



CAPT Ike Puzon, USNR (Ret)
Director of Legislation

Remembering What Made the Difference

These past few months have been times that we all have identified more with our country in some way or another. I, along with many, recently had the opportunity to assist in the dedication of the World War II Memorial as a volunteer. We have all been affected and concerned by recent events in Iraq. It has been three decades since we have experienced the state funeral of a President, and the tribute to a President in the Capitol. All of these historical events are going on while Congress is wrangling with next year's National Defense Authorization Act that can change many lives and careers. And, of course, there is the election year of 2004!

For many months, we have provided to you what you mean to the effort to change America through getting involved. For many months, we have successfully fought the legislative battles for your wishes. For many months, a lot has happened to affect those issues that are important to our military and our country. However, for a moment, think about these current historical events and the people who participated in the change. While you ponder these events, remember the document that makes it all possible – the Constitution of the United States with its checks and balances!

Our country paused recently to celebrate the dedication of a memorial to a generation and their efforts toward freedom for the world and our country during the 20th Century. The World War II Memorial dedication was a monumental event, and you had to be there to see the participants of that great war, along with their families, to understand the event. Watching 80+ year-old warfighters (and spouses) walk, limp, and being pushed in wheelchairs to view a monument to their efforts was the monument! No one present could really fathom these heroes' service,

dedication, or commitment unless you were there during their service to the country. We hear and read of their efforts, and we respect them. These people came from all corners of the earth to be together one more time. They wore their uniforms of old, and looked great. They withstood Washington, DC, traffic and bickering to stand with their colleagues and look at a screen, sometimes three or four miles away. They withstood bright sunshine and great uncertainty just to be in the same ten square miles – where a monument could not even be seen. It all meant so much to all present and to the millions watching, and it was all about respect for freedom and the Constitution of the United States and service! They came because they respect our country, our religious freedoms, and the way we do things! In the end, all of us baby boomers were humbled and kept asking over and over – where did these people come from and what made them do all the things they did. It all made you believe in our system, and made you want to get engaged even more in today's efforts that confront us. While we are living the good life, we need to think about their (WWII participants) sacrifices. It overwhelms anything you can say you did. They got involved because duty called.

If you have never walked through the Capitol rotunda, you should. If you have never visited Washington, you should. If you watched and experienced the recent tribute to the 40th President, you most likely remembered many of your own experiences during the 1980's. And, during all these memories, you have to wonder when the Cold War would have ended if President Reagan had not been elected. For many, we do remember the turnaround in the Defense budgets and what that meant to the military, and to U.S. military world efforts. Transformation meant something totally different in those days because we had the threat of total annihilation, and we were reeling from post-Vietnam trauma. However, transformation took place because we had a visionary leader who could, and did, inspire us to take

action. And, he knew how to work with Congress. President Reagan did one major thing for which we all should be thankful; he made us feel like we could do it, and got us engaged. Military legislation flowed to Capitol Hill that turned around years of downsizing after Vietnam. Legislation in favor of the military and the military families flowed out of the White House.

These historical memorial events are taking place as the issues in Iraq are entering another critical period for our country and, especially, for our military. Whether we like it or not, or support this or that, Iraq is going to be a part of our lives for the foreseeable future. The Defense budgets are centered generally on the war and postwar in Iraq. What Iraq means to our Congressional priorities cannot, and should not, be misunderstood. Iraq efforts are driving everything in Congress. What is significant and necessary is that we must evaluate the need for our own personal involvement in our country and legislation that shapes the military. Iraq and discussion on Iraq alone can and will provide opportunities. Involvement means different things to you, the readers, and to those in the war zones. We have to understand that we truly do live in the age of action. Just as our WWII veterans volunteered their service in the face of adversity, we, too, must get more engaged to shape the outcome. Just as we all felt that the Defense budgets of the 1980's were a turning point due to one President's actions, we have to remember that Congress provides the resources and guidance. Left alone, Congress will make decisions on a provision alone.

Currently, Congress is moving fast to decisions on TRICARE for Reservists, SBP, and a commission on Guard and Reserve. Do we want to let it pass us by, or do we want to shape the outcome. As we recently memorialized those who served in WWII because they rose to the challenge, we, too, have to rise to the occasion. Just as President Reagan challenged us to believe and challenged us not to waiver,

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we, too, must believe that our input is important because it truly is. Over 40 percent of those in Iraq are either from the Guard or Reserve Component. This war and future wars will depend upon the contributions of the Reserve Components. We must provide the input to Congress or risk decisions being made by those who either do not support the Guard and Reserve, or do not have time to understand the Guard and Reserve.

One e-mail, or one letter, or one call from each of our members to a Congressional member can and will make the difference in

legislation that affects you or someone you know. We owe it to all those who served before us, and to those after us, to engage in the debate and press for the issues. You can make a difference in legislative outcome.

NOTE: *SASC and HASC, as well as SAC-D and HAC-D are working on the Defense bills right now. If you want to support our resolutions or those that support Guard and Reserve, write or e-mail your Congressional members on SBP, TRICARE for RC, tax credits for employers, and the commission on the Guard and Reserve.* ↴