

## President's Report for State Issues and Storming the Hill

As you all know, I have been extremely busy here of late working with our state legislators in an effort to get many bills relative to the well being of our membership and the military passed through this session of the Texas Legislature. In addition to that, I have just returned from a week in Washington, D.C. working with MOAA National and our Federal Representatives and Senators relative to four issues that MOAA is working on this year.

Let me first address some issues at the Texas State House. One key bill has passed and is on the Governors desk, while others of great importance are almost there.

**SB90 Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children** – This bill has passed and is on the Governors desk to be signed.

**SB93 Relating to tuition and fee exemptions for certain military personnel and their dependents** – This bill has passed the Senate and is out of committee in the House. It should be voted on shortly and will go to the Governor. It enhances the Hazelwood Act to allow spouses of military members to use the Hazelwood.

### Property Tax bills:

#### **Tax relief for disabled veterans (Enabling legislation for Proposition 9)**

##### **1. SB 469 & HB 742: 100% Property tax reduction for 100% disabled veterans:**

- SB 469: Carona et al: Relating to an exemption from ad valorem taxation of the residence homesteads of certain totally disabled veterans and to amount of the exemption from ad valorem taxation to which a disabled veteran is entitled based on disability rating. Estimated 2-year impact to General Revenue funds: negative impact of \$11,421,000 thru biennium ending 8/31//2011. 4/22/09: SB 469 was passed by the Senate; 4/23/09: House received the bill and was read for the first time. 4/30/09: referred to House Ways & Means Committee. 5/7/09 Passed out of Ways and Means to the Calendars Committee.
- HB 742: Kuempel: companion bill to SB 469. Identical. Status: 4/2/09: considered in public hearing; committee substitute considered; reported favorably as substituted; 4/15/2009, **voted out of House Ways & Means Committee**; In Calendars Committee.

**Summary:** HB 742 is in the Calendars Committee waiting to go to the House General Calendar along with SB469 to be debated and voted on. The next move is that we need to call Representative McCall, the Chair of the Calendars Committee and ask him to schedule a vote in the House ASAP. He can be reached at (512) 463-0594. Also, it wouldn't hurt to call the Speaker and ask for his support in getting this scheduled for a vote. Speaker Straus can be reached on (512) 463-0686.

## **2. HB 1299 & SB 421: Lottery Ticket to Benefit Veterans**

- **HB1299:** As Introduced: The bill would make no appropriation but could provide the legal basis for an appropriation of funds to implement the provisions of the bill. 4/7/09: Committee report filed with Committee Coordinator, report printed and distributed. 4/8/09: Committee Report sent to Calendars. 5/8/2009 Passed out of Calendars to the General House Calendar for debate and a vote.
- **SB 421 Action:** a discussion will be held with the authors of SB 421 to determine the best course of action to pursue to ensure optimum support for progress of the bill in the Texas Senate.
- **Summary:** A press conference on 4 May 09 sponsored by Senator Van de Putte and Rep Chris Turner will be held to discuss the scratch-off lottery ticket and to garner public support for the bill. SB421 is presently being held up in the State Affairs Committee by the Chair Sen. Duncan. Senator Duncan can be reached on (512) 463-0128. Sen. Duncan, who is opposed to SB421 and has held it in his Committee since February, has indicated that he would consider releasing SB421 from his Committee to the Senate should HB1299 be passed by the House. Please call your local State House Representative and ask them to support HB1299 when it comes to the floor for debate and a vote. We only have three more weeks until the Legislature is scheduled for adjournment.

## **HB 2689 & SB 2403: making a voluntary contribution to the fund for veterans' assistance when registering a motor vehicle:**

- **HB 2689:** 4/1/09: considered in Defense Affairs Committee public hearing; committee substitute considered; left pending in Committee.
- **SB 2403:** 3/31/09: referred to Senate Finance Committee

- SB 1940: Van de Putte: relating to gifts received for the Fund for Veterans, or voluntary contributions to the Fund by State Employees. 4/16/09: favorably voted out of the Veterans Affairs Committee; Senate vote recorded and engrossed; bill sent to House; received from Senate. 4/21/09: read first time and referred to House Defense & Veterans' Affairs Committee

**3. HB 71, HB 551 & SB 92:** Relating to the establishment of a program to provide a ballot by electronic mail to military personnel serving overseas.

