



SWEETWATER CHAPTER MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

Established December 12, 1972

THE MARINERS LOG

Volume LVI, Issue No.05

May 2026

FUTURE HAPPENINGS

****First Monday, May 4, 2026: Chapter Board meeting at 9:00 A.M.** at Bonita Golf Club Lounge, 5540 Sweetwater Road, Bonita, CA 91902.

****Second Wednesday, May 13, 2026:** MOAA, Sweetwater Chapter luncheon meeting at 11:00 AM, at IHOP Restaurant, 1430 E. Plaza Blvd., National City, CA 91950.

**** May 5, 2026** – Cinco De Mayo

**** May 10, 2026** – Mother's Day

**** May 25, 2026** – Memorial Day

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

***** MOAA, Sweetwater Chapter will be sponsoring JROTC cadets this year from two different High Schools.** Awards will be presented to deserving cadets from the Air Force JROTC at Mt. Miguel High School and U.S. Navy JROTC at San Ysidro High School. It is always an honor to recognize the accomplishments of these young cadets. These outstanding students have demonstrated discipline, resilience, and a strong dedication to excellence both inside and outside the classroom.

***** Memorial day will be observed on May 25, 2026.** On this day, let us honor and remember those who died while serving in the military. These brave men and women of the military paid the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our nation.

Was Your VA Appeal Denied? You Could Be Part of a Class Action Settlement

By: Kevin Lilley April 20, 2026 MOAA Newsletter

Tens of thousands of disability claims denied by the VA over 35 years are part of a class action case that could result in reactivation of previously closed files.

Claimants whose case was closed between Dec. 12, 1990, and Feb. 6, 2025, would be part of a proposed settlement under *Freund v. Collins*, a case which alleges the VA's automated system improperly closed appeal cases because veterans had not filed materials in time, and that veterans did not receive notification of the closures. The proposed settlement is under court review, according to a VA.gov article outlining terms and eligibility. If approved, it would:

- Trigger a manual review of more than 28,000 closed appeal files that may have had "a timely substantial appeal."
- Reactivate all files found to have such an appeal, and notify the claimant of the reactivation.
- Complete the review in 18 months, and "process the reactivated cases expeditiously."

Am I Eligible?

Along with the timeframe mentioned above, the suit applies only to cases decided before Feb. 19, 2019. Veterans whose case meets all the criteria will not have to take action; the VA will review the case automatically in line with the terms of the settlement.

However, 64,599 other appeal files "met most but not all of the parameters that VA used when searching for potential class members," according to the VA.gov article. In these cases, claimants who believe their appeal was unfairly denied would need to request a review; these claimants would receive notices from the VA as part of the proposed settlement.

Learn More

VA.gov includes more official resources regarding the case, such as contact information for further details and how to object to the proposed settlement.

While MOAA can provide general information regarding VA appeal processes, those who believe their VA appeal may be part of this class action and have any questions about their benefits should reach out to class counsel John D. Niles at freundclass@carpenterchartered.com. MOAA cannot determine official eligibility under the suit, nor can the association assist with VA document preparation.

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The Next Steps: 3 Upcoming Moments That Matter for Your Benefits

By: Kevin Lilley APRIL 22, 2026 MOAA Newsletter



Dena Kilgore/MOAA

The issues at the heart of MOAA's signature spring advocacy campaign will remain at the top of our priority list, but they are far from the only issues involving service-earned benefits on Capitol Hill.

And as the legislative calendar rolls ahead, it's critical that MOAA members remain engaged.

Here's a look at three upcoming touchstones for the 119th Congress and what each could mean for the wider uniformed services community.

Building the NDAA

What: The must-pass FY 2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) will be the year's largest legislative vehicle for critical defense issues, to include military pay rates, quality of life reforms, TRICARE changes, and much more.

When: Legislators and staffers already have begun crafting the legislation. House lawmakers reportedly are targeting early June for the official NDAA mark-up session, where much of the final bill takes shape.

