

## Report on MOAA's 2019 "Storming of the Hill"

Wednesday, April 10, 2019

US Capitol, Washington, DC

Submitted by Shelly Kalkowski

The four members of the Colorado "Storming" team spent a long day traveling back and forth between the Senate and House sides of Capitol Hill to discuss national MOAA's three 2019 focus issues with staff members of all nine members of the Colorado Congressional delegation.

Background papers on the issues (as shared with each office) are available at <http://www.moaa.org/storming2019>. They are:

- **Military Pay and Benefits** (Vote for the full pay raise of 3.1 percent currently in the President's Budget. Considered critical recruitment and retention issues.)
- **Eliminate the "Widow's Tax" SBP-DIC Offset** (Focused on having 100 percent Colorado Congressional Delegation co-sponsorship of the current related bills H.R. 553 and S. 622.)
- **Stabilize TRICARE Fees and Copayments** (Requested legislators to stop making changes to co-pays, premiums, prescription fees, etc., - also a critical retention issue.)

A fourth issue – DoD's recently announced **20% Reduction in Military Medical Billets** – was included on Tuesday as a Storming issue. Currently the Services are reviewing the DoD position to determine how the drawdown will be implemented. MOAA is closely watching this issue and will provide more information as it becomes available. The medical billet reduction was news to several – but not all – staffers that we met with.

On a non-election year, it is often very difficult to meet in person with the senators and congressmen. Even in election years, last minute schedule changes – mostly as a result of votes – are common place. The team originally was scheduled to meet in person with Senator Cory Gardner, Congressman Jason Crow (District 6) and Congressman Joe Neguse (District 2). Unfortunately, we were not able to meet with any of these. Part of the problem was that the following day was the start of Congress's Spring Recess and almost all were traveling back to Colorado mid-afternoon. In addition, Congressional Democrats were holding an early afternoon caucus/retreat.

I was, however, able to deliver the "elevator speech" on the "Widow's Tax" when I unexpectedly encountered Congressman Ken Buck (District 4) and, separately Congressman Scott Tipton (District 3) in the hallways. Please see the following "Call to Action" to encourage these two gentlemen to sign up as co-sponsors of H.R. 553.

Finally, on behalf of all Colorado MOAA members, we left a "get well" card for Senator Michael Bennet, who underwent cancer surgery last week. The card was signed with the names of all CCoC board members and chapter presidents.

The Colorado Storming team members were:

- **VADM Michael Cowan, USN (ret)**, former Surgeon General of the Navy and head of TRICARE. VADM Cowan grew up in Fort Morgan, CO.
- **Ms. Beth Conlin**, spouse of a currently serving Army major. Beth is a member of MOAA's Currently Serving Spouse Advisory Committee. She also manages the Blue Star Families Spouse Employment program. The Conlins were previously stationed at Fort Carson and still own a home in Colorado Springs.
- **Col Jim Ling, USAF (ret)**, former president of the inactive Northern Colorado chapter and charter member of the Larimer County Veterans Network.
- **Lt Col Shelly Kalkowski (ret)**, former CCoC president, current CCoC legislative liaison and Storming team lead.