



## Coalition and Valued Associates in the News...

Fifteen businesses and state and local government organizations received the 2014 Secretary of Defense Freedom Award, the highest honor the Defense Department gives to employers for support of National Guard and Reserve employees. **We congratulate ALA member General Mills Inc. for being among this year's recipients**, who were honored in a Pentagon ceremony this week.

"By recognizing these 15 exceptional employers, the Department of Defense celebrates the contributions made by American employers to our citizen-warriors," said Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel. "I commend these extraordinary employers for their unwavering commitment to service members and their families."

The 2014 recipients were selected from nearly 3,000 nominations received from Guardsmen and Reservists for going above and beyond what the federal law requires to support their military employees. Last year's award winners met with President Barack Obama and senior Defense Department leaders as part of the award recognition.

The Secretary of Defense Freedom Award was instituted in 1996 by the Department of Defense Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve office to recognize exceptional support from the employer community. Since its inception, 190 employers have been honored to receive this award. For more information about the Freedom Award and this year's recipients, visit <http://www.FreedomAward.mil>.

Coalition valued associate member, [Military Officers Association of America](#) (MOAA) government relations deputy director, Col (Ret) Mike Barron was quoted in *The Virginian-Pilot* article, [Measuring the savings at the military commissary](#). The article compared commissary savings to local retailers in the Hampton Roads area. ALA has set the record straight as outlined in the **President's Message, "When Snapshots are Misleading."** But the article also addressed the Department of Defense proposal to drastically cut the commissary budget:

...In its budget proposal released in February, the Pentagon suggested decreasing the federal appropriation for commissary operations from \$1.4 billion to about \$400 million over three years. The change appears on hold for now.

U.S. Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner, both Virginia Democrats, fought to maintain the current appropriation and other military personnel benefits until a review of those programs is completed in February. Congress now looks poised to approve a continuing resolution to extend current spending levels to the end of the year.

That's a relief to Barron and members of his organization.

"It was going to put the commissary really on a death spiral," he said of the administration's proposal. "And it's a critical benefit."

MOAA's advocacy and patron outreach is instrumental in the fight to protect the military resale benefit. This past year, MOAA testified before Congress, and rebuked the Pentagon's [Slow the Growth](#) budget-cutting catchphrase in a prepared document shared with every member of Congress, stating:

"Uniformed and civilian leaders have created a perfect storm, providing political top cover to slash pay and benefits with repeated, alarming – and noticeably misleading – statements on personnel cost growth." "This 'quadruple whammy' of capping pay, increasing out-of-pocket expenses for housing, consolidating TRICARE, and *slashing* commissary benefits would be four giant steps towards repeating past insidious measures that led to retention and readiness problems."

MOAA also waged a #Budget Battle campaign, outlining the annual loss of purchasing power service members and their families would incur as a result of these drastic budget cuts; educated the military community through a live Virtual Town Hall, call to action alerts, publications, articles, and blogs; and encouraged their members to *Strom the Hill* and write their Members of Congress.

MOAA's efforts played a critical roll in protecting military families' earned commissary and exchange benefits, and the military resale system as a whole. **Proving the power of partnerships.** We are grateful to count them among our Coalition valued associate members, and will continue to partner with them as we fight future Budget Battles.