



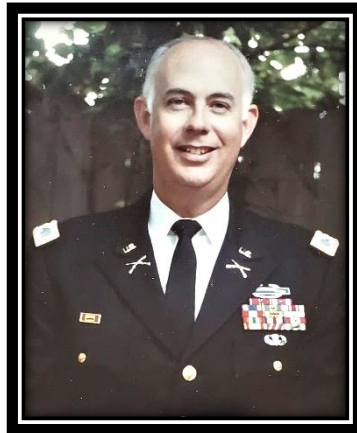
Houston Area  
PO Box 18372  
Sugar Land, TX 77496  
[www.moahahoustonarea.com](http://www.moahahoustonarea.com)

February 2022 Issue – Newsletter to Members

## President's Message...

Greetings Friends,

January and February at my alma mater traditionally is known as the dark ages (cold, wet and dark); kind of like this in Houston this time of the year. However, one of the bright spots was our January guest speaker, Dave Weaver, President of the Houston Regional Veterans Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is relatively new and if you are like me, I did not really know much about the Chamber. They are doing great work with the Veterans business community in the Houston area. I would encourage our members to pass the word to our colleagues in the business community.



The next Chapter meeting will be Saturday February 26 at the Golfcrest Country Club in Pear Land (always a good venue). Our guest speaker will be Christopher Govekar, Command Executive Officer of the 75<sup>th</sup> Innovations Command. It should be quite interesting to learn what the 75<sup>th</sup>'s 21 century mission is all about.

Finally, as always, if you have not taken care of your dues, please do so. Your membership dues are our life blood and...keep the new members coming in. We had good results last year, so keep up the recruiting effort.

Respectfully,  
Rob

Robin P. Ritchie, COL, Infantry, USAR (Ret)



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### February... Upcoming Chapter Events:

**Wednesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2022 @ noon**

**MOAA HA BOD Meeting**

Rudi Lechner's German Restaurant  
2503 S Gessner Rd  
Houston, TX 77063

**Saturday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022 @ noon**

**MOAA HA Chapter Meeting**

Golfcrest Country Club  
2509 Country Club Drive  
Pearland, TX 77581  
RSVP to Rob Ritchie  
Email: [rpitchie@earthlink.net](mailto:rpitchie@earthlink.net)

# Delay Means Disaster: Servicemembers, Military Families Need Budget Fix Now

By: Dan Merry  
FEBRUARY 09, 2022

As another continuing resolution (CR) makes its way through Congress, allowing the government to limp forward without a full budget well into the fiscal year, MOAA again needs your support to ensure your lawmakers realize the damage these delays are doing to military readiness and the quality of life of those in uniform and their families.



Douglas Rissing/Getty Images

This effort takes on greater importance as the specter of a full-year CR has risen. The ripple effects of such a move would cost DoD billions of dollars, cripple budget planning, delay or destroy any gains made to your benefits through recent authorization legislation, and cause immediate headaches for servicemembers and the wider uniformed services community.

## [TAKE ACTION: [Write Your Legislators Today](#)]

### How We Got Here

On Sept. 30, 2021, the president signed into law a continuing resolution (CR) to finance the government in FY 2022 at the previous year's levels, but only through Dec. 3, 2021. Given all the controversial politics and polarizing issues, many on the Hill and others in town knew this was not enough time for both sides to see a way forward beyond the holidays.

On Dec. 3, Congress faced the deadline with no clear way forward. Those who thought two months was not enough time to generate an enduring solution were proven right. As such, Congress pushed the same CR solution through to the president, who signed just in time to again extend previous year's funding, this time to Feb. 18, 2022.

And here we are again.

On Feb. 8, the House passed their Further Additional Extending Government Funding Act ([H.R. 6617](#)) by a vote of 272-162. The Senate has yet to weigh in, but it is likely to pass given the importance of avoiding a government shutdown. The signals from the Hill and news outlets still indicate an enduring solution is no closer than before – even including talks about a possible CR to extend through the rest of this fiscal year.