MOAA's Role: With Congress passing fewer standalone bills than in previous sessions, the NDAA may provide the only practical path for some MOAA legislative priorities to become law. As negotiations continue and amendments move forward, we will look to key legislators to champion a range of issues, to include Advocacy in Action priorities

(Benefits Continued on page 3)



At our April MOAA, Sweetwater Chapter Luncheon Meeting, Marvelyn Hoyt shared memories from the Apollo 13 Moon Mission – 56 years ago. Sweetwater Chapter members, LT William Hoyt (Marvelyn’s husband) and Warrant Officer Eugene Rinehart were both serving aboard the recovery ship, the U.S.S. Iwo Jima and participated in the recovery mission. Both ocean landings were here in San Diego.

(Benefits Continued from page 2)
and other benefits protections.

Passing a Budget

What: The administration released its FY 2027 budget proposal in early April, including \$1.5 trillion for national defense and nearly \$490 billion for the VA.

When: The fiscal year ends Sept. 30, giving Congress about five months to pass a budget without relying on a continuing resolution to keep the government open. Lawmakers haven’t passed a budget on time since 1997.

MOAA’s Role: Not only will MOAA continue to advocate for the full funding of national defense and veterans programs, but we will continue to urge Congress to break the cycle of continuing resolutions, which result in wasted resources, misaligned funds, and financial uncertainty for servicemembers and their families. We will also push for passage of the Shutdown Fairness Act, an Advocacy in

Action priority that would protect military servicemember pay during federal funding lapses.

Election Season

What: Voters will go to the polls to determine who holds every House seat and one-third of Senate seats for the 120th Congress.

When: Election Day is Nov. 3, but campaign season is in full swing in many parts of the country. After a lame-duck session, the new Congress will begin Jan. 3, 2027.

MOAA’s Role: MOAA does not endorse candidates, but it’s no secret that lawmakers on the campaign trail are more likely to listen to constituent concerns as they court votes. Members who engage their legislators on MOAA priorities – either through our Legislative Action Center or in person in their home districts – can show the importance of these issues as supporters of the uniformed services community head to the ballot box.

SWEETWATER CHAPTER MOAA – BOARD MEETING MINUTES

MARCH 2, 2026

I. 9:32 A.M. – The Board meeting was called to order by President Ernie Liwag.

II. Ernie Liwag led the Pledge of Allegiance. Attendees were Ernie & Remy Liwag, Vivian Rinehart, Oscar & Veronica Garcia, Marvelyn Hoyt, Rich and Jean Wilson.

III. Secretary’s Report – Submitted by Secretary, Rich Wilson. Motion made by Jean Wilson, 2nd by Marvelyn Hoyt, minutes approved as corrected.

IV. Treasurer’s Report – Submitted by Treasurer, Oscar Garcia: January 31,2026 the ending balance was \$4416.49. Income for February was \$77.00 and expenses for CALMOAA were \$156.00 leaving a February 28,2026 balance of \$4337.49. Motion to approve by Rich Wilson, 2nd by Marvelyn Hoyt. Motion approved.

V. Presidents Report – Submitted by Ernie Liwag:

- a. Next Board meeting: Monday, April 6,2026 at 9:00 A.M. at Bonita Golf Club Lounge,5540 Sweetwater Road, Bonita, CA 91902.

b. Next Luncheon meeting: Wednesday, March 11,2026 at 11:00 AM at IHOP Restaurant, 5540 Plaza Blvd, National City, CA 91950.

c. Paid CALMOAA dues at \$6.00 per member: \$156.00.

d. IRS Form 990 and FTB Form 199.

e. Membership dues deadline: March 31,2026.

f. VA disability ratings.

g. July 8 – Independence Day Picnic.

