

THE CATAWBA VALLEY OFFICERS DISPATCH



MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, CATAWBA VALLEY CHAPTER
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President's Comments: Colonel Dana Tucker

It's heartening to see what's occurring these days in the military establishment. The recently released National Defense Strategy manifests a huge emphasis on increasing our nation's military might—every aspect of it! Also contained in that is a call for allied nations to increase their defense spending to five-percent of GDP, and a strong push on our Defense Industrial Base to produce much faster and to be more cost-effective. I know we all applaud the military establishment's ongoing evolution. But, without being pessimistic, one could visualize all this in the context of a balance scale. On one side of the scale, Congress and the Department of Defense are now spending massive amounts on warfighter and defense capabilities. On the other side, Congress is slowly addressing improvements to pay, benefits, living quarters, and overall quality of life for those who wear or have worn the uniform—and their families! Hopefully, a fair balance will be achieved in the end, albeit proportionately scaled.

If you haven't seen these already, here is a framing of National MOAA's current efforts at achieving that fair balance. MOAA recently announced its top five 2026 legislative priorities: 1.) "Shutdown Fairness Act" to ensure those in uniform are paid during government shutdowns. 2.) "Improve and Enhance the Work Opportunity Tax Credit Act" for employers hiring Veterans. 3.) "Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding VA Benefits Act" to protect Veterans from unscrupulous benefits advisors who charge fees for assistance. 4.) "Military CARE Act" to create a database for improving support from Military Treatment Facilities. 5.) "Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement Act" to provide caregivers health care and transition support. I will have the opportunity to advocate for those issues with legislators and their staff during April's "Advocacy in Action" event wearing my "2nd VP of Advocacy, NCCoC" hat, and will keep you informed of those efforts.

I'm certain we all agree with those five initiatives and I ask that you actively advocate via MOAA's Legislative Action Center. Indeed, it's logical that priority #1 is to ensure that those on active-duty continue to receive their pay during government shutdowns, a perennial event that now seems to be increasing in frequency. While we collectively push for passage of the Shutdown Fairness Act (S-3168), we can't lose sight of the Richard Star Act (H.R. 2102) which is the long-term effort to provide for concurrent receipt of veterans' disability compensation and retired pay for medical retirees with combat-related disabilities. Combat is a violent activity; those who suffer debilitating injuries while courageously fighting the enemy must not be short-changed by a system that provides wounded warrior heroes their disability pay while simultaneously denying them their earned retirement pay.

One last matter I'd like to address. Surely, we all remember the iconic Uncle Sam military recruiting poster that bears the "I want you" caption. Well, our chapter is carrying on in that spirit—we want more members! National MOAA is providing us a newly developed tool that should be of some help in our recruiting efforts. Beyond that, I'm encouraging all chapter members to be somewhat bold when encountering fellow officers in our huge six-county Area of Responsibility (AOR). You'll bump into potential members on the golf course, at the supermarket, at church services, etc. Other than that face-to-face dialogue, it's also possible to carefully slip one of our membership recruiting cards under the windshield wiper of a vehicle displaying military insignia: pilot's vanity plate, Legion of Merit license plate, military academy decal, etc. In any case, it's easy to spark a fellow officer's

interest by simply handing them one of those business cards we've passed out for recruiting use, or even just mentioning our website where there's chapter info and a membership application form—www.moaacvc.org

Our MOAA chapter's recent meeting and dinner featured Guest Speaker Ms. Anne-Marie Pumphrey, an Army Veteran. She was speaking on behalf of the Welcome Home Veterans Museum at Richard's Coffee Shop on Main Street in Mooresville. Anne-Marie gave some history of the Welcome Home Veterans facility, explaining that the "Coffee Shop" moniker stems from its founder. Richard Warren, was a "Huey" attack helicopter pilot in the Vietnam War; he established the original coffee shop as a place where Veterans were welcomed home. Although Richard has passed away, his legacy continues in the new coffee shop which has evolved into a world-class military museum, comprised of donated military artifacts—some of which are priceless! Anne-Marie explained that the coffee shop is a place where Veterans of all ranks from all over this area come together to enjoy camaraderie, especially on Thursday "free coffee day" and Saturday "music jam day." Veterans making their first visit to Richard's coffee shop sign the Book of Honor and receive a beaded key chain that represents the USA and the individual's branch of service. At the conclusion of Ms. Pumphrey's presentation, our Chapter President—Colonel Dana Tucker—gave her a generous donation check from our chapter to help support the Welcome Home Veterans facility. (www.welcomevets.com)

