

REPORT OF THE 2017 NATIONAL CONVENTION

Park Inn by Radisson Resort & Conference Center – Kissimmee, FL

June 10, 2017

National President Kirk Bennett called the National Convention to order at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 10, 2017. The Civil Air Patrol 463rd Cadet Squadron advanced and posted the Colors under the supervision of AMRA Sergeant-At-Arms, Roger Mick, followed by the Opening Prayer by National Chaplain John Babcock, and the Pledge of Allegiance by the Assembly.

National Officers, National Directors, Past National Presidents, Department Presidents, Chapter Presidents and Delegates from Treasure Coast Chapter FL1, Space Coast Chapter FL2 and Hopewell Chapter VA2 were in attendance, in addition to nine “first-timers” who were introduced and welcomed by the President and convention attendees.

Roll call by National Secretary John Monahan, Approval of Convention Rules and Minutes of the 2016 Las Vegas Convention were followed by reports from National Officers on their activities on behalf of AMRA members since the last convention.

National Legislative Director Ted Painter delivered a comprehensive report on AMRA’s legislative activities during the past year. Mr. Painter recounted a new collaborative process which entails AMRA’s identification of a champion for issues that are vital to military retirees and their families, working with the Member of Congress’s staff to provide AMRA’s Position Paper and a Letter of Support for the champion’s proposed legislation, bringing staff members of Members of Congress working on the bill together to formulate a plan and then bringing support from other VSO members of the National Military & Veterans Alliance (NMVA) on board to provide Letters of Support. AMRA is a member of the NMVA and Mr. Painter is Co-Director of the Alliance. A specific example of this collaborative process is currently underway as AMRA works to find a new path to concurrent receipt of military retirement pay and disability compensation. This new path is on track to have an amendment placed into the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

Mr. Painter went on to provide details on initiatives and progress on a variety of issues and pending legislation.

Pentagon Health Care Proposals: Due to AMRA’s lead on these issues, and the collaborative efforts of other VSOs, not one of the Pentagon’s proposals made it to the NDAA which means that there will be no fee increases or new “participation” fees for any current retirees or service members and that open enrollment windows for TRICARE for Life will not be implemented.

Honor America’s Guard-Reserve Retirees Act: This issue has been one of AMRA’s hardest fought victories. In collaboration with several VSOs, today Reserve and National Guard service members who are eligible for retirement but who have not served on Active Duty other than for training purposes, are now designated as **veterans**. Originally, passage of legislation only granted “honorary status” to these service members but AMRA continued to push to have full veteran status codified in Title 38 law. We are pleased to report that the Miller-Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Act amended Title 38 of the United States Code to codify veteran status was signed into law in December, 2016.

Uniformed Services Former Spouse Protection Act: In response to many calls from AMRA members about the unfairness of having their states treat post-divorce promotions and longevity pay increases as

marital assets, AMRA took action. Working with Congressman Russell's office, AMRA provided a Letter of Support for the Military Personnel Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee's amendment to the 2017 NDAA. Through NMVA, AMRA brought along thirteen VSOs representing 1.5 million members to provide support for the NDAA amendment. The amendment survived the entire legislative process and was signed into law in December, 2016. The law preserves a fair amount of support for surviving spouses while allowing service members to fully benefit from promotions and pay raises earned solely through his/her efforts after the effective date of a dissolved marriage.

Concurrent Receipt: As mentioned above, AMRA's new collaboration plan now finds the staffs of three Members of Congress coordinating with professional staff of the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to clear the way for consideration in the 2018 NDAA. Getting to this stage has been a nearly **two year effort** and it has been achieved **solely by AMRA**. AMRA's plan would, over the course of ten years, focus on a disability percentage of both regular retirees not receiving Combat Related Special Compensation (CRSC) and Chapter 61 retirees not receiving CRSC each year. This method keeps the overall cost, year by year, as low as possible while allowing both of these key groups to be positively impacted.

Survivor Benefit Plan Offset (SBP-DIC): The SBP-DIC offset takes a dollar-for-dollar amount from a surviving spouse's Survivor Benefit Plan (for which the deceased spouse paid 6.5% monthly from retirement pay) if the deceased spouse was also 100% disabled at the time of death.