VI. Newsletter Editor Report – (Jean Wilson): N/A

VII. Sunshine Report – (Marvelyn Hoyt): Nothing from Jillian or Dick

VIII. Surviving Spouses Report – (Vivian Rinehart): All have paid their dues.

IX. Old/New Business – N/A

X. Adjournment –Motion to adjourn by Rich Wilson, 2nd Jean Wilson. Adjourned 10:05 A.M.

MOAA Joins Gold Star Spouses in Call for Improved Survivor Benefits

By: Tony Lombardo April 28, 2026 MOAA Newsletter



Capt. Julie Hammond, USNR (Ret), a Gold Star spouse and MOAA Life member, discusses survivor benefit legislation with Rep. John Rutherford (R-Fla.). She travelled to Washington, D.C., with fellow members of the Gold Star Spouses of America for the association’s April 21 advocacy day at the Capitol. (Photo by Tony Lombardo/MOAA)

Gold Star spouses from around the country arrived in Washington, D.C., this month to meet with Congress and advocate on behalf of all uniformed services survivors.

“It is our job to educate them about the issues. There are too many bills for any one person to know about all of them,” said Kathy Prout, a MOAA Life member and founding member of Gold Star Spouses of America (GSSA).

The organization led an April 21 campaign on the Hill that included several MOAA members and staff among the advocacy teams meeting with legislative leaders.

“Everyone should have the opportunity to see how democracy works,” said Prout, who was honored this year as one of MOAA’s 2025 Changemakers. “I feel so fortunate to be able to participate in our government through grassroots advocacy.”

GSSA outlined three legislative priorities, and MOAA backs each of them:

The Caring for Survivors Act (H.R. 2055 | S. 611). Dependency and Indemnity Compensation rates for survivors of those who die in the line of duty, or of veterans who die of service-connected ailments, have been only minimally adjusted since 1993. They now rest at 43% of a 100% disabled veteran’s compensation; this bill would raise that rate to 55%, resulting in about \$450 more per month and matching the compensation percentage offered by similar federal programs.

The bill also allows more survivors who have cared for a disabled veteran to claim DIC benefits. Current law requires a veteran to have been totally disabled by a serv-

(Gold Star Continued on page 5)

(Gold Star Continued from page 4)

ice-connected condition for at least 10 years for a survivor to qualify for DIC. The Caring for Survivors Act would reduce this to five years.

The Sharri Briley and Eric Edmundson Veterans Benefits Expansion Act (H.R. 6047). This bill would increase the rate of DIC to provide additional financial support for survivors and increase the rate of Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) to boost financial support for catastrophically service-connected disabled veterans. The bill is named for Sharri Briley, widow of CWO3 Donovan Briley, an Army Black Hawk pilot killed in Somalia in 1993, and for Eric Edmundson, a former Army sergeant who suffered shrapnel wounds, a heart attack, and a brain injury after his Humvee struck a roadside bomb in Iraq in 2005.

The Love Lives on Act (H.R. 1004 | S. 410). This bill would allow surviving spouses to maintain certain benefits, including DIC and Survivor Benefit Plan payments, regardless of the age at which they remarry. Current law revokes these benefits if the spouse remarries before age 55, leaving many young spouses a stark choice: Restore a two-parent household or maintain financial security.

MOAA Life member Julie Hammond, a Gold Star Spouse and retired Navy Reserve captain, met with Rep. John Rutherford during the Hill Day event. When hearing Hammond make her case for the Love Lives On Act, the Florida Republican told her his name would be on the bill tomorrow. He kept his word.

Hammond's husband was killed in a 1986 helicopter accident 10 miles off the coast of Mayport, Fla.

With only a small percentage of Americans willing to serve, and a small percentage of those families enduring the death of their servicemember in the line of duty, Gold Star spouses risk being forgotten, Hammond acknowledged. Advocacy efforts like GSSA's Hill Day are essential.

"We could easily disappear into nothing," she said. "Us being here, seeing our face, interacting with us, hearing our stories, makes a big difference."