Defense leaders already have been testifying and speaking openly about the damage a yearlong CR would cause. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin outlined some of these challenges in a [Dec. 6 statement](#), mentioning the potential for a yearlong CR and noting the measures DoD would have to consider to pay for the 2.7% pay raise and BAH increases. Mitigating measures include reducing PCS moves, limiting new recruits, and delaying more than 100 military construction projects in support of servicemembers' quality of life. Each service chief has indicated similar impacts decrementing their mission to organize, train, and equip the force.

A yearlong CR would be “an unprecedented move that would cause enormous, if not irreparable,

*(Continued on Page 5)*

# New Year's Resolutions in Ruins? It's Not Too Late to Get Back on Track

By: *Erin Orlich Cardinal*  
FEBRUARY 08, 2022

By now, you have either established a new habit from your New Year's resolution ... or scrapped it. Most people gave up or forgot about their desired new practice by about, well, Day 10 of 2022. So here we are at the beginning of February – now what?



*Constantine Johnny/Getty Images*

Well, you have a choice, and that choice begins with the thought you choose to believe. You might be thinking, “Well, so much for that resolution” or, “I can never stick with anything” – thoughts likely leading to despair, discouragement, anger, shame, or guilt for not being strong enough to break a bad habit or keep up a good one. Those feelings are almost certain to result in quitting, giving up, self-loathing, self-deprecation, and/or a cycle of paralysis and rumination.

Or ... you could choose to think another thought about your resolution, such as, “Well, I haven't stuck to my new habit daily, but it's only February and I have the rest of the year to work on this. I won't be perfect, but any progress I make is still progress, and that's what counts!” This type of thinking throws the often not useful “all or nothing” mindset to the curb and allows us to try again another day.

## **[FEB. 23 MOAA WEBINAR: Mindset: A Critical Key to Success in Career Transition (and Life!)]**

Your results are a direct result of your thinking. Thoughts produce feelings that fuel actions (or inaction!). It all begins in your mind. Your circumstances do not dictate your results. It is your thoughts about your circumstances that do!

So how about reevaluating your resolutions, or any habits you have tried to adopt in the past, and think about them in a new way? Be kind to yourself. Let progress over perfection be good enough. In time, you will learn what works for you and before you know it, you will be further ahead than you were when you started.

One way to help instill a new practice is called, “habit stacking.” For example, if you want to drink more water and less coffee, soda, etc., start small – consider staging a glass of water on your nightstand (or by the sink) at night before you go to bed so it is ready for you when you wake up. Drink a glass of water first thing. Or commit to drinking a glass of water before, and in between, drinking anything else. Sound overly simple? Try it out!

So, what are you going to recommit to in February 2022 to work on for the rest of the year?

To learn more about developing a productive mindset and how to ditch an “all or nothing” approach, join MOAA for **a Feb. 23 webinar**. We'll discuss ways to develop a resilient mindset by choosing your thoughts in a manner that will move you closer to achieving sustainable results in any area of your life – including military-to-civilian transition! ★

## ***VA Vet Centers Need Longer Hours and More Promotion, MOAA Tells Congress***

**By: Kipp Hanley  
FEBRUARY 07, 2022**

MOAA joined several veterans service organizations in testifying Feb. 3 before a House of Representatives subcommittee in support of expansion and improvements to the VA's Vet Centers, which provide services for military personnel transitioning to civilian life.



*Alex Wong/Getty Images*

Created by the VA in 1979 to help veterans returning home from the Vietnam War, the centers' wide array of offerings includes counseling on military-related issues, bereavement, military sexual trauma counseling and referral, substance abuse assessment and referral, and screening for medical issues like depression and traumatic brain injuries.

More than 216,000 veterans and servicemembers, and their families, took advantage of readjustment counseling and outreach services offered by Vet Centers in 2021. And according to the VA, there was a 90% overall increase in veterans seeking mental health care from fiscal year 2006 to 2019.

With these figures in mind, MOAA is advocating for the VA to improve its promotion of the centers and prioritize the expansion of non-traditional hours to meet the increasing needs of veterans and servicemembers. While the centers may have more than 100,000 clients, many veterans have never heard of the facilities or their mission said MOAA Senior Director of Government Relations Cmdr. René Campos, USN (Ret), told the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health.

