

# HUNDREDS OF FIRE & POLICE PENSIONS RESTORED....

On November 22, 2003, President Bush signed into law The District of Columbia Military Retirement Equity Act of 2003, allowing for current and retired members to "buy back" military service time and thus restoring the pensions for hundreds of retired District fire fighters and police officers who experienced their monthly annuities reduced on average by 25 to 30 percent.

Why the reduction?

In 1997 the Federal government assumed responsibility for the pension system that covers District police officers, fire fighters and teachers. This responsibility mandated not only that the Federal Government run the program, but also assume any unfunded liability in the system. Currently there are approximately 14,000 District retirees and survivors covered under the plan.

Shortly after the U.S. Treasury assumed responsibility for the plan, it discovered that the District of Columbia Government had incorrectly administered the program for decades. Under Federal law any post 1956 military service must be purchased in order to be considered creditable for retirement purposes. If it is not purchased, the retiree's annuity would be reduced once they become eligible for Social Security.

Unfortunately, the District ignored the 1956 statute governing military service and completely failed to properly inform members about the application of the statute; provide a mechanism through which members

could purchase their military time as can be done through the Federal system; and failed to correctly calculate the retirement benefits of hundreds of annuitants.

In the spring and early summer, the U.S. Treasury began informing retiree's that because of the error, their monthly annuity would be reduced by 'X' amount of dollars.

Needless to say the members affected turned to Local #36 and The Retired Association for help.

Unfortunately, the only way to "fix" this problem would be by legislation. Even though officials from the U.S. Treasury agreed that the retiree's were placed in this situation through no fault of their own, they had absolutely no discretion to administratively waive the enforcement of the 1956 law.

President Sneed and Vice President Cox immediately began to lay the foundation for a legislative fix. In order to be successful we had to have the support of key members of Congress and the cooperation from their staffs.

Fortunately for our retired members affected by the reductions, Local #36 maintains an excellent working relationship with Rep. Tom Davis, R-VA; Rep. Steny Hoyer, D-MD; and Rep. Curt Weldon, R-PA, the Congressional Representatives we needed to help us.

A series of meeting were held with Congressional staffers and

representatives from the affected groups which resulted in the drafting of the legislation which eventually became known as The District of Columbia Military Retirement Equity Act of 2003.

**In summary, this legislation will allow our active and retired members to "buy back" the years of military service time in order to avoid having the reduction in their monthly benefit payment.**

The fact that we were able to successfully achieve a legislative remedy in a short amount of time is a credit to the grassroots lobbying efforts by Vice President Cox. It was Kenny Cox who secured the assistance of Andy Quinn, former legislative assistant for Rep. Hoyer. It can't be emphasized enough how invaluable Quinn's influence and experience impacted in the drafting of the legislation. Cox was also able to enlist the assistance and support of Maine and Connecticut IAFF Locals in lobbying Senator Collins, R-ME and Senator Joe Lieberman, D-CT. Then there was the influence of Charla Bransley, a family friend of the Cox's who recently moved to Maine and knew Senator Collins and approached her about supporting our legislation. And the rest, as they say, is history.

There are many lessons to be learned from having gone through this experience, including "why" it pays to remain a member of Local

# ....YOUR LOCAL WORKING FOR YOU!

#36, even when you are retired.

Who could have ever envisioned that our pension's, which we all thought were safe and untouchable, could suddenly be changed or reduced with

little or no recourse.

But standing in the gap was officials from Local #36 proving once again that:

**In Unity  
There Is  
Strength!**



## **Fire Chief Hoyer To The Rescue!**

Maryland Congressman Steny Hoyer was recently honored by the leadership of both Local #36 and the Retired Firefighters Association for his co-sponsorship of The District of Columbia Military Retirement Equity Act of 2003. As a result of this legislation, retired members who had their monthly pensions reduced due to the failure by the District Government to enforce a 1956 law, will have the opportunity to buy back their military time and have their pensions restored.

*Left to right;*

Vice President Ken Cox, Rep. Steny Hoyer, retired Brother Jim Eschbacher (whose monthly annuity was reduced by \$455), and former Local #36 President Tom Tippett.