VSOs have been trying to right this egregious wrong for decades. AMRA, partnering with the Society of Military Widows (SMW) began gathering testimonials from widows on the impact of the SBO-DIC offset. AMRA presented the testimonials in its official congressional testimony to the Joint Committee on Veterans Affairs. Three days after the Joint Committee heard testimony, the House Armed Services Committee released its annual "views and estimates" letter which petitions congressional appropriators on a host of military spending priorities. We are pleased to report that SBP-DIC appeared on the list for the first time in six years! AMRA continues to monitor this issue and will report to members on any developments.

21st Century Cures Act: For five years AMRA has been supporting efforts to pass legislation that takes aim at the growing threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. We previously supported the PATH ACT because superbugs are infecting our service members, veterans, retirees and fellow citizens at an alarming rate. AMRA advocated within NMVA and nineteen other VSOs representing nearly 2.5 million members signed on. The 21st Century CURES Act became law in December of 2016 and will save many lives.

Military Retiree Appreciation Day: AMRA has long wanted to have a day set aside by Congress to recognize the sacrifices, service and contributions of military retirees. We were pleased to have Congressman Stefanik and Congressman Bishop jointly introduce House Resolution 782 but due to procedural rules in the House, the bill could not be advanced. AMRA is currently seeking a champion in the Senate which has no procedural rules to impede progress on our request.

President Bennett next called upon National Chaplain John Babcock who conducted a moving Memorial Service for all AMRA members who have passed away since the last Convention.

Resolutions Committee Chair, John Monahan, presented twelve Legislative Resolutions for approval by delegates. These Resolutions will guide the Association's advocacy efforts for 2017-2018. Approved Legislative Resolutions are available at www.amra1973.org/advocacy. One General Resolution was approved to amend the Department & Chapter Bylaws, eliminating required the annual Department dues paid by Chapters to the Department.

President Bennett presented the following awards at the annual Awards Luncheon:

- Chapter of the Year** – Carolina Lowcountry Chapter, SC1
- Highest Percentage Membership Gain** – Lone Star Chapter, TX1
- Member of the Year** – John Monahan of Minuteman Chapter, MA1
- Plaques to Retiring Board Members** – David Cook & Ted Painter
- Certificates of Appreciation** – National Officers

The second session of the convention was called to order and Foundation President J.B. Kump was invited to accept donations to the Foundation for the Scholarship Fund. When the dust had settled, donations from members, Chapters and Departments totaled a very generous \$3,851.50. In addition, Hopewell Chapter VA2 donated \$100 to the JROTC Awards Program.

Following a brief review of activities of National Committees, Michael Fayette, Chair of the Constitution & Bylaws Review Committee presented proposed amendments to the National Bylaws. Article III, Sections 301(b) and 301(c) were amended to include membership eligibility for individuals with retirement orders in hand to allow them to join prior to their retirement date and to clarify eligibility for those medically retired under Title 38 U.S.C. and those permanently and totally disabled through the Department of Veterans Affairs. Housekeeping issues in Article IV removed additional sections that refer to corporate membership which was eliminated last year but had not been deleted from the bylaws. Article IX, Section 905 updated the description of the duties of the Legislative Affairs Committee to accommodate for the change in responsibilities since the hiring of a National Legislative Director. All changes were approved by the delegation.

There being no Old Business, President Bennett called for the Credentials Report by Chair Roger Mick and once approved by delegates, proceeded with Election of Officers. The following individuals were nominated and elected:

- President – Kirk Bennett
- First Vice President – William Knepshield
- Second Vice President – J.B. Kump
- Secretary – Deborah Smith
- Treasurer – Stephen Wood
- Director (3 years) – John Monahan
- Director (3 years) – Randall Stagner
- Director (3 years) – Betty Collins
- Director (3 years) – Burt Hunter
- Director (2 years) – Henry Wallace (filling unexpired term)

There being no further business, President Bennett announced that the 2018 National Convention will convene in Baltimore, MD on Saturday, June 9, 2018 and recessed the convention until the evening

when Past National President Ronald K. Kneppshield would install the national officers, immediately following the annual banquet. Following installation, President Bennett adjourned the convention to reconvene in Baltimore in June, 2018.