



## **Coalition and Valued Associates Advocacy and Actions...**

The Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) held their public hearings and a town hall meeting yesterday outside Fort Bragg and Pope Army Airfield. The Commission heard testimony from senior commanders of local military commands and their senior enlisted advisors; unit commanders and their family support groups; local medical and education community representatives; and dining facilities, grocery, and other quality of life organizations.

The evening town hall meeting had a good turn out with over 80 military community members in attendance, as well as representatives from DeCA and industry partners. We believe the efforts of the ALA, military resale partners, Coalition, and valued associate organizations helped to encourage attendance. This was the tenth town hall meeting conducted by the Commission. Commissioners in attendance were Chairman Alphonso Maldon, Jr., former Congressman Stephen Buyer, former Congressman Chris Carney, and Mr. Mike Higgins.

There was strong support for the commissary from those in attendance. A retired Desert Storm soldier told commissioners not to take retired benefits away. He said the commissary is a benefit that makes ends meet and that enlisted service members need the benefit. A retired Sergeant Major discussed all benefits that are being cut and how it affects his family. He also discussed the importance of the commissary benefit. A retired E8 said the commissary is one of the most important benefits we have and stressed that the commissary works and needs to be left alone. "You take away the benefit or turn it over to civilians you are hurting the soldiers. It saves soldiers money." He told the Commission that if you want to take the commissary benefit, we don't need you. It got a round of applause.

Commissioner Buyer responded that the commissary is a well run efficient program and that retired soldiers should be angry about the cuts proposed to the commissaries. He noted..." You think the lines are long now, wait until after the cuts."

The Commissioners made it clear to those in attendance that no recommendations have been made at this time and that the Commission's efforts are not driven by cuts. Their job is to review processes to improve effectiveness and to improve benefits. Mr. Buyer noted that they are an independent consulting board and no recommendations have been made at this point. Mr. Higgins acknowledged there are different views on modernization and reform inside the beltway in Washington, D.C. He noted there needs to be balance in the system while preserving the core values of the military.

The Commission closed the meeting by thanking all those in attendance for coming. The Commission stressed that they are committed to honesty and integrity, and will be candid with recommendations. The Commission encouraged all to take and submit the benefits survey, which has been sent out to over 170,000 military households. The Commission's preliminary findings are due out this month and will be made available on the Commission website at <http://www.mcrmc.gov/>.

The Coalition sent out a Call to Action alert to our members last week encouraging them to attend the Commission public hearings and town hall meeting and to share the information with friends who live in the local area. In addition, the Coalition also shared this information several times with our Save Our Benefit Facebook followers and valued associate members. The Coalition and our valued associates continue to encourage service members, veterans, and their families to attend these meetings, and to share their opinions and concerns with the Commission via their website and survey.