"MOAA continues to hear from veterans who are not familiar with Vet Centers or the services they provide," Campos said. "Typically, we hear veterans learn about the centers when they try to get an appointment through a VA Medical Center or by word of mouth from another veteran."

### **[READ MOAA'S TESTIMONY]**

As the workload has increased for Vet Centers, issues have arisen with documentation, staffing, and outreach to the military and veteran communities, according to reports from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the VA's Office of Inspector General (OIG).

In fall 2020, GAO released a report highlighting staffing and workload issues at the Vet Centers. A year after the GAO audit, the VA OIG found deficiencies in the quality reviews, suicide prevention and consultation, and supervision and training provided by the Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS), which oversees the operations of the centers.

*(Continued on Page 6...)*

## ***Delay Means Disaster*** . . . (continued from Page 2)

damage for a wide range of bipartisan priorities – from defense readiness and modernization, to research and development, to public health,” Austin said in the statement.

### **Make Your Voice Heard**

MOAA remains concerned Congress will remain focused on party priorities and the upcoming midterm elections, resisting their responsibility to come together to fully fund our government. The result could possibly wipe out the entire fiscal year’s budget increases they determined were needed for FY 2022.

It is imperative you let your legislators know we cannot sit by while their work remains unaccomplished.

Please contact your elected officials using MOAA’s toll-free congressional hotline, 1-866-272-6622, to share this important message, or use [this link to our Legislative Action Center](#) to send a letter to their offices. ★



**MOAA HA Chapter Luncheon**  
**Saturday, February 26, 2022**  
**1200-1330**

**Guest Speaker:**  
**Mr. Christopher Govekar**  
**Command Executive Officer**  
**75<sup>th</sup> Innovation Command**



*Golfcrest*  
COUNTRY CLUB

**Meal: Chicken Fried Chicken w/sides**  
**Dessert and Tea/Coffee included**  
**Cash Bar**

**Price: \$25 per person**



**Venue Address:**  
**2509 Country Club Dr.**  
**Pearland, TX 77581**

**Please RSVP to Rob Ritchie**  
**Email: [rpritchie@earthlink.net](mailto:rpritchie@earthlink.net)**  
**Phone: 713-818-0408**

## ***VA Vet Centers Need Longer Hours and More Promotion, MOAA Tells Congress*...***(Continued from Page 4...)*

According to the GAO report, some Vet Center employees expressed confusion on how productivity was measured and that incentives were given to change their work practices in some cases (changing length or frequency of appointments or holding more group counseling sessions, for instance).

Sharon Silas, the director of GAO's health care team, told the committee the Vet Centers are committed to helping those veterans with serious mental health issues but could improve on a number of things including documentation processes, coordination with VA Medical Centers, and incorporation of Vet Center counselors' input when changing their staffing model.

"The record system with RCS is quite different than with the Veterans Health Administration, so as an oversight body, we had a difficult time determining which processes were carried out in a timely manner and with what level of leadership oversight," Silas told the subcommittee. "... If you are looking at training records, as an example, they could not support documentation of completed trainings of their staff."

### **[RELATED: [MOAA's 2022 Legislative Priorities](#)]**

Rep. Jack Bergman (R-Mich.), the subcommittee's ranking member, said he fears the autonomy the Vet Centers have in relation to the rest of the VA – clients' medical information is kept confidential unless given permission by the client to be released – has led to a "dangerous disconnect" between Vet Centers and other VA medical facilities.

"Vet Centers have a key role to play in stopping veteran suicide and are a critical access point for veterans struggling to cope with civilian life," Bergman said. "They should be fully integrated into the mental health and suicide prevention efforts that the rest of the VA Health Center is undertaking, and treated an equal partner, not like a distant relative."

Subcommittee Chair Rep. Julia Brownley (D-Calif.) said staffing expansion at Vet Centers is necessary to continue to provide quality care to veterans and hopes whatever staffing model is adopted doesn't place too much rigidity on the number of clients seen.

"We need staffing models to know how we need to expand," Brownley said. "That is critical. But I also don't want the staffing models to be such that it creates this one counselor needs to see 10 veterans a day [model] and if they don't meet those criteria, that's unacceptable. That's not where we want to go in this process."

