



CMSGT LANI BURNETT, USAF (RET.) • REA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Reflecting on Forward Progress

I love the month of September. It may have something to do with it being my birthday month, or maybe because it brings on memories of simpler times like picking out a pair of shoes for the new school year. Regardless, it seems that September is the month I've set aside for reflection, and it's a month that marks many life-changing events for me—in addition, of course, to that life-starting event of my birth. For example, it's when I began the pursuit of my present passion: standing up the Reserve Enlisted Association. Four years ago this month REA was incorporated. Happy Birthday, REA!

This annual milestone provides an opportunity to reflect on our achievements; our hope for what we can accomplish in the future; and assessing where we are now. Despite what I perceive as a slow rate of growth and progression, I believe as strongly today that the purpose, the mission, and the people our Association serves

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are worth the challenges we face. I have faith that REA will continue to grow, prosper, and be a catalyst for the changes needed in your professional life.

Our focus this past year has been to deliver a level of excellence in advocacy, community, collaboration, and education.

On the advocacy front, REA has been actively engaged in supporting numerous issues, including the following:

- payment of travel costs to attend inactive duty training and unit training assemblies;
- tax incentives for employers of mobilized Reservists;
- protection from predatory lenders;
- reduced age retirement;
- narrowing the pay gap between military members and their civilian counterparts;
- providing mortgage assistance for members of the Individual Ready Reserve who are called up;
- tax credits for hiring military spouses.

We've collaborated with the Reserve Officers Association in formulating position papers on Montgomery GI Bill enhancements and reform and on parity

medical care for wounded Reservists. Additionally, we've submitted joint written statements to the House Armed Services Committee to support a recommendation made by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves in its second report to Congress. As a member of the Reserve and Guard Committee of the Military Coalition, REA has been able to bring attention to various issues of concern to our members.

The REA Foundation was incorporated this past year and will be the umbrella under which REA education programs will be developed and scholarships awarded.

REA has reached out to various organizations, senior enlisted leaders, and numerous Citizen Warriors at different events this year to educate public officials and the public alike about your work, sacrifices, and needs. Furthermore, two local chapters were added to the REA community, which strengthens the REA voice.

Unlike some veteran service organizations and professional military associations, REA's challenges don't include membership losses, declining revenue, or delivering state-of-the-art programs. Our challenges are much more basic: how do we communicate our relevance and accomplishments to the membership with our limited resources? While our daily focus and energy is on advocacy, how do we manage to send out the backlog of renewal notices?

As we energetically embark on our fifth year, the dreams for the future must not delude us to the real challenges of managing the present. Commitment may inspire us to engage in battle on behalf of enlisted Reservists, but it alone is not enough to ensure survival, prosperity, and victory. REA is not merely an Association. It is you! And your involvement and participation is instrumental to the success of the Association.

As we begin year number five, I'm reminded of an ancient Chinese proverb that cautions, "Unless we change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed." But I am inspired by the not-so-ancient words of President Ronald Reagan who reminded the nation that our future "can be as grand and as great as we make it No crisis is beyond the capacity of our people to solve, no challenge too great."

I don't believe anything is beyond our capacity! So let's blow out the candles, celebrate our successes, and get Year Five started. Happy Birthday, REA! ▲