**Summary:** progress is being made in both the House and Senate. As of 4/4/09 no action is required or requested from the Texas Coalition of Veteran Organizations or the TCC.

- **HB 71** Status: 3/11/09: testimony taken in Defense & Veteran Affairs Committee; left pending in committee. 3/23/09: Committee report sent to Calendars. 3/30/09: placed on General State Calendar; read 2<sup>nd</sup> time; passed to engrossment; 3/31/09: read 3<sup>rd</sup> time; amended; passed as amended; record vote; vote engrossed; 4/1/09: **Out of Committee; sent from House to Senate; received from House.** 4/7/09: Senate: read first time and referred to State Affairs Committee. 5/7/09 Reported out of Committee favorably and sent to Calendar for consideration.
- **SB 92:** Van de Putte: companion bill to HB 71 with similar wording. Status: 3/9/09: public testimony taken; bill left pending in committee. 3/23/09: considered in public hearing; report favorably submitted as substituted; recommended for local and uncontested calendar; 3/26/09: out of Committee. 3/30: to Senate Bills Calendar Order as Committee Substitute and recommended for local calendar; scheduled for 2<sup>nd</sup> reading.
- **HB 551:** Relating to the electronic transmission of a federal postcard application used for voting. 3/26/09: House Elections Committee reported favorably without amendments; report printed and distributed; 3/27/09: sent to Local & Consent Calendar; 3/31/09 read 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> time; passed; vote recorded and engrossed; 4/1/09: Senate: report received from House. 4/27/2009 Referred to State Affairs Committee and still in Committee.

I spent last week in Washington, D.C., along with LtCol Virginia Alloway and CAPT Mark Seglem both Board Members for Texas, forming three teams to lobby for MOAA initiatives before all of the Texas Federal Representatives and Senators. MOAA National is pushing for four things this year before the

Congress and it appears that the climate is right to probably get them to the point that they can be achieved!

First and foremost is to bar any disproportional increase in fees for Tricare. MOAA presented very well documented evidence that increases in fees for Tricare were really unjustified and what impressed many Representatives was that MOAA showed ways that DoD could more than make up any fee increases requested by simply implementing some common sense policies. We shall see what happens, but the general consensus is that nothing will happen this year, in particular where Tricare for Life is concerned.

The second issue was that of Sustaining the Defense Budget to fund both People and Weapons. It is recommended that a base of 4% of GDP be dedicated to the DoD that would not have to be renewed each fiscal year. In addition, MOAA is recommending that the Congress support the Presidents proposed budget and give a 3.4% pay increase instead of the proposed 2.9% to the military.

The third issue was to get rid of the "Veteran's Tax" Concurrent Receipt. Veterans should be fully vested and all earning exempted. In addition, there should be no difference between a combat vs. non-combat disability. We need to support HB333 and HR 303 as well as S546 for this issue.

The fourth issue is that of SBP-DIC offset. Support for HR775 and S535 should be given.

For more details on these issues, please look at them on the MOAA.org website.

MOAA National is asking the Texas Council to work with each Chapter to identify a Federal Legislative liaison for each of the Representatives from our respective areas. This person or persons would represent MOAA and their local Chapter to the Representative to make them aware of issues that we need action on at the Federal level. Once identified for each legislator, MOAA National would work directly with that individual or individuals anytime they needed extra emphasis made to the Representative for some issue. They would count on this legislative liaison to carry through with this and not only give the Representative our position, but also give feedback to National as to how the Representative might be leaning on various issues. I would ask each of our Chapters to try and identify such a resource within your Chapter for each Representative in your area and let me know who that is so that work with them and get them in touch with the appropriate people at National MOAA.

Sincerely,

Major James Cunningham  
President  
Texas Council of Chapters  
Military Officers Association of America