MOAA CVC photo



Ms. Pumphrey speaks at chapter meeting



Vietnam War
Veterans Day
is March 29th



Alamy Photo



Veterans History Museum of the Carolinas in Brevard, NC

The Veterans History Museum of the Carolinas in Brevard, NC is reopening on March 3rd. The museum's mission is: "To honor our nation's veterans, to educate the public about our country's military history and the contribution of our service men and women, and to preserve important and unique historic artifacts." The key aspect of the museum is that it's to portray military history, rather than just display military artifacts. The museum covers WWI, WWII, and the Korean War, Vietnam War, Iraq War, Afghanistan War, and it also includes a Sea Service exhibit covering Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard. There are other special military exhibits, including uniformed manikins, combat weapons, dioramas of key combat scenarios, and video presentations. Plus, special rotating exhibits such as: women in WWI; uniforms of the five military academies, etc. The museum is an excellent side-trip when visiting Asheville. It's a half-hour drive down from Asheville, go south on I-26, take Exit 40 to Hwy 280 down into Brevard: 21 E. Main Street. The museum is open Tuesdays and Saturdays 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and there's no entrance fee! (www.theveteransmuseum.org)

Veterans Stand Down: The 2026 Foothills Veterans Stand Down will be held on April 10, 2026, from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Our chapter will again be a major sponsor of the event that'll be held at Catawba Valley Community College, Tarlton Complex. Address is: 2550 US Hwy 70 - SE Hickory, NC. The event is for all Veterans, with special emphasis on homeless Veterans. Services offered include: medical, vision, dental, education, tax assists, employment counseling, haircuts, shoes, and various community resources. Volunteer staff members can now get their brief training either in-person or via virtual mode, and they receive a free event T-Shirt for their support. Full info and the volunteer on-line application form are on website: <https://foothillsveteranshelpingveterans.com>

2026 National Defense Strategy: The Department of War (DOW) recently published its 2026 National Defense Strategy document. The document begins with a very powerful introduction from the Secretary of War. Next, the publication outlines the global security environment and presents the DOW's Strategic Approach. The Strategic Approach is broken out into four so-called lines-of-effort: 1.) Defend the U.S. Homeland, 2.) Deter China in the Indo-Pacific Through Strength, Not Confrontation, 3.) Increase Burden-Sharing with U.S. Allies and Partners, 4.) Supercharge the U.S. Defense Industrial Base. The actual National Defense Strategy document is posted at: <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>

Dream Home via VA Loan: It's a somewhat obscure fact that the VA offers a construction loan allowing Veterans to build their own one-off designed home, rather than buy an already built home or a "cookie-cutter" home from a developer. The construction loan is structured differently than a traditional mortgage, and it does come with stricter qualifications and greater documentation. The Veteran must use a lender who offers a construction loan product. The lender's funds go into an escrow "draw account" that pays the builder at certain points during home construction. Details on this loan process and requirements are in the VA Buyer's Guide: <https://benefits.va.gov>

USCG Devotion to Duty Bonus: Despite recent payday worries, Coast Guard personnel in paygrades 0-6 and below recently did receive a \$2,000 "Devotion to Duty" one-time bonus. The bonus was authorized by the Secretary of Homeland Security to recognize the incredible achievements by Coast Guard personnel ("Coasties") over the past year. Among their many achievements were: saving 4820 lives, interdicting 165 metric tons of drugs, and servicing 13,448 navigation aids. Remember, passage of the Shutdown Fairness Act is critical for the USCG!

PCS Moves Made Better: On May 1st, the War Department's Personal Property Activity will stand up as a permanent fix to the myriad of woes service members and their families have experienced during permanent change of station (PCS) moves. This is a long overdue fix to the mostly terrible mover service and unfair damage claim process that nearly all military members and spouses have experienced during their military careers. It's perhaps the single most aggravating sore spot of military service, and a significant distractor to the military member's duty performance. A two-star flag officer will command the permanent and fully funded Personal Property Activity that will ensure high quality, reliable and efficient house hold goods and vehicle shipment services for 300,000 military PCS moves that occur each year.

