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## Old Year Resolutions for New Congress

Capitol Hill is quiet during the holiday season, so it's the perfect time to prepare our legislative platform. The 110th U.S. Congress is set to convene Jan. 4, 2007. As I explained in last month's column, the 109th Congress's slate of bills was wiped clean, so all bills must be reintroduced. We start over. So let's get to it; it's time they get to know who you are!

Throughout the coming year, REA will advocate on your behalf in several ways: as an independent association focused strictly on enlisted Reserve issues and also by working with other associations. REA is a member of both The Military Coalition (TMC) and the National Military Veterans Alliance (NMVA). These relationships allow us to harness the grass-roots support of more than 5.5 million members and their families to accomplish far more than we would working separately.

REA will do its best to make your voice heard in 2007. But you play a powerful role in the process. I can't emphasize enough the importance of your taking action as an individual and as an organized REA Chapter. Congress wants to know what the troops think. They want to hear from the enlisted force!

Following is information on our key issues for the year. REA's complete 2007 legislative agenda can be reviewed at [www.reaus.org](http://www.reaus.org).

### **Reduce the qualifying age for a Reserve retirement.**

I don't need to tell you the operational level of support the Reserve Components are filling has gone beyond "nice to have" to "need to have." As a result, your civilian employability, upward mobility, and financial security are affected. You risk lower promotion rates, reduced retirement annuities, missed training opportunities and other events that keep you competitive in the civilian market. Receiving a retirement annuity earlier than age 60 could offset these losses. Repeated, extended activations make it more difficult to sustain a full civilian career and build a full civilian retirement.

REA will urge Congress to reduce the age for qualifying to receive a Reserve retirement.

### **Extension of Montgomery G.I. Bill for Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR).**

Although Reserve and Guard forces are operationally integrated under the Total Force policy, MGIB benefits do not reflect the policy, nor does it match benefits

to service commitment. Reserve and Guard benefit levels have slipped from 50 percent parity to 29 percent. Although the program expanded in 2004 to authorize MGIB benefits for activated members, a recent survey showed that frequent activations decreased Reservists' opportunities to use education benefits.

REA will work toward continued use of MGIB-SR during the period of participation and then extend it to 10 years beyond the last day of service.

### **Protections for Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and force reduction.**

For the next five years the force will be adjusting to reductions because of BRAC and force reductions. Congress legislated transition initiatives for active duty members, but no one has enacted any law to ease the transition from service that a significant number of Reserve members will be facing. Transition initiatives should go beyond releasing individuals and should also be focused on retaining experience.

REA will support transition initiatives such as separation pay, extending commissary and exchange privileges, and permanent change of station (PCS) offset.

Through the TMC and NMVA, REA will also work toward the following improvements:

- Health care insurance options;
- Equivalent offset to civilian plan premiums during activation;
- Extension of post-mobilization military dental coverage;
- Transition assistance services in home locale after release from active duty;
- Academic protections, such as exemption from federal student loan payments during activation;
- Reemployment rights for Guard and Reserve spouses;
- Stronger credit protections;
- Space-A travel provision for Guard and Reserve and their families.

### **Lani's Bottom Line:**

Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand as in what direction we are moving." REA will make great progress in 2007. Happy New Year! ▀