



As valued partners in the ALA, we thank each of you for the critical role you play in helping to preserve and protect commissary and exchange benefits for our military service members and their families. To accomplish this vital mission, the ALA has traditionally relied on informing key policy-makers of the value of the benefit and the need to preserve it. However, given the continuing threats to the system, the Board of the ALA decided to create an affinity group to reach out to patrons making them aware of their benefits and of the threats that could take these benefits away. In October 2011, the ALA created *The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits*.

The Coalition, also referred to as Save Our Benefit, has been working this past year to gain support in our efforts to promote and protect these “quality of life” benefits for service members, veterans, and their families. To accomplish this objective, Save Our Benefit spends a great deal of time and energy reaching out to members of The Military Coalition (TMC), which is comprised of 34 organizations representing 5.5 million members of the uniformed services – active, reserve, retired, survivors, veterans – and their families, to educate them on the economic value of the military resale system and the ongoing threats to these benefits. TMC, and many of its member organizations, list the protection of commissary and exchange benefits among their top legislative goals for 2013.

As a direct result of the Coalition’s outreach, many of these military and veterans service organizations include our articles and information on their websites and within their publications, encourage their members to join our efforts, and have become Valued Associates of the Coalition. Our partnership with these organizations is critical to the Coalition’s success. Combined, our growing number of Valued Associates represents 750 years of proven advocacy on Capitol Hill and reaches nearly 1.5 million military service members, veterans, and their families – the majority of which are authorized patrons of the resale benefit. The Coalition is committed to bringing more military and veterans service organizations on board as Valued Associates, and other associations interested in helping our efforts.

The Coalition is also focused on interacting directly with military patrons. As part of our Patron Engagement Strategy, the Coalition has developed and integrated the necessary tools to educate, engage and excite our patrons. Because of the unique retail nature of our business, the Coalition is also able to offer savings opportunities to patrons to encourage them to become members. In August 2012, the Coalition made the decision, in partnership with our ALA members and the manufacturing community, to create a section of our website to keep patrons informed; allow them to step up and protect their benefits; and to provide a one-stop location for patron discounts, savings, and promotions at the commissary and exchanges.

In September 2012, the Coalition launched the new section of our website called the “Patron Savings Portal.” Seeing the direction the Coalition was heading, the Exchange (AAFES) agreed to include the Coalition as part of its marketing efforts in December 2012. The Coalition now receives weekly Exchange promotional graphics for inclusion in the savings portal. While still in its infancy, the savings portal has already outgrown its initial concept. Due to the amount of current content and the more recent affiliate marketing efforts with the exchanges, the Coalition is already designing the next phase of the savings portal.

Where the website and savings portal educate our patrons, the Coalition's online congressional advocacy tool helps to engage them. In 2012, the Coalition integrated Roll Call's legislative advocacy system called Capwiz. This allows our patrons to contact the President, the Secretary of Defense, their Senator or Representative, or any individual the Coalition wishes to influence. It takes less than 60 seconds for a patron to review the letter, select the recipient, add their name, and click send. To date, more than 4,800 messages have been sent by our patrons.

The Coalition has also integrated the website and patron savings portal with social media. The Coalition's Facebook page helps educate and engage our patrons. The majority of information posted to Facebook is in the form of a call-to-action, bringing the patron back to the website. While the website and savings portal educate our patrons, and the online advocacy and Facebook page engage our patrons, promotions excite our patrons. Throughout the year, the Coalition is planning to hold monthly promotions, some larger than others. In the past, these promotions have contributed extensively to the size of our affinity group. In addition to increasing our membership, these promotions also provide the opportunity to remind military families that one of the best ways for them to protect their earned benefits is to use their benefits, and to encourage other military families to do the same.

Commissary and exchange benefits are the bedrock of the military community and one that we must all fight to protect. That is why *The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits* was created. Through its partnerships with the military and resale community, and growing patron support, the Coalition is well positioned to engage those who threaten this important benefit. With millions of service members, veterans, and their families relying on their commissary and exchange benefits to make ends meet, these benefits are too important to lose.

With all of us working together, we can and will Save Our Benefit!

*Candace Wheeler*  
*Vice President of Strategic Communications & Marketing*  
*The Coalition to Save Our Military Shopping Benefits*