Scammers Never Stop: Many of us subscribe to Amazon Prime that gets renewed annually. Clever scammers are sending out fake e-mail alerts about expiring Amazon Prime memberships, saying the annual renewal is due and that an attempt to automatically process payment failed. The e-mail then requests that the recipient click on a link to update means of payment; that is, give credit card data. The best defense is to not respond or click on any link in the e-mail. Instead, go to your Amazon account to see the renewal date and preloaded payment method. That way, you can safely see the real status in the Amazon domain. Likewise, take note of the fake MOAA membership renewal scam info on the "News & Events" page of our chapter website: www.moaacvc.org. Scammers are e-mailing out fake annual membership fee payment requests that appear to be from MOAA National.

Problems With Pennies: Copper pennies are no longer being minted because it costs about four cents to produce a one penny coin. That's causing problems in the military PX/BX and Commissary because it's getting harder to make change due to the lack of pennies. Another copper penny problem occurred in 1943, at the onset of WWII. Copper was needed for the war effort; specifically, for communications wires & cables and for munitions. Thus, at the start of the war, the U.S. Mint produced Lincoln Steel Cents (pennies) in the form of steel coated zinc coins.

- NEWS FROM THE FIVE MILITARY BRANCHES –

ARMY: 101st Airborne Division soldiers are training with Marine aviators flying the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft in anticipation of the Army’s receipt of Bell MV-75 Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft—also tilt rotor.

NAVY: The highly controversial ship USS Zumwalt just completed its sea trials. This stealthy destroyer provides the Navy with its first hypersonic missile capability. The ship’s crew will be comprised of a mere 140 sailors!

MARINES: II MEF Innovation Campus on Camp Lejeune is now producing drone components, vehicle mounts, and medical tools using high-end 3-D printers; this rapid supply capability can operate in contested environments.

AIR FORCE: Air Expeditionary Wing version 2.0 is being established; this concept forms a deployable combat air wing organized 18 months before deployment, rather than “crowd-sourcing” air assets at the moment of crisis.

SPACE FORCE: Multiple news sources report that Space Force recently awarded a contract worth \$52.5 million to deorbit low earth orbit satellites; this is a first of its kind initiative for end-of-life disposal service in outer space.

Benevolent Fund: Our four designated charities are: Foothills Veterans Helping Veterans (FVHV), Purple Heart Homes (PHH), Piedmont Veterans Assistance Council (PVAC), and Welcome Home Veterans (WHV). Make Benevolent Fund donations by sending a check to our chapter Treasurer. You may annotate the check to specify any of the above charities, or leave it to our Board of Directors that apportions out funds to the various charities.

Treasurer: CDR Dave Olson, 485 26th Ave NE (Unit A), Hickory, NC 28601

2026
Calendar: *General Membership Meetings/Dinners:* Mar 19, May 21, Sep 17, Dec 8
 Board Meetings: Feb 26, Apr 23, Jun 25, Aug 27, Oct 22, Dec 17

CHAPTER PRINCIPALS, DIRECTORS AND STAFF

Chapter President: Colonel Dana Tucker
1st Vice President: Captain “Judd” Taylor
2nd Vice President: Major Jim McCauley
Treasurer: Commander Dave Olson
Secretary: Major Dennis McClish
Chaplain: Vacant
Programs Chairman: Vacant
Director: LTC “Davy” Davenport

Director: Colonel Joe Cansler
Director: Vacant
Legislative Liaison: Colonel Dana Tucker
Surviving Spouses Liaison: Mrs. Mary McClish
Membership Chair: LTC “Davy” Davenport
JROTC Coordinator: Lt Col G. Jane Harmon
Personal Affairs & TOPS: Colonel John Liburdi
Newsletter/Website: Colonel John Liburdi

Join National MOAA: MOAA is the country’s leading organization protecting the rights of military servicemembers and their families. Those who belong to MOAA not only lend their voices to a greater cause, but they also gain access to extensive benefits tailored to the needs and lifestyles of military officers. MOAA members proudly hail from every branch of the uniformed services. To them, MOAA has made the same promise that they have made to their country: Never Stop Serving! Membership is open to those who hold or have ever held a warrant or commission in any component of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, Coast Guard, U.S. Public Health Service or the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration. Learn more about MOAA National and join at either Basic, Premium or Life level by visiting their website: www.moaa.org/content/join-moaa/why-join-moaa

