



## T H E M I L I T A R Y C O A L I T I O N

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### MILITARY COALITION PRESENTS TOP AWARDS TO HILL ADVOCATES

Alexandria, Va.....The Military Coalition (TMC), an influential Washington, DC-based consortium of 35 military and veterans groups, presented its highest awards on Sept. 9 to four legislators and two congressional staff members who have championed the causes of pay and benefits improvements for military families. The awards ceremony was held at the Reserve Officers Association Building on Capitol Hill.

Senators Max Baucus (D-MT) and Jim Webb (D-VA) and Representatives Charles Rangel (D-NY) and Thelma Drake (R-VA) received the Coalition's 2008 Award of Merit. Baucus and Rangel were recognized for their leadership in protecting beneficiaries' access to Medicare and TRICARE and improving tax treatment of servicemembers and their families. Webb was honored for his leadership in winning enactment of major new GI Bill education benefits, and Drake for championing legislation to upgrade military pay raises, honor military spouses and survivors, and improve servicemembers' retirement options.

The Military Officers Association of America's Colonel Steve Strobridge (USAF-Ret), Co-Chairman of The Military Coalition, lauded the efforts of Baucus and Rangel to protect military beneficiaries.

"These two senior committee chairmen made it a leadership priority to reverse a 10% cut in Medicare and TRICARE payments that would have significantly reduced doctors' willingness to continue seeing elderly and military patients. We still need a long-term fix for this problem, but we're grateful for their clear commitment to get that job done," he said. "We also owe them a debt of thanks for their joint work in solving a number of long-standing tax inequities affecting all active duty personnel, especially Guard and Reserve members and their civilian employers."

Mr. Joe Barnes, also a TMC Co-Chairman and National Executive Director of the Fleet Reserve Association, praised Webb for persevering to push through the largest improvement in military education benefits since World War II.

"Lots of people told Senator Webb that he was asking too much in trying to reestablish a GI Bill that actually paid the full cost of a college education," said Barnes. "But he crafted a package that made so much sense and built a coalition of cosponsors and public support that couldn't be

ignored. The result is a new package of benefits that will change the lives of servicemembers and their families and also make a huge positive impact on America's future."

Mrs. Kathleen Moakler, TMC Award Committee Co-chair and Director of Government Relations for the National Military Family Association, singled out the particular efforts of Rep. Drake.

"Thelma Drake has been the leading advocate for improving military pay raises for the last two years," said Moakler. "Of special importance is the legislation she has sponsored to establish a memorial in Washington to honor military family members. Her bill to let military members and federal civilians put part of their earnings into a tax-advantaged Roth savings plan will help them in these financially troubled times."

TMC also presented its annual Freedom Award to Mr. Gary Leeling, senior staffer on the Senate Armed Service Personnel Subcommittee, and Mr. William Edwards, military legislative assistant for Senator Webb, for their work in promoting support for military issues behind the scenes.

"The legislators are the champions," said Mike Cline, TMC President and Executive Director of the Enlisted Association of the National Guard, "but their staffs expend huge amounts of effort in crafting the legislation, working with the military associations to fill in the details, and coordinating our mutual efforts to get other legislators and the public on board. Gary Leeling and William Edwards have been great supporters on a wide variety of key issues affecting the military community."

TMC represents the interests of more than six million members around the world, including active duty, National Guard, Reserve, and retired members and veterans of the seven uniformed services, plus their families and survivors.

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