'Fundamental Fairness': Fight for Combat-Injured Veterans Continues on Multiple Fronts

By: Kevin Lilley April 20, 2026 MOAA Newsletter

More than 300 lawmakers' offices heard about the fight to end an unjust offset faced by tens of thousands of combat-injured veterans April 15 as MOAA members made their priorities known during the annual Advocacy in Action event.

That same day, another group of veteran advocates hosted a bipartisan press conference on Capitol Hill to shine a brighter spotlight on the Major Richard Star Act –



1st Sgt. David Star, USA (Ret), speaks at an April 15 press conference on Capitol Hill in support of his brother's namesake legislation. (Photo by Nicole Cross/MOAA)

a bill with the support of more than 390 lawmakers ... but one that has yet to receive a vote by either the full House or Senate.

"It is time for us to go ahead and move this bill forward, get the 54,000 combat-wounded veterans their retirement pay – the retirement pay that they shed their very blood for," 1st Sgt. David Star, USA (Ret), brother of the bill's namesake.

Maj. Richard Star, USAR, died in 2021 after battling cancer linked to burn pit exposure. When his illness forced him into an early military retirement, Star advocated tirelessly in support of legislation that would allow early retirees to collect both service-connected retirement pay and disability-based VA compensation without a dollar-for-dollar offset.

Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.), who introduced the House version of the bill, called it an issue of "fundamental fairness."

"Quite simply, these brave men and women are penalized for being wounded in service to our nation," Bilirakis said during the April 15 event, hosted by the Veterans Justice Alliance. "Fiscal responsibility should never come at the expense of the men and women who have already sacrificed their health, their careers, in many ways their future earning potential, in defense of our freedom."

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), who introduced the Senate version of the bill, twice asked for the chamber to move the legislation forward under unanimous consent, a procedural tool that can be derailed by a single objection. The bill was blocked in both instances, with opponents citing cost concerns.

"One of the costs of war is to care for our veterans," Blumenthal said at the press event. "We made promises. We're failing to keep those promises. I can't imagine a more important cause for me and for the Congress than

(Fairness Continued on page 6)

(Fairness Continued from page 5)

making sure we eliminate this injustice.”

Work will continue on multiple paths to ensure the bill becomes law, Blumenthal said, such as efforts to include support for combat-injured veterans as part of any supplemental funding bills and during the annual National Defense Authorization Act mark-up process.

Supporters working to end the “wounded veteran tax” faced by these combat-injured retirees have come from across the military advocacy community. Along with MOAA’s work through our Advocacy in Action campaign, the association was a founding member of the Star Act Alliance, a group of nonprofits including Veterans of Foreign Wars, Wounded Warrior Project, Blue Star Families, and more groups working together to move the bill forward.

And while it’s likely your lawmakers have agreed to cosponsor the legislation, it’s clear from this session (and previous sessions) that signing on to support the bill isn’t enough: Even if you’ve already engaged with your legislators on this issue, do so again to keep the unjust offset faced by tens of thousands of combat-wounded veterans top of mind on Capitol Hill.

Advocacy in Action: States Need Support Protecting Veterans From ‘Claim Sharks’

By: Kevin Lilley april 15, 2026 MOAA Newsletter



Col. Michael Kelly, USAF (Ret), president of MOAA’s Kansas Council of Chapters, left, and MOAA Board Chairman Gen. Thomas Waldhauser, USMC (Ret), meet with staffers in the office of Sen. Jerry Moran (R-Kansas) on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., on April 15. (Photo by Mike Morones/MOAA)

Dozens of states have either passed or introduced legislation designed to address unaccredited VA claims agents, some of whom may charge veterans or survivors tens of thousands of dollars for support they aren’t legally allowed to provide ... support already available from other sources at no cost to the claimant.

But this patchwork solution, triggered by a 2006

change in federal law that removed criminal penalties for unaccredited agents – also known as “claim sharks” – has led to predictable consequences.

