veteran and caregiver benefit improvements that will provide a lifeline to some of those who need one the most – especially those who rely on VA benefits as their main source of support. Already long delayed, MOAA's work to move the bill forward recently saw some success with overwhelming House passage November 18.

The bill includes upgrades to all manner of support systems:

Pilot programs designed to expand VA-provided assisted living options, improved at-home care for aging veterans, multiple improvements to caregiver support programs, and more important changes for homeless veterans,

- VA employment programs
- survivor benefits
- suicide prevention efforts.

Bottom line: The 118th Congress has yet to pass meaningful, wide-ranging veterans' legislation since it was sworn in nearly two years ago, and veterans and their families cannot afford to see this bill fail to reach the president's desk.

Unlike the must-pass NDAA and the looming shutdown, the Dole Act risks falling off the legislative radar during a busy year-end session.

MOAA needs your help in keeping it top of mind for your legislators – send a message today on behalf of millions of fellow servicemembers, veterans, and caregivers who will (or soon could) benefit from these critical program improvements.

Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 1282/S.344)

The Major Richard Star Act would authorize combat-injured veterans to receive their earned DoD retirement pay for years of service and their VA disability compensation for lifelong injury.

Currently, these combat-injured (and often seriously disabled) veterans are subject to a cost-saving offset where their retirement pay is reduced for every dollar of VA disability received.

To reduce earned retirement pay because of a combat disability is an injustice; the compensation for these injured veterans is not the place to achieve savings. Currently, The House has 326 co-sponsors for this bill and the Senate has 74 co-sponsors.

TAKE ACTION: Ask Your Lawmakers to Support the Major Richard Star Act]

MOAA Urges Swift Passage of FY 2025 NDAA

December 09, 2024

MOAA believes the Fiscal Year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) includes significant quality of life improvements for servicemembers and their families, expands and updates key benefit programs, and requires key reports designed to ensure continued, meaningful congressional oversight.

For these reasons, MOAA supports swift passage of the legislation, which has become law every year since 1961. The bill passed the House 281-140 on Dec. 11 and will move to the Senate in the closing days of the 118th Congress.

“MOAA is extremely grateful to the lawmakers and their staffs who crafted this bipartisan legislation,” said Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly, USAF (Ret), MOAA’s president and CEO. “We are especially appreciative of the work of the House Armed Services Committee’s Quality of Life Panel, whose report served as the foundation for the House bill and whose recommendations have, in many cases, become meaningful parts of the final legislation now under consideration.

MOAA believes this legislation will make a real difference in the quality of life and quality of service of our uniformed servicemembers and families.

This legislation recognizes strong national defense and readiness start with having strong people and families and appreciates that the two are undeniably linked.”

Kelly highlighted a number of MOAA-endorsed provisions in the bill, to include:

- **Military Pay Raise and Junior Enlisted Pay Increase:** Increased junior enlisted pay by 14.5%, with an increase of 4.5% for all others.
- **Unaccompanied Housing:** Improvements include authorizing the services to provide free broadband internet access to servicemembers residing in unaccompanied housing, and the expansion of the DoD Housing Feedback System to include unaccompanied housing.
- **Basic Needs Allowance:** An increase in the threshold from 150% to 200% of the federal poverty guidelines would increase the number of military families eligible for this vital assistance program.
- **Military Family Support:** Improvements include more child care coverage for military spouses seeking employment, a 100% discount for DoD child care providers on the care of one child and reduced costs for additional children (standardizing the benefit across the departments), and upgrades to the portability of professional licenses of servicemembers and military spouses.

MOAA Urges Swift Passage of FY 2025 NDAA (Cont'd)

December 09, 2024

- TRICARE and the Military Health System: Improvements include a referral waiver for servicemembers seeking physical therapy, nutrition, audiology, optometry, and podiatry services in military treatment facilities.
- The elimination of TRICARE contraception copays to align with federal requirements for commercial health plans.
- Licensure flexibility allowing TRICARE mental health providers to provide tele-mental health care to servicemembers and their families without regard to the location of the provider or the patient.
- Travel Expense Reimbursement: Effective in January 2027, DoD would reimburse reserve component travel and some related expenses for servicemembers who travel over 50 miles to inactive duty training (IDT) and muster duty.

