

April 2026

ILCouncilMOAA.org

FORWARD OBSERVATIONS

Never Stop Serving!!!

*“NEVER
STOP
SERVING”*



President’s Column

Advocacy in Action (AiA) Issue

President’s Column for the Post Advocacy in Action Week Newsletter

As you know, Colonel Bob Norman and I travelled to northern Virginia in support of the annual MOAA Advocacy in Action event. While I don’t have the numbers, I hope our Illinois chapter members sent emails that week in support of our visit to the Hill on the 15th. Since Bob provided such a thorough review of the legislative portions of the week in his legislative column, I will focus on several other topics covered during the week. First and foremost, MOAA is an **ADVOCACY** organization whose purpose is to “protect the earned benefