

57th Legislative Session (2001)
Lobbyist Report of Activities
MTNGA/EANGMT State Conferences
21/28 April 2001

It is a great honor and privilege to once again represent your great organizations before the Montana State Legislature. Once again your associations have made their mark on the state legislative process. As members of these great organizations, you can be proud of your accomplishments. It has been a rewarding opportunity for me to represent you during the legislative session.

Preparations for the 57th Legislative Session began early in 2000 when your associations were asked to provide comments on the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) Governor's Budget Submission. At that time, it was affirmed by both the Officer and Enlisted Associations that our legislative priority was the adequate funding of the National Guard Scholarship Program. The DMA placed this funding requirement as the #2 department priority.

Later in 2000, it became evident that the associations could have other legislative interests. This came about due to the massive State Active Duty activation for the forest fires. Many soldier/airmen care issues were identified during the course of the state activation. The web pages of the respective associations contain a point paper identifying the various concerns related to State Active Duty. Although the DMA assured us that they would address these issues during the interim between the 57th and 58th Legislative Sessions, there may be a necessity for proposed legislation during the 58th Legislative Session.

In January, your associations hosted all legislators and their guests at the 5th Biennial Legislative Reception. Over half of the legislators and staff attended this excellent affair and were greeted by 85 members of the Officer and Enlisted Associations. The highlight of the evening was a presentation by the Officer's Association to Senator Conrad Burns and the presentation of the Colonel Harry C. Kessler - First Montana Volunteers Award to State Senator Don Hargrove (Belgrade) and State Representative Joe Tropila (Great Falls). The 'Kessler Award' is a joint association award presented by both associations to a deserving Senator and Representative in recognition of their outstanding support of the Montana National Guard.

Just a few days later, your associations hosted a morning snack and lunch for the members and staff of the Joint Sub-Committee on Appropriations for Corrections and Public Safety. This is the committee that heard the DMA budget bill and they were your guests while getting briefings about the Montana National Guard, Disaster and Emergency Services, Centralized Services and the Veteran's Affairs Division.

During the session your associations provided testimony on a variety of military related bills. The priority testimony was on House Bill 2 (the Budget Bill) in support of Governor Racicot's budget request of \$350,000 for the Montana National Guard Scholarship Program. At the time the budget bill got to the joint sub-committee Governor Martz had reduced it to \$300,000 in an effort to balance the budget due to revenue shortfalls. Unfortunately, during joint sub-committee action, the appropriation was further reduced to \$250,000. The bill came out of the House with only \$250,000 for the scholarship program, an amount equal to the last biennium appropriation. Although this amount was unacceptable, we felt we could get it changed in the Senate. That was the wrong idea. In the Senate Finance Committee the whole appropriation was removed from the budget. As you are aware, your strong grassroots efforts succeeded in restoring the \$250,000 to the budget by amendment on the Senate Floor. As of this writing, considering the tight fiscal situation, I submit that we are lucky to hang onto the \$250,000 for the next biennium.

House Bill 9 (Cultural and Aesthetic Grant Appropriations) was the target of your support for a grant request for the Military Museum at Fort Harrison. Although the grant was not approved, the interest generated by the proposal indicates a strong sentiment towards the Museum. My kudos to COL Ray Read (Retired) for his great work.

House Bill 52 (Adopt most recent federal military laws), introduced by Representative Dave Gallik (Helena) is a biennial bill that updates our state Uniform Code of Military Justice. This non-controversial bill sailed through the legislature with the assistance of our Associations.

Senate Bill 25 (Flag burning as a crime to ‘incite to riot’), introduced by Senator Ric Holden (Glendive) was a bill, not to make the burning of a U.S. Flag a crime (as this violates free speech, per the U.S. Supreme Court) but merely defines flag burning as one act that can be punishable if it incites a riot. Although we provided testimony on this bill, the bill failed to get out of committee.

Senate Joint Resolution 14 (Urge establishing public service [including military service] obligation for 18-year-olds), introduced by Senator Eve Franklin (Great Falls), was another bill

Although the associations did not directly lobby for the follow-on funding for the Montana National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program, that program was also funded by the legislature.

As I said earlier, to be chosen to represent our associations before the State Legislature is an honor. I would like to give some recognition to another member of your organization that was key to our successes this year. We would not have had these successes if Command Chief Master Sergeant Roger Larsen had not been there. No one person can claim success, but as a team we definitely achieved more. I wish to publicly thank him for his support and guidance.

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