“These efforts to support the military community and provide for the all-volunteer force show the great strides possible when lawmakers from both sides of the aisle work with stakeholders like MOAA and fellow military service organizations,” Kelly said. “We look forward to Congress moving on this legislation without delay, and for lawmakers to complete their appropriations duties – including a full DoD budget – alongside these measures.”

Keep up with the progress of the NDAA and other MOAA advocacy priorities on MOAA's Advocacy News page and by registering at our Legislative Action Center.

Chaplain's Comments

Season's Greetings from your Chaplain,

As this is written, we of the Christian Faith are reminded of His First Coming in which He announced Salvation for all, and, to remind us of His Second Coming, date and time unknown, to take all who have believed in Him to heaven.

One hymn which captures much of what The Savior has done and is still doing for us all, believers or not, is captured in a hymn by The Rev Philip Doddridge, which in the first verse says:

**Hark the Glad Sound, the Savior Comes,
The Savior promised long,
Let every heart prepare a throne.
And every voice a song.**

As is common among clergy (which I must confess is not common to me), clergymen are also authors of hymns. He preached his Christmas sermon and then had the congregation sing this hymn. Additional verses add to the treasury of gifts to us : He comes the prisoners to release, to clear the mental obstacle, to open the eyes of the blind, to bind up the broken hearted and to make the humble heart rich.

What a treasury of Gifts God offers to all ! Far more than announcing salvation for all, He promises and delivers relief from many of the maladies common to man. He causes people unjustly imprisoned to be released. Through the medical profession, He cures blindness and mental illness, and delivers real hope for a better earthly life to the downcast and materially poor, relief even coming as we all know, at times, apart from any human agency !

Yes, the joys of Christmas are many, and so in our desire to give aid and comfort to our members as well as those who may become members, let us all refer everyone to the gracious God who bids us to call on Him in every trouble, to pray, praise and give thanks.

In Your Service,

Ralph Woehrmann,

Ch Major USA RET

Illinois Council of Chapter Presidents, Chaplain

Survivor Outreach Services Coordinator



Survivor Outreach Services

Many choose new goals for the beginning of the Year.

Organization is a great place to start. DFAS, BENEFEDS, MILCONNECT and the VA are all great online resources and a great place to start.

As a reminder the Survivor Benefit Plan

Marital Status Update form (Formally Certification of Eligibility) is due annually

on the Annuitants' birthday. If you have questions, contact Michelle Rutherford at

michelle.r.rutherford3.ctr@army.mil or 217-720-9574.

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PROVIDING **CRISIS RELIEF** TO OUR NATION'S HEROES

Together, we can offer support and stability to the uniformed services and veteran communities during a crisis.



OUR GOAL

Our goal is to raise \$1 million to endow The MOAA Foundation's Crisis Relief Fund and continue our great work.



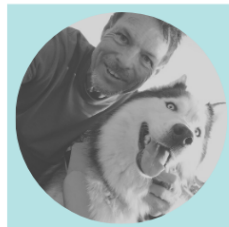
WHY CRISIS RELIEF?

More than 12 million veterans without a VA disability rating have virtually no support when disaster strikes.



CAN YOU HELP?

Our hope is your generous contribution will help us reach our goal to fund this program in perpetuity.



READY TO ASSIST

In April 2020, The MOAA Foundation launched an emergency COVID-19 Relief Fund to support uniformed services families impacted by the pandemic.

As the pandemic has ebbed, we know crisis-related needs of uniformed services families and veterans still exist.

To answer the call for help, we established The MOAA Foundation Crisis Relief Fund — an enduring emergency relief fund to assist uniformed services personnel, veterans, and their families (including caregivers and survivors) in the midst of crisis.

WHAT SETS US APART



Our streamlined application takes less than 20 minutes to complete, saving applicants the time they need to address other urgent priorities.



Funds reach an approved applicant's bank account within days of approval — timely relief when it can have the most impact.