“You left the speed limit sign up on the interstate, but you took away the highway patrol and the traffic courts,” said Col. Michael Kelly, USAF (Ret), president of MOAA’s Kansas Council of Chapters and a 2022 recipient of MOAA’s Colonel Steve Strobridge Legislative Liaison Award. “We don’t want benefits to be diverted from those who earned them.”

Kelly joined fellow chapter leaders, MOAA members, and MOAA staff on April 15 in Washington, D.C., for Advocacy in Action, MOAA’s signature spring advocacy event. On the agenda: Passage of the Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding (GUARD) VA Benefits Act (H.R. 1732), which would restore criminal penalties and protect veterans and survivors from predatory claims practices.

State-Based Protections

While some states have passed legislation designed to offer these protections, others have moved forward with bills empowering the unaccredited agents.

In Kansas, a package of veteran-related legislation included a measure supported by for-profit claims agents “positioning themselves as the good guys,” Kelly said – promising regulations, but providing legal status to operate in the state despite federal guidance.

“The whole thing is to create legitimacy,” Kelly said.

Gov. Laura Kelly expressed overall support for the package but said the legislature “added a provision to this bill that would allow for-profit entities to prey upon unsuspecting veterans, charging them hefty fees for services those veterans can receive at no-charge from state-supported veterans’ service organizations.”

She called it a “poison pill provision” and vetoed the bill April 8. Michael Kelly said the bill was a single vote away from a veto-proof supermajority, and a follow-up measure that would’ve required state veterans services to coordinate with a group representing unaccredited claims agents died in committee by a similarly slim margin.

“This isn’t over,” Michael Kelly said. “They’re going to come back. They’re paying lobbyists.”

Legislation in Louisiana to support unaccredited claims agents was declared unconstitutional by a federal court in February. States like California, Maine, New Jersey, and New York have passed legislation designed to curb predatory practices, in some cases based on state consumer protection law, but millions of veterans remain unprotected nationwide.

“Some states have moved in positive directions to support their veteran populations, and MOAA members have been at the front of some of those fights,” said Jen Goodale, MOAA’s director of Government Relations for

(Sharks Continued on page 7)

(Sharks Continued from page 6)

Veteran and Retired Affairs. “But this is a federal issue involving the VA, and it needs a federal fix. That’s why we’re here backing the GUARD VA Benefits Act.”

Forty-four state attorneys general put their voices behind the legislation in a 2023 letter to lawmakers. No matter your state, you can add your voice to the cause at MOAA’s Legislative Action Center. Looking to find out more about state-level advocacy? Reach out to a nearby MOAA chapter.

MOAA Member Found Passion in Teaching Post-Service

April 22, 2026 MOAA Newsletter



Now-Col. Thomas E. Snodgrass, USAF (Ret), is pictured with an EC-47 airborne radio direction (ARDF) aircraft. He scheduled 130 ARDF aircraft on intelligence collection missions in Vietnam. (Courtesy photos)

By Kathie Rowell

In 1963, then brand-new college graduate Col. Thomas E. Snodgrass, USAF (Ret), could see the conflict in Vietnam was heating up. He decided to join the Air Force to fight from the air instead of on the ground.

“They gave me an eye test and said, ‘What else would you like to do?’ I said, ‘Well, I’m pretty good at history and language.’ They said, ‘OK’ and put me into signals intelligence.”

That beginning turned into a 30-year military career, primarily in intelligence, and a subsequent civilian career as an educator.

Snodgrass’ early assignments saw him serving around the world in various intelligence roles intercepting Soviet and Chinese Communist radio transmissions and controlling access and analysis of sensitive intercepted communications.

Career highlights include serving in Vietnam as the officer-in-charge of Airborne Radio Direction Finding for U.S. Military Assistance Command, serving in a diplomatic position negotiating and implementing the 1979 Panama

Canal treaty, and an assignment as air attaché for the U.S. Embassy in Communist Warsaw, Poland, where he functioned as both a diplomat and an intelligence collector.

