

Notes from MD Council Of Chapters President, 29 Oct 2017

Greetings to all,

1. NEW AND IMPORTANT: On the 7th of November the Maryland Veterans Caucus (of the General Assembly) will be conducting a Veterans Summit--the first of its kind! There is only one invitation to each Veterans organization in our State, and I plan to attend and represent our 12,000 MOAA members. Annie Brock most likely will not be available on that date. Nevertheless, she and I have been coordinating on this and expect to receive copies of the final planning documents and detailed agenda for the meeting sometime during the coming week. In brief, the Summit promises to focus on identifying those legislative initiatives on which our Maryland Veterans would like to have the Caucus concentrate its efforts during the upcoming session. Some Veterans Caucus members elected to the House of Delegates and Maryland Senate expect to be present. Senator Steve Waugh's office is handling the administration and planning for the Caucus. In brief, if you or your Chapter have specific priorities on which you'd like to focus, I'd appreciate knowing your **top 3-5 issues by COB on Friday, 3 November**. One or two sentence of explanation for each item should be adequate; if you have more than that to share, please give me a phone call to discuss additional details. [If your Chapter Board has an opportunity to discuss your input prior to the end of next week, that would be ideal.] Kindly forward your short list of the highest legislative priorities for our General Assembly to me [not as a Reply to All].

EXAMPLES OF ISSUES ALREADY IDENTIFIED TO ME VERBALLY, BUT YOUR INPUT IS OPEN TO ALL MATTERS ON WHICH THE VETERANS CAUCUS AND OUR LEGISLATURE CAN EXERT ITS INFLUENCE: (a) Initiatives to make Maryland more "friendly" to Veterans and Retired Uniformed Services personnel and their family members, (b) Additional tax relief up to 100% on Uniformed Services Retired Pay--to immediately match or surpass what was granted to Hometown Heroes in 2017 [i.e., 15% subtraction starting at age 55]; (c) Enabling legislation that would facilitate the establishment and operation of Veterans Treatment Courts at the Circuit and District Court levels, as appropriate, across Maryland; (d) Legislation to recognize 7 Uniformed Services in all future House and Senate bills, except when specific exclusions are directed by the General Assembly for unique circumstances; (e) Timely support of future Federal Base realignments (including BRAC) by funding necessary upgrades of state highways, transportation networks, and utilities near affected installations; (f) Non-competitive Veterans Preference for specific categories of State jobs. **KINDLY SUBMIT YOUR OWN LIST; WE DON'T NEED ALL THE DETAILS AT THIS TIME.**

2. The MOAA Annual Meeting for 2017 took place in Alexandria Virginia (Holiday Inn Suites, 1st Street) on 23 October. Here are a few highlights from the meeting, for your information.

(a) Lt Gen Dana T. Atkins gave his 2d Annual Report to the Membership. He referred to his article on the 5-Year Strategic Plan in the October issue of Military Officer. He showed a concise video (about 5 minutes) summarizing how the Plan is divided into areas of emphasis. Other staff members followed. Dan Merry said that, pending a Defense Bill from Congress, it appears that our 2018 legislative concerns on Capitol Hill will again be the SBP/DIC Offset, Sequestration, and Avoiding Increases in Benefits Fees. A Joint House-Senate Committee is working on these issues now, as the Senate and House views on specific issues are different. We still are waiting for a final Defense Bill from the House/Senate [Conference] Committee. The House version is better for our military and Veterans, and it is the one supported by MOAA. We definitely expect an attack on Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH), especially for active duty families with two military members living in the same residence. Dan will be taking over as Co-Chair of the Military Coalition. Things may prove better for the military community in 2018, an election year.

(b) More help from National Headquarters on State issues is planned.

(c) A new advertising agency has been selected to help National with membership.

(d) There is a new Office of People Analytics (within the Office of the Secretary of Defense). MOAA is developing a relationship with this new agency.

(e) The new MOAA homepage was launched on 15 August 2017; that page is second in popularity only to the "Take Action" page. Watch for more MOAA website enhancements over the next few months.

(f) Watch for guidance on the new Customized MOAA Newsletter during November. Also, CQEngage Legislative Technology will be replacing CapWiz to get information out more efficiently.

(g) New emphasis is being placed on Annual Networking and Hiring events.

(h) Using USAA grants on military installations, MOAA is implementing its Military Spouse Professional Development Program.

(i) The Military Officer magazine is undergoing a makeover; the redesigned version will launch with the January 2018 issue. Mock-up copies are on display in Alexandria.

(j) Last year Congress grandfathered everyone on active duty before 1 Jan 18 regarding TRICARE fees. Now the Senate wants to raise fees unilaterally. It was noted that SSIA (for surviving spouses) will end in May of 2018 unless Congress takes action. The Military Coalition will be going over to Capitol Hill to discuss these and other matters affecting active duty/Reserve Component personnel, Veterans, spouses/surviving spouses, and families.

Harvey