### **[RELATED: [VA Wants to Waive Some Copays for Veterans at High Risk for Suicide](#)]**

RCS completed work in December on a Vet Center-specific demand forecasting model, RCS Chief Officer Michael Fisher told the subcommittee.

"We intend to use the projections to improve planning related to future utilization, resource allocation and budgeting requirements," Fisher said.

In her Feb. 3 remarks to the subcommittee, Campos suggested the VA work with DoD to better advertise the services offered by the Vet Centers. Brownley thanked Campos for raising this issue to the subcommittee.

"That outreach [is important] so that servicemembers and National Guard understand that they have access to the Vet Centers," Brownley said. "They should use them. During their service, people may not be on the battlefield... but there are issues that can be dealt with at Vet Centers." ★



**Surviving Spouse Corner**

Judith Thomas  
Surviving Spouse MOAA Liaison  
[jthomas482@aol.com](mailto:jthomas482@aol.com)

MOAA has established a Surviving Spouse Virtual Chapter to provide support and information to Surviving Spouses. There are monthly meetings via Zoom, usually on the 2nd Tuesday of the month. They alternate between sharing pertinent information and social times.

If you are interested in joining the Virtual Chapter, please contact Micki Costello at [mssvc02@gmail.com](mailto:mssvc02@gmail.com) or Gail Joyce (the Surviving Spouse Representative on the MOAA Texas Council of Chapters) at [VirginiaGailJoyce@gmail.com](mailto:VirginiaGailJoyce@gmail.com).



## ***You Become a Non-Person': MOAA Testifies on Improving VA Survivor Outreach***

**By: Kipp Hanley  
FEBRUARY 09, 2022**

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) should allocate more resources for information technology, personnel, and customer-information management to modernize how it serves survivors and dependents, MOAA told members of a House of Representatives subcommittee Feb. 8.

MOAA was one of several veterans service organizations (VSO) to provide recommendations to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs subcommittee on how the VBA can improve its survivor outreach and assistance.

Improvements would include the expansion of communication and outreach efforts to surviving spouses, said Lt. Col. Mark Belinsky, USA (Ret), MOAA's director of Government Relations for currently serving and retired affairs, as well implementing a "no wrong door" policy for survivors seeking assistance.

Belinsky shared a survivor's story in his testimony illustrating the need for this "no wrong door" approach.

"It is almost like you become a non-person when your spouse dies," the survivor told MOAA. "I still get mail for him, but I need my own ID number to respond. Everything is done on your husband's Social Security number. When they gave me my own ID number, it wasn't linked to my husband's information and history. It's a customer service problem. Why can't I pick up the phone and have the representative see my information? A surviving spouse is still a customer and I know I am not a veteran."

*(Continued on next page...)*



*Photo by Elizabeth Fraser/Arlington National Cemetery*

## **MOAA Testifies on Improving VA Survivor Outreach**...*(Continued from previous page)*

### **[READ MOAA's TESTIMONY]**

Belinsky also addressed ongoing concerns with Arlington National Cemetery – as the cemetery reaches capacity, MOAA would also like to see Congress pass legislation to transform a VA-run facility into the next national cemetery that would afford full military honors, with support from the VA and DoD.

“Many dependents struggle to understand proposed eligibility reductions at Arlington National Cemetery that will change plans for many elderly veterans and make most woman veterans ineligible,” Belinsky told the subcommittee.

### **[TAKE ACTION: Ask Congress to Preserve Arlington National Cemetery Eligibility for 20-Year Retirees]**

#### **A Better VBA**

Recent automation has dramatically decreased the amount of time it takes the VBA to process Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) and burial benefit claims, according to testimony from Dr. Nilijah Carter, VBA's executive director for pension and fiduciary service.

“I am proud to say that as of December 2021, our average days to complete these claims are well under 60,” Carter told the subcommittee.

However, both VSO panelists and members of the subcommittee stated VBA's resource allocation and customer service in certain areas are not up to par.

Thirteen years after Congress created the VBA's Office of Survivors Assistance (OSA) -- a resource for benefits and services for survivors and dependents of deceased veterans – subcommittee chair Rep. Elaine Luria (D-Va.) said she was shocked to learn only two people work at this office despite 450,000 survivors receiving benefits from VBA. OSA returned 5,953 emails in the last fiscal year and conducted only 17 speaking and training engagements in fiscal years 2020 and 2021, Luria said.

