

Keeping Our Legislative Focus

by CW4 (Ret) Don Hess

One of the benefits of technology is the instant communications we enjoy today in contrast to just a few years ago. The up side is that we can communicate with individual members, chapters, other associations, DA and even Congress almost immediately. The down side is that rumors, misinformation and even disinformation can spread much more quickly than in the past. As a result, we spend a great deal of time replying to doom and gloom speculation about negative legislation pending on the Warrant Officer Corps or the military community in general.

First, let us state emphatically that the Defense budget is under constant scrutiny and continued attempts to cut it are a fact of life in today's environment. To compound our attempts to support our military posture we have a declining military presence in Congress as more legislators with military experience are retiring and being replaced by freshman with little or no experience.

On a daily basis we hear outrageous proposals and many of them make the news. Declining Health Care, reduction or elimination of Cost of Living Allowance (COLA); adjustments to Consumer Price index (CPI); threats to privatize commissaries; the list is endless.

There certainly is a need for a 'wake up call' to the military community to alert them to the erosion of our benefits. But there is also a need to focus on specific issues so that their responses will be at the proper time and place where they will do the most good. Grassroots support can best be marshaled when you have a specific issue with information stating the impact of that issue on the military community. A shotgun approach to the members of Congress will be counterproductive in the long run.

All this is to say that the legislative representatives within The Military Coalition have the experience to assess the myriad of legislative proposals being floated in the halls of Congress, the insights to determine the best approach to combating these various proposals, and the professional confidence of those pro-military members of Congress who will assist us in protecting the military community.

So, if you hear shotgun approaches to the erosion of our benefits, ask for specifics, such as the House or Senate bill number, who is sponsoring the bill, what kind of support does it have, etc. We can assure you that if changes to any benefits are under serious consideration, The Military Coalition is aware of the legislation, and will publicize the facts to the grassroots of the military community with factual information on how to let your legislator know your opinion. Grassroots support is essential to protecting our benefits but your response should be focused on specific legislation and not a general attack on Congress. Remember to be professional and polite. Those members of Congress who oppose a particular issue are also the same members who support other legislation favoring the military community. Keep your comments on the issue and not the individual.

(Based on an article by CW4 (Ret) Don Hess, then Executive Vice President, in the March 1997 NEWSLINER)

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