Join MOAA Catawba Valley Chapter: Our chapter covers six counties: Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Iredell and Lincoln. The chapter is active in the community through its Benevolent Fund (explained above) and JROTC support. The chapter also engages in ad hoc charitable support and activity, with emphasis on homeless Veterans. Please note that National MOAA and this affiliated chapter are nonpartisan, without any political party affiliation, bias, or designation. *A one-page chapter membership application mail-in form is available via the “Join Chapter” button on our chapter website homepage at: www.moaacvc.org.*

RESERVATION FOR MOAA CATAWBA VALLEY CHAPTER'S GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING & DINNER

This is my reservation for MOAA Catawba Valley's membership meeting/dinner on **March 19th**, (a Thursday) at Lake Hickory Country Club. Cocktails/social time begins at 6:00 p.m. and dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m. Dress code is coat & tie. The Guest Speaker for this event will be announced at a later date.

Name of attendee(s): _____

Indicate number of entrée selections: Cordon Bleu _____ Baked Salmon _____ Veggi Platter _____

Please send this slip and your check (**\$40.00 per attendee**) to arrive no later than March 16th, a Monday, to:



Commander Dave Olson, 485 26th Ave NE (Unit A), Hickory, NC 28601

(Please be aware that participants attending this event may be photographed or recorded for MOAA media products.)

(SEE NEXT PAGE FOR A SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM NATIONAL MOAA REGARDING VA DISABILITY RATINGS)

VA's 24/7 Crisis Line: Dial 988 and press 1, or text 838255, or chat online at website: VeteransCrisisLine.net/chat

VA's Fraud & Scam Protection reporting desk: VSAFE.gov & 1-833—388-7233

Defense Manpower Data Center DS central website: www.dmdc.osd.mil

DoD ID Card Office Online at: <https://idco.dmdc.osd.mil/idco/>

Ideas for Guest Speakers always welcome—no sales pitches please!

Tell prospective members about our website: www.moaacvc.org

FYI: - Receive this newsletter via e-mail by requesting to: moaacvcnews@hotmail.com

- Directly access the MOAA "Legislative Action Center" at: www.moaa.quorum.us

(FROM: NATIONAL MOAA)

Council and Chapter Leaders:

Good morning — I'm writing to update you on a VA interim final rule released earlier this week and then promptly rescinded by VA leadership. I ask that you share this with your members through your communications channels. MOAA's official statement in this matter follows.

A new VA rule designed to “clarify existing policy” regarding veteran disability ratings met sharp criticism from veterans and advocates in the hours after its release, leading VA Secretary Doug Collins to announce the department will be “halting enforcement” of the rule immediately.

“MOAA joins others in thanking and applauding Secretary Collins’ decision to halt the implementation of the interim final rule,” MOAA President and CEO Lt. Gen. Brian T. Kelly, USAF (Ret), said after the VA announcement. “We appreciate the secretary’s continued focus on veterans’ concerns and on ensuring veterans receive all benefits they have earned as quickly and conveniently as possible. Veterans should never have to consider whether seeking treatment or taking medications could lead to a reduction in their benefits.”

Veterans’ advocates stated the rule could allow the VA to lower disability ratings (and compensation) for veterans whose conditions are controlled or improved by medication. Such a rule could lead to unintended consequences and may not account for a medication’s side effects or other ways a veteran’s daily life may be impeded by their ailments.

Many also took issue with the VA’s rulemaking process, which did not include the customary notice-and-comment process or meaningful engagement with Veterans service organizations and other stakeholders. Although comments were not solicited before the rule was considered final, there reportedly were nearly 9,000 comments on the Federal Register website within 48 hours of the rule’s posting.

“Transparency, clarity, and trust are bedrocks for veterans and are non-negotiable elements in supporting the continuance of the all-volunteer force,” Kelly said.

In a social media post announcing the reversal, Collins said the intent of the rule was “to clarify existing policy and protect Veterans’ benefits in the wake of an ongoing court action.” But many interpreted the rule as something that could result in adverse consequences.

The VA “does not agree with the way this rule has been characterized,” Collins continued, but noted that “the department always takes Veterans’ concerns seriously.”

MOAA looks forward to continuing work alongside the VA to ensure the delivery and maintenance of service-earned benefits, Kelly said.

MOAA will continue to monitor this issue and, as we learn and understand more, will communicate any associated MOAA actions in this matter through our member communications channels.

Thanks again for your leadership and support, V/R

CAPT Frank J. Michael, USN (Ret)
Senior Director, Affiliated Councils & Chapters
Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)