Financial grants are awarded to qualifying applicants to help with housing costs, utilities, medical and insurance bills, groceries, and more.



100% of our Crisis Relief applicants would recommend our program to others in need.



(800) 234-6622



moaa_foundation@moaa.org



charities.moaa.org/crisisrelief

Reasons to Join a MOAA Chapter

You know the value of belonging to MOAA and your chapter!

But when you're talking to a potential new chapter member, it's important to remember that many officers might have only limited knowledge of MOAA's chapter system.

Creating a dialogue and asking open-ended questions is the best way to find out if and how a chapter membership could help a prospective member.

Find out as much as you can about their priorities in order to tailor a response that is more likely to resonate with them personally.

Here are some aspects of membership that may appeal to them:

1. **Make yourself heard.** MOAA's chapters provide critical grassroots support for MOAA's national legislative agenda. Chapter members let their legislators know what's on their minds and open doors for MOAA's legislative team in Washington, D.C.
2. **Give back to the community.** Chapter members are MOAA's ambassadors in their communities, supporting countless programs that make a difference in the lives of others. These members continue to serve and are giving back in the truest sense.
3. **Value added to chapter members' lives.** MOAA chapters sponsor interesting programs and opportunities to interact with civic, political, military, and business leaders on issues important to members.
4. **Networking with fellow officers.** Chapters include second-career members in the work force and retired service members who have contacts in their communities that can be valuable to transitioning officers.
5. **Stay informed.** Chapter newsletters, websites, and meetings provide you with the latest information on local, state, and national issues and changes to military benefits.
6. **Influencing state legislation.** Most states have a council of chapters that unites chapters in the state. These councils, and independent chapters in states without a council, often lobby for and pass state-level legislation that affects military members and their families, such as exempting military retired pay from state income tax or increasing funding for state veterans' programs.
7. **Camaraderie with a purpose.** MOAA chapters unite active duty, former, and retired officers from every branch of service, including National Guard and Reserve, as well as surviving spouses, offering the opportunity to connect with others with similar backgrounds and interest and develop close and lasting friendships.

Council of Chapters

Website

The Council has a website. Address is <http://www.ilcouncilmoaa.org>

If you have any items or input for the website, contact MAJ (USAF, Ret) Dave Knieriem at the following email address: dknieriem@casscomm.com

MOAA is the nation's largest and most influential association of military officers. It is an independent, nonprofit, politically nonpartisan organization.

While MOAA is permitted by law to lobby—and does so actively—its status as a tax-exempt veterans organization precludes it from participating in political activities, which are defined as intervening directly or indirectly in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.

Stated briefly: the association may advocate issues, but it may not advocate the election or defeat of particular candidates or political parties. This newsletter follows the policies of MOAA National.



Never Stop Serving!!!

MOAA Store and ROTC/Junior ROTC Items

The MOAA store has re-opened at <https://moaa.estore.shop/>. In addition to promotional gear, you can find ROTC and Junior ROTC (JROTC) award certificates (in stock now) and medals (place orders now for backorders to be shipped when medals are in stock, expected by the end of April). Electronic certificates may be customized and downloaded [online](#) at any time. Note that medals have been updated to reflect all eight uniformed services, and JROTC certificates have been updated with language more appropriate to high school students rather than ROTC students.

The cost of medals to affiliates will remain at \$3.00 per medal due to a MOAA subsidy. Additionally, the store recently added the USPS live rate to shipping options, providing a lower-cost alternative.

**Never Stop Serv-
ing!!!**

MOAA Legislative Action Center

You can help MOAA by visiting their legislative action center and contacting your elected officials regarding pending legislation MOAA is working. You can reach the Legislative Action Center at the following email address: take.action.moaa.org

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Group Travel: We offer the opportunity to travel with your fellow MOAA members from your local chapter and across the country, thereby increasing the fun for your next vacation.

MOAA Support: MOAA Vacations supports MOAA National and Local Chapters. By booking through us you are also supporting MOAA's mission and initiatives, as a portion of the proceeds helps fund advocacy and support programs for the military community and their families.

If you're considering booking a trip, it's worth exploring what MOAA Vacations has to offer!

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