### **[UPDATED MONTHLY: MOAA's Surviving Spouse Corner]**

Information on the OSA is also difficult to find on the VBA's website, and even the benefit letters sent to survivors after the death of their spouse can be confusing, said Belinsky, whose mother is a survivor.

According to Kelly Hruska, government relations director for the National Military Family Association, 40% of surviving spouses are over the age of 75, and many don't have easy access to computers.

“In an ideal world, we would love to see expanded programs for the Office of Survivors Assistance,” said Ashlynn Haycock-Lohmann, deputy director of policy for Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). “If a survivor calls and notifies that a veteran has died, the VA should immediately do a gentle handoff to the OSA and they can begin the process of supporting the survivors through the benefits [process], making sure they are aware of all the programs out there.”

Gold Star Wives of America Member-at-Large Pamela Laurion told the subcommittee she would like to see the VBA have a casualty assistance representative, similar to what the service branches provide a survivor when upon the death of a servicemember.

“The grief process for a widow when a spouse dies leaves that person with an enormous amount of paperwork, an enormous amount of emotional trauma, and an enormous amount of financial trauma,” Laurion said. “So having that initial point of contact [with the VBA] and assistance with paperwork [is important] ... so they can move forward with their benefits.” ★



## 2022 Officers

### President

Robin P. Ritchie, COL, USA (Ret.)  
713.818.0408  
[rpritchie@earthlink.net](mailto:rpritchie@earthlink.net)

### Vice President

Daniel M. Gutierrez, MAJ USA (Ret.)  
281.543.1527  
[danielgutierrez1751@gmail.com](mailto:danielgutierrez1751@gmail.com)

### Treasurer/Secretary

Frank A. Tricomi, COL, USA (Ret.)  
314.330.6936  
[ftricomi@earthlink.net](mailto:ftricomi@earthlink.net)

### Military Organizations Liaison

Eugene Tulich, Captain USCG (Ret.)  
281.376.0061  
[gene42@flash.net](mailto:gene42@flash.net)

### Chapter Chaplain

David Essells, USAR, MAJ (Ret.)  
817.682.1054  
[artychap@yahoo.com](mailto:artychap@yahoo.com)

### ROTC/ROTC Affairs Liaison

Rollins J. Collins, LTC USA (Ret.)  
704.213.2334  
[rollins.collins93@gmail.com](mailto:rollins.collins93@gmail.com)

### Surviving Spouse MOAA Liaison

Judith Thomas  
formerly Mrs. Billy Thomas, LTG USA  
(Ret)  
719.331.8485  
[jthomas482@aol.com](mailto:jthomas482@aol.com)

### Chapter Representative to TCC

Daniel M. Gutierrez, MAJ USA (Ret.)  
281.543.1527  
[danielgutierrez1751@gmail.com](mailto:danielgutierrez1751@gmail.com)

### Chapter Newsletter Editor

Kathy Frank  
713.203.5058  
[kathyfrank23@gmail.com](mailto:kathyfrank23@gmail.com)

*We need YOU...  
to remain a  
MOAA HA Member!*



*Debating whether to renew your chapter membership?*

*Talking to a potential new member?*

Benefits to belonging to a chapter:

- Camaraderie and Connections: when you attend chapter functions, actively serve on a committee, or take a prominent leadership role, you forge lasting ties with other MOAA members.
- Community Involvement: Membership provide opportunities to contribute to your community in a variety of ways, from providing scholarships to local students, to supporting causes that support wounded warriors and their families.
- Legislative Advocacy: We advocate for the entire military community-all ranks. Members play a critical role in advancing legislation in both Austin and Washington, D.C. This grassroots advocacy is key to MOAA achieving its legislative goals.

Chapter dues reminders will be emailed/sent out in November to those members needing renewal. We are on a calendar year for our chapter dues.

Annual renewal is \$30 for one year, \$20 for each additional year paid with renewal. Surviving Spouse \$15 initial membership; \$10 annual renewal.

