

USAWOA's Legislative Update

A Report Submitted to the Members for the 2006 Annual Meeting

By Ray Bell, USAWOA Legislative Advisor (September 28, 2006)

Those who have heard me speak may recall something I frequently say; this is: *“There is very little in public law that deals exclusively with warrant officers.”*

Never-the-less, it is important for USAWOA to be involved in the legislative process of this Nation. Although it is true that there is little *specific* law dealing with warrant officers, there is a lot of *general* law that has both immediate and long-term impact on the lives of Army warrant officers and their families. Laws pertaining to such matters as pay and allowances or rules for PCS are examples of those with immediate impact. Examples of long-term implications are laws dealing with retirement, health care, commissary access, and so forth.

It is equally important that USAWOA make its positions known to governmental officials in the Executive Branch of the government. Although congress passes laws, the Administration makes its wishes known in the form of budget proposals, national defense planning, and other means. Likewise, the Department of Defense (DoD) and the service departments develop the procedures that implement laws established by congress and policies of the administration.

USAWOA seeks to influence the legislative and executive branches of government primarily through our membership in an organization named The Military Coalition (TMC). In 1985, USAWOA was one of the military associations that founded TMC. Today, TMC is made up of 36 national-level military, veterans' and uniformed service associations; with a combined membership of more than 5.5 million. TMC is a powerful voice speaking for the men and women serving our nation in uniform and their families.

USAWOA is an important and active member of TMC. Through TMC, USAWOA ensures that warrant officers are considered fully and equally in legislation developed and enacted by congress, as well as the policy initiatives of DoD and HQDA. Additionally, USAWOA serves an important role within TMC; this being the subject matter expert in the areas unique to warrant officers. Equally important is the fact that within TMC, USAWOA serves to protect warrant officer interests. For example, when a TMC committee reviews (or suggests) revision to military housing standards, we ensure that pay grade W-5 is fairly considered, as well as the difference in rank status between the WO1-CW2 and the E-7/E-8 community.

TMC has four basic goals. These have not changed since founding and are:

- Maintaining a strong national defense provided by recruiting and retaining skilled and highly capable personnel in the seven uniformed services;
- Maintaining uniformed services compensation and benefits at levels sufficient to attract and retain professional uniformed service members for careers of service to the Nation;

Representing the interests of the entire uniformed services community, including members' families and survivors, and responding to assaults upon the compensation and benefits earned by members of that community through years of dedicated service; and

- Educating the public on the extraordinary demands and sacrifices associated with a career in uniformed service, and the need to maintain a similarly unique system of compensation and benefits to attract and retain the kinds and numbers of high-quality personnel needed to meet the Nation's short- and long-term defense requirements.

It is important to understand that unlike many national-level organizations that profess “military-interest,” TMC does not deal with defense policy issues, procurement of systems, hardware, or real estate. Rather, TMC focuses on the “people” side of the military.

This is best illustrated by words from the Articles of Incorporation of TMC; which say: *“The Coalition will consider, or place on its agenda for review, only issues directly related to the compensation, entitlements, morale, welfare and benefits of members of the uniformed services community, including active, retired, reserve, guard, veterans, and their families and survivors.”*

Because of this, TMC enjoys an excellent reputation on Capitol Hill and within the Pentagon. The input of TMC is actively sought by legislators and policy makers.

The “full” TMC usually meets once a month. Since TMC founding, a USAWOA representative has participated in the monthly meeting. One may wonder; *“If TMC is involved in so many different areas of legislation, how can much be done in one meeting a month?”* Good question .. however, The grunt work of TMC is done within the eight, long-established action committees. These committees meet as required; some as often as several times a month, depending on the need. TMC committees are:

- Guard & Reserve
- Health Care
- Morale, Welfare, Recreation and Military Construction
- Personnel and Compensation
- Retirement Programs
- Survivor Programs
- Taxes/Social Security
- Veterans

One can see the committees of TMC align very closely with the subjects affecting the “people-side” of the uniformed services. Less obvious is the fact that the committees parallel the sub-committees of the Armed Services Committees of the Senate and the House (the SASC and the HASC) as well as the Veterans Committees of both the Senate and the House.

In the committees, TMC is working on what congress is working on. However, TMC is not limited to following the congressional agenda. Often, TMC is proactive in dealings with congress in efforts to ensure that service members, retirees, veterans, families, and survivors, are dealt with fairly and equitably by the federal government. Likewise, TMC does not hesitate to deal directly with DoD or specific service departments in matters of interest.

TMC prepares and issues annual “Legislative Goals.” These goals are developed within the committees. However, the final language and prioritization is established by the full TMC. These goals are formally published and widely-provided to members of congress, congressional staff, and various levels of leadership within DoD.

The goals are extensive and comprehensive. Indeed, if printed, the list and accompanying justifying text exceeds 20 pages. I urge USAWOA members to visit the web site of TMC (via link form USAWOA On-Line) to review areas of personal interest and related goals.

Additionally, TMC is frequently called upon to testify to congress (usually the SASC, HASC, and Veterans’ Committee). TMC often receives information and briefings from DoD; or may be asked to provide information to DoD. Also, it is common for personnel from TMC to be asked to be members of, or advisors to, various commissions, committees, or action groups, established by congress and DoD.

Members may recall that USAWOA was called upon to present information to the 9th QRMC (Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation). This was our opportunity to communicate our concerns about warrant officer pay and particularly, the pay compression problem, directly to those with authority to bring about change.

TMC becomes USAWOA's partner when legislation specific to warrant officers is in front of congress. TMC strongly supported USAWOA when congress addressed the topic of pay grade W-5. More recently, a technical correction (to previously enacted legislation) was needed to prevent recurrence of commissioned – warrant flight pay inequity. TMC lined up with USAWOA in favor of the correction and it was accepted by congress without debate.

Respectfully Submitted:

RAYMOND A. BELL, CW5, USA (Retired)