

## **LEGISLATIVE UPDATE**

Kudos to the Virginia General Assembly. With late hour wrangling the House and Senate were able to agree on a budget for the forthcoming year and adjourn on time. So, how did we fare now that the dust has settled? The following report was received from Col Sam Wilder, USA (Ret), VCOC Legislative Chair. I certainly could not have said it better myself so I will quote him.

1. “JLC Priority #1: Veterans Claims System (“Turbo Vet”) – Not only have we restored the \$50,000 that had been cut by the Governor, but an additional \$100,000 has been added in the second year. So, we now have a total of \$150,000 to do pilot programs and to keep the program alive. This is much better than we had hoped for.
2. “JLC Priority #2: Interstate Compact for Education of Military Children – The budget amendment submitted by Delegate Mark Cole only asked for \$75,000 to pay dues to the Compact. However, the Fiscal Impact Statement reported that a full time position was needed in the Department of Education. We tried to tell them that it was not needed and that no other state has done it. Nevertheless, the budget conferees provided \$200,000 for the compact! This will fund the dues, a full time position, and another \$20,000 for travel and admin. This is much more than we had expected. So, it looks like Virginia will, in fact, join the Interstate Compact for Education of Military Children. A job well done by all those who worked so hard on this one!
3. “Virginia Wounded Warrior Program – The governor had cut \$200,000 from the program. That \$200,000 has been restored.
4. “Virginia War Memorial – The budget conferees have appropriated \$6.5 million in real dollars. It is no longer a Treasury loan. My understanding is that we now have no obstacle to starting construction of the Galanti Education Center.

“As in the past, the budget negotiator that has helped us the most was Delegate Kirk Cox. This time a very strong ally and supporter for our veterans’ issues was Delegate Phil Hamilton. Hamilton is the House Appropriations Vice-Chair and likely to be the Chair in the future. We need to thank him also for his support. He will be key in the future.

“This was an extremely tough year for all legislation. Yet, thanks to the hard work of a lot of people from many of our Veterans service organizations, we have done extremely well! A huge debt of thanks is owed to all of you.”

On the national scene, MOAA (ever vigilant in these matters) announced that for the first time in history, the FY2010 budget includes provisions to expand coverage of concurrent receipt to disabled veterans not currently eligible to receive such. Though details are sketchy at this point, this could mean that medical retirees with less than 20 years service and at least a 50% VA rating could be authorized to receive disability pay.

The budget proposes a troop increase of 15,000 for the Army and 8,000 for the Marines. MOAA strongly supports these increases.

The budget proposes a 2.9% pay increase for active duty, Guard and Reserve forces. MOAA is pushing for a 3.4% increase to restore full military pay comparability.

The budget includes an approximate 11% increase to \$55.9 billion for “discretionary” VA programs (mostly health care). When “mandatory” spending programs (GI Bill, survivor benefits, disability compensation, etc.) are added in, the total is around \$113 billion. Included are funds to expand health care for “priority group 8” veterans (nondisabled vets with incomes above certain locality-based thresholds) by approximately 500,000 over the next four years. (Frank Duckett, Maj, USAF (Ret), 757-253-1824)