

Storming The Hill

Jim Cunningham

TCC Executive Vice President - State Legislative Affairs

On March 28 and 29, the Texas Council of Chapters of MOAA had their Storming of the Hill at the Texas Capital known as Advocating in Austin. The effort was organized by past TCC President Pat Christ and attempted to educate the legislators about efforts to change the Hazlewood Act and our opposition to any actions that would materially gut the program. New methods of calculating ad valorem tax exemptions for partially disabled veterans also were discussed. Thirteen of the twenty-six chapters in Texas participated.

On the Legislative front, I am spending at least two days per week at the Capital advocating for various bills that have an effect on the Military Community. Most recently, the House Higher Education Committee heard two bills very important to the Hazlewood and its future. The first was HB2536 offered by Representative Matt Schaefer. It would require the schools of Higher Education to provide information to the legislature related to veterans and dependents who have used and are presently using the Hazlewood benefits. This has been a major issue as the schools have been less than forthcoming with information of this nature. As such, it is impossible to have any meaningful discussions among the legislators, veterans or other interested parties as to if or how the law should or should not be modified.

The second bill presented was from Representative Rick Miller. It would modify the law in such a way to require minimum periods of service for the veteran and the dependent to be able to use the law for their education. This is HB4089. Much of the testimony taken for this bill was against it, but with respect to Representative Miller trying to have an equitable bill. General opinion was that Representative Schaefer's bill should be passed and implemented during the interim to get the best information possible prior to trying to modify the Hazlewood Act. We had anticipated that one or both of the bills would be sent to the Calendars Committee this week (April 19), but this did not happen. Stay tuned!