Membership Application on the last page!

## Chaplain's Corner...

I was raised in Southern California so I loved to swim, go to the beach and body surf. I learned early to respect the power of the surf when a friend was swept off the rocks while we were bouldering on a jetty. She was OK after the brief rescue. I'd always heard about undertows. I was relieved when I learned, that they really did not pull you under; only out to sea! They are, however, dangerous if you don't know how to deal with them. The danger is that you can't recognize them as you are pulled away from the shore. It is dangerous when you cannot recognize the enemy. I also understood that while flying combat missions in Vietnam.



When I was in the fifth or sixth grade, I remember seeing Nikita Khrushchev at the podium shouting, "We will bury you." At that time the Cold War was beginning and Communism was the enemy. In the years following I learned and believed two things before I went to war in Vietnam. The first was that communism was, and is, dangerous and an enemy of democracy. The other idea that I believed was that, after studying the rise and fall of earlier empires, communism will not bury us...we will bury ourselves. This seemed apparent to me when I studied the Civil War. At that time Lincoln repeated Jesus words, "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mt 12:25) It seems that we are currently in the middle of a political "undertow".

We are asked to pray for our nation and its leaders. Are we praying for the success of our nation and the president's leadership? Currently, we are in the midst of the election primaries. As citizens and leaders, it is our responsibility to lead and voting is one of those responsibilities. Jesus told us that we should love God first and then love our neighbor as ourselves. Our vote should reflect not only that love but also our love for our nation.

At about the same time that I remembered hearing Khrushchev's words, President John F. Kennedy challenged the nation with his words, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country." As I thought about those words and what Jesus would have us do, I believe our vote can be guided by both our national and religious ideals with regard to the faith to which we adhere.

As we continue to move forward as a nation it is imperative that we pray for one another, our nation and its leaders. By our values, our sacrifices and our votes and with God's guidance we will move forward to be the beacon on the hill that we have been. ★

*~ David Essells, USAR, MAJ, RET*

# MOAA HA Chapter Luncheon Saturday, January 29, 2022



Dave Weaver



Dave Weaver, Guest Speaker  
President of the Houston  
Regional Veterans Chamber of  
Commerce



Rob Ritchie



Judith Thomas



Kathy Frank and Rob Ritchie



Dan Gutierrez



Mike Martin



Milinda Morris



Rick Frank



Dennis O'Driscoll



Tian O'Driscoll



Janice Nickie-Green



Don Wallin



Pat Wallin



Norris Posehn



Ken Tamberg



Susan Tamberg

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION / RENEWAL FORM

### MOAA's Core Mission

The Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) is the country's leading organization protecting the rights of uniformed servicemembers and their families. MOAA's constituents proudly hail from every branch of the uniformed services. To them, we have made the same promise that they have made to their country: Never Stop Serving.

MOAA's greatest mission is to improve the lives of those who serve and their families, which is achieved largely through the tireless advocacy efforts taking place in our nation's capital. For more than 90 years, MOAA has supported legislation that benefits the uniformed services community and has remained equally vigilant when fighting to stop legislation that threatens our livelihood. The larger our numbers, the greater our voice. For more detailed legislative actions see [MOAA | Take Action Center \(quorum.us\)](http://quorum.us)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please print)                      Last                                      First                                      Initial                                      Rank

Branch \_\_\_\_\_ Status \_\_\_\_\_ MOAA Nat'l ID \_\_\_\_\_ \*

Spouse's First Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. for Directory \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dues:** Regular Membership – \$30 first year; annual renewal \$30 (Discount for multiple years if paid with renewal: \$20 for each add'l. year **paid with renewal**)  
Surviving Spouse – \$15 first year; annual renewal \$10 (same discount for multiple years)

#### Chapter Assistance Fund

\$100.00     \$50.00     \$25.00     Other \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to MOAA-HA and mail to:

MOAA-HA  
PO Box 18372  
Sugar Land, TX 77496



For more information, call COL Robin Ritchie, 713-818-0408

*\*If not a MOAA national member, another benefit of chapter membership is the opportunity to become a national MOAA member at the BASIC LEVEL for free! If you would like to do so, please indicate here:*

YES     NO

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_