He also served in the role of educator, teaching counterinsurgency, unconventional warfare, and psychological operations; Soviet foreign policy; and military history and strategy, with his last position at the Air War College.

Those experiences led him to a civilian career teaching American history and American military history at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Arizona until he retired in 2011.

“My first and foremost goal was to educate my students on what we were facing as a society,” said Snodgrass, a member of MOAA’s Northern Arizona Chapter, pictured with his wife, Susan.

He was recognized by Marquis Who’s Who Top Educators for dedication, achievements, and leadership in humanities.

Lt. Col. Edward Hume, USAF (Ret), has known Snodgrass since the 1980s when their tours overlapped at the U.S. Air Force Academy. Snodgrass was the superintendent’s executive officer, and Hume was the deputy head of the Law Department. When Hume moved in 1995 to the same Arizona town where Snodgrass resides, they crossed paths at church, and the two became friends.

“His knowledge and experience are extensive about national security and international relations in which I had some involvement and a great interest,” Hume said. “In addition to many discussions in this area of mutual interest, we also participated in presenting renewal weekend retreats in Arizona for our religious denomination. Tom’s faith and character [are] in my opinion exemplary and strong.”

Kathie Rowell is a writer based in Louisiana.



Why I Serve: Marine Officer on Leadership, Sacrifice, and Pride in the Corps

By: Blair Drake

(This article originally appeared in the May 2026 issue of Military Officer, a magazine available to all MOAA Premium and Life members who can log in to access our digital version and archive. Basic members can save on a membership upgrade and access the magazine.)

When he was a sophomore in high school, William Bowers saw Marines working out on the track during his

(Marine Continued on page 8)

(Marine Continued from page 7)



Lt. Gen. William Bowers, USMC, serves as deputy commander for manpower and reserve affairs. (Photo by Mike Morones/MOAA)

football practice, and he knew then he wanted to serve. “I was impressed with their physical fitness, toughness, and military bearing,” he said. After high school, Bowers attended the Virginia Military Institute, beginning his pursuit of commissioning as a Marine Corps officer. Now a lieutenant general, he serves as deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs.

Vast Experiences

“I have had the opportunity to serve in every Marine expeditionary force and every element of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force, to serve in both recruiting and recruit training, and to command at every rank,” Bowers said. “I also was afforded the opportunity to attend incredible military and civilian schools.”

Lead by Listening

“The most valuable skill I’ve learned is active listening. This is so important because we have such high-quality personnel in the Marine Corps who are so smart and talented, so the key to success is genuinely listening to their ideas.”

Standing Proud

I take the most pride in seeing Marines who I had a hand in helping become a Marine or had an opportunity to serve with who go on to excel and achieve great things for our Corps and country. It’s particularly rewarding when you see someone as a civilian with so much raw potential, but then you see them blow past that while serving as a Marine.

Supporting Sacrifice

I hope my service is making life a little bit better for Marines and their families who have taken up the challenge of serving the country during this particularly challenging time. Marines serve. Families sacrifice.

Forget Failure: Follow the Feedback

By: Erin Cardinal April 13, 2026 MOAA Newsletter



PBNJ Productions/Getty Images

Spring is often a season of renewal. It signals change and new beginnings, reminding us that fresh starts aren’t limited to one moment on the calendar. But change doesn’t always arrive on our terms — and when it doesn’t, it can feel unsettling, even disruptive.

This spring will be my first without my dad. I’ve experienced loss before, but this one feels different. More personal. More clarifying.

Confronting mortality has a way of sharpening perspective. Time feels more finite, and the things we’ve been forcing — or simply living with out of habit — become harder to justify.

Recognizing that something needs to change doesn’t mean we were doing it wrong. It means the conditions have shifted. What people are often quick to label as failure is, in fact, feedback — information telling us it may be time to adapt.

Transitions frequently come with a sense of loss, especially when change is driven by external circumstances beyond our control. And loss, in any form, is something people grieve. That grief can cloud how we interpret what’s happening, making it easy to see disruption as defeat.



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