

HIGH COUNTRY CHAPTER
MILITARY OFFICERS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA



SECRETARY'S REPORT

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**High Country Chapter, MOAA
Board of Directors Meeting
02 Sep 2025 | Bocca Bistro, Boone, NC**

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order with an opening prayer that gave thanks for community, past achievements, and the safety of veterans. The meeting was conducted in accordance with the Chapter Bylaws and Robert's Rules of Order.

Attendance – Quorum Established

Present:

- Mary “Frankie” Groff – President (Surviving Spouse)
- Fred Schmitt – 1st Vice President (CAPT, USCG, Ret.)
- George Brudzinski – Treasurer (LtCol, USMC, Ret.)
- Adam Greene – Legislative Affairs Chair; Acting Secretary (LTC, USA)
- Melanie Trado – Director (MAJ, USAR)
- Douglas May – Immediate Past President (Capt., USMC, Fmr; PhD)
- Patsy Alley – Director (Surviving Spouse)
- Bob Love – Director (LT, USN, Fmr.)
- David Hollis – Director (LTC, USA, Ret.)
- Jim Fisher – Chaplain; Personal Affairs; Newsletter (CAPT, USN, Ret.)
- Lisa Ninnis – Director (Maj., USAF, Fmr.)

Absent:

- Dinah Pinney – Director (Maj., USAF, Ret.)

General Membership Guest(s) Present:

- David Hulburt – LTC, USA, Ret.
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Pledge of Allegiance

Led by Frankie Groff.

Invocation

Jim Fisher offered the invocation.

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New Action Items

- Fred Schmitt - Fred to prepare the ballot for the officer and board member elections and send it out at least 14 days prior to the General Membership Meeting.
- Draft proposed change to Bylaws regarding size of Board of Directors
- Adam Greene to provide revised bylaw language to the board within 24 hours.
- David Hollis - Invite the new ROTC Professor of Military Science, Major Zac Jones, to the GMM.
- George to get a quote on the cost of the pop-up banner and flyers, and send it to the board for approval.

Secretary's Report

Frankie Groff presented the Secretary's Report from the August 05, 2025, meeting. Approved unanimously with corrections

Treasurer's Report

George Brudzinski presented the Treasurer's Report.

- **Monthly Results:** Reported a loss of **\$1,398** for the month. The only income recorded was interest from the checking account.
- **Year-to-Date Status:** A budgeted loss of **\$2,600** had been projected for the fiscal year. Despite the monthly shortfall, the chapter remains within budget expectations.
- **Proposed Budget (FY 2025–2026):** Discussion included increasing the scholarship allocation to local high schools.
 - Recommendation: Increase scholarship fund to **\$3,000 total**, divided evenly between Watauga High School and Avery High School.
 - **Motion:** To approve the scholarship increase to \$3,000, split evenly between the schools.
 - Motion by: Melanie Trado
 - Seconded by: Jim Fisher
 - **Outcome:** Approved unanimously.
- **Cemetery Contribution:** Proposal raised to increase contributions in support of veteran cemetery maintenance. Additional information to be requested from Nancy regarding actual costs.
- **Investments:** Consideration was given to opening a **certificate of deposit (CD)** to take advantage of higher interest rates.

Action:

- The proposed budget will be formally approved at the next meeting.

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Board Membership and Elections

- Planning began for the **General Membership Meeting (GMM)** scheduled for **October 9, 2025**. Invitations will be sent to members in advance.
- The Board welcomed **Lisa Ninnis (Maj., USAF, Fmr.)** as a new director.
- **Dinah Pinney (Maj., USAF, Ret.)** was also added to the Board but was not present at the meeting.
- Slate of officers for the upcoming term was discussed:
 - President: **Melanie Trado**
 - Treasurer: **George Brudzinski**
 - Secretary: **Adam Greene**
- The need to fill the **Second Vice President** position was emphasized to ensure a clear line of succession.

Action:

- Fred Schmitt will prepare and distribute the ballot for officer and board member elections at least 14 days prior to the GMM.
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ROTC Updates and Storage discussion

- The Board was informed of the arrival of the new **Professor of Military Science, MAJ (P) Zac Jones**.
- The importance of supporting ROTC and JROTC programs through high school visits and events was emphasized, though challenges with volunteer participation were noted.

Action:

- David Hollis will invite Major Jones to the GMM.

Storage Needs:

- The Board discussed ongoing requirements for **climate-controlled storage** to house flags, banners, and chapter materials.
 - Potential options include the possible reopening of the Boone Armory or use of American Legion storage space. Cost and availability will be further explored.
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Venues and Events

🏠 The Board considered options for **future meeting venues** to reduce costs and improve accessibility.

- Potential sites include the **Presbyterian Church** and **BREMCO**, both available at no charge.
- Catering would still be required for food service at these locations.

🏠 Members emphasized the importance of choosing venues that are both affordable and welcoming for general membership gatherings.

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Legislative Affairs

Adam Greene shared brief updates on current developments:

Legislative Climate

Congress in Recess Until September 6

Both the House and Senate remain in recess through early September. This pause has temporarily stalled movement on veteran-related legislation but provides an opportunity for local advocacy before legislative sessions resume.

Omnibus Veterans Bill Expected in September

Senate and House committee staff have indicated that a consolidated veterans package may be introduced shortly after Congress reconvenes. Likely inclusions are:

- Major Richard Star Act
- Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) reform
- Caregiver support provisions
 - Action: Prepare for a fast-moving advocacy window in September. Chapters may wish to coordinate with MOAA National to ensure key provisions are retained.

FY26 Budget Negotiations Resume Mid-September

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and VA appropriations markups are expected to resume the week of September 9. Multiple benefits-related bills remain stalled due to ongoing debate over budget offsets.

➤ Action: Emphasize the moral and long-term cost of continued delays in member communications and public advocacy.

Federal Legislation – August Status Updates

Major Richard Star Act (H.R. 2102 / S. 1032)

➤ Update: Remains a central MOAA priority. Language may be included in the expected omnibus package.

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➤ Action: Constituents should request support from their representatives before the September session begins.

Caring for Survivors Act (H.R. 680)

➤ Update: Dependency and Indemnity Compensation reform continues to gain visibility.

Advocates expect language to be bundled into broader legislation.

➤ Action: Survivor families who are comfortable doing so may wish to share testimony with MOAA or allied organizations.

Fair Access to VA Services Act (S. 1147 / H.R. 2814)

➤ Update: Senate staff met in late July to revise key language on telehealth and transportation support.

➤ Action: Chapters are encouraged to gather anecdotes from rural veterans experiencing access issues.

Military Retiree Survivor Comfort Act (H.R. 3790)

➤ Update: MOAA National has circulated a chapter resolution template for formal endorsements.

➤ Action: Chapters may vote to endorse in upcoming September meetings.

State Legislation – Session Concluded

North Carolina General Assembly Adjourned August 9

The 2025 short session ended with several veteran-related bills unresolved or referred to interim study. There is no further state legislative action expected until the 2026 long session unless a special session is called.

Bill Status Highlights

- H.B. 118 – Property Tax Relief for Disabled Veterans
 - Cleared Senate Finance but did not receive a floor vote. Strong bipartisan support remains.
 - Action: Encourage county commissions to prepare for local adoption if reintroduced in 2026.

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- H.B. 114 – Veteran Employment Preference
 - Referred to a workforce study group for inclusion in future reforms.
 - Action: Share bill details with local government HR departments or community colleges to explore pilot initiatives.
- S.B. 660 – Phased Property Tax Exemption Expansion
 - No final action taken before adjournment.
 - Action: Continue local conversations about municipal reimbursement and veteran affordability.

Local & Regional Advocacy – August Summary

Rep. Ray Pickett Listening Tour Rumored, Not Confirmed

Although informal reports suggested early August constituent meetings in Foscoe and West Jefferson, no public schedule was released.

➤ Action: Monitor Rep. Pickett's communications for future event announcements or fall town halls.

Regional Veteran Priorities for September

- VSO Staffing in Ashe and Avery Counties
 - Reports of staffing shortages or limited hours persist.
 - Action: Chapters may draft letters to county commissioners encouraging stable VSO funding in FY26 county budgets.
- Affordable Housing & Fixed-Income Veterans
 - Rising housing costs in Boone, Banner Elk, and Spruce Pine continue to pressure veteran families.
 - Action: Encourage local governments and housing authorities to consider tax relief programs like H.B. 118 in their long-term planning.
- Workforce Partnerships (Caldwell, CCC&TI)
 - Local interest in veteran hiring pathways remains strong.
 - Action: Continue sharing employment preference legislation with workforce development boards.

Looking Ahead – September 2025

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- September 6–9:
Congress reconvenes. Expect fast-tracked committee activity on veterans legislation and FY26 budget markups.
- Mid-to-Late September:
Potential floor votes on veterans omnibus package. Chapters should be prepared to mobilize local members quickly via MOAA's Legislative Action Center.
- County Budget Discussions:
Fall is a key time for local budget planning. VSO and veteran housing concerns should be raised in September and October commission meetings.

Publicity and Recruitment

- The Board agreed on the need for **pop-up banners and informational flyers** to promote the chapter and highlight membership benefits at events.
- Banner design should include contact information and a clear message about the organization's mission.

Action:

- George Brudzinski will obtain a quote for the cost of banners and flyers and circulate it to the Board for approval prior to purchase.

Adjournment and Next Meeting

- Scheduled for **Tuesday, October 7, 2025**, at **Bocca Bistro**.
- GMM Scheduled for Thursday, October 9, 2025 at Dan'l Boone Inn