

USAWOA's Involvement in the Legislative Process

What's "In It" for Warrant Officers? - What's Not 'In It' for Me? - What Should be "In It for Me"

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Why Should USAWOA be Involved?

It is important that USAWOA be involved in the legislative process of this nation. The U.S. Senate and House of Representatives make decisions with 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 PCS rules, are examples of topics of immediate impact. Examples of matters with long-term implications are laws dealing with retirement, health care, commissary access, and so forth.

Equally, it is 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 policies established by congress and the administration. Naturally, USAWOA is more focused on actions of the Department of the Army.

How is USAWOA Involved?

USAWOA influences the legislative and executive branches of government through our membership in an organization named The Military Coalition (TMC). USAWOA is one of the military associations that founded TMC in 1985. 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 the legislative initiatives developed and enacted by congress, as well as the policy initiatives of DoD and DA. Likewise, USAWOA serves an important role within TMC; this being the subject matter expert in the areas and topics unique to warrant officers

What's Special to USAWOA Members about TMC?

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 "military-interest" organizations, TMC does not deal with national defense policy or procurement of systems, hardware, or real estate. Rather, TMC focuses on the "people" side of the equation.

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.

How Does USAWOA’s work with TMC Affect Warrant Officers?

The “full” TMC usually meets once a month. Since TMC founding, a USAWOA representative has participated in this meeting. One may wonder; *“If TMC is involved in so much legislation and policy, 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 are:

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

These committees meet as required (some meet several times a month, depending on “what’s on the plate.”)

One can see that TMC’s committees align very closely with the subjects affecting the “people-side” of the uniformed services. Less obvious is the fact that the committees parallel the important 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 chambers.

In the committees of TMC, what congress is working on, TMC is working on. However, TMC is not limited to the 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.

How does TMC Deal with the Administration, Congress, and DoD?

Annually, TMC prepares and issues “Legislative Goals.” These goals are developed within the committees. 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.

Secondly, TMC is frequently called upon to testify to the military-related committees and sub-committees of congress (usually the SASC, HASC, and Veterans). Also, TMC often receives information and briefings from DoD and/or may be asked to provide information to DoD.

NOTE: The Director of the 9th QRMC (Quadrennial Review of Military Compensation) presented an information briefing to the full TMC. As a result, USAWOA was asked to present a briefing to the working group of the QRMC about warrant officer pay and particularly, the pay compression problem.

Also, it is common for specific personnel from TMC, to be asked to be members of, or advisors to, various commissions, committees, action groups, established by DoD.

What's "In It" for Warrant Officers?

I draw your attention to the preceding "noted" paragraph. As a direct result of the QRMC briefing, the warrant officer population received recognition, understanding and action on pay tables. Additional future benefit is likely to be received.

Second, in the "big picture" topics dealt with by TMC, warrant officers must be represented with a dedicated and specific warrant officer voice. For example, when a TMC committee reviews (or suggests) revision to military housing standards, that voice needs to make sure 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.

Thirdly, 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 a potential commissioned – warrant flight pay inequity. TMC lined up with USAWOA in favor of the correction and it was accepted without debate by congress.

What's Not "In It for Me"?

In this general topic area, warrant officers must accept several "facts of life," even though we may not want to. From my experience and perspective, these are:

- There is very little in law dealing exclusively with warrant officers – we are part of the far larger "package of laws" dealing with the military.
- Warrant officers are a small portion of the Army and DoD population.
- Warrant officers are neither Captains nor Colonels. Therefore, warrant officer pay, allowances, housing, and other benefits will differ from this group.
- Although warrant officers are a critical component of the war-fighting and support team, there are other components equally important to the commander. The world does not revolve around the "chief's desk."

What Should be "In it for Me":

- That warrant officers be fully and fairly considered in all legislative actions and DoD/DA policies.
- The initiation of "catch-up" programs in areas where it can be documented that warrant officers have fallen behind; or were not fully and fairly considered.
- That warrant officer pay be placed at the mid-point between the pay tables of the basic branch commissioned office population and the pay tables of the senior NCO population; thereby creating a distinct, financial incentive for one to move to the warrant officer program

- That allowances, benefits, housing and other quality-of-life factors for warrant officers be enhanced so that there is clear difference from the non-commissioned officer community; thereby creating a distinct, non-financial incentive for one to move to the warrant officer program.
- That USAWOA be the voice of the warrant officer outside official military channels.
- That the Warrant Officer Advisor to the Chief of Staff of the Army, the proponent Chief Warrant Officers of the Branch, and the Command Chief Warrant Officers of the Army Guard and Reserve, be the voice of the warrant officer inside military channels.

These last two elements, teamed together in common cause, will do much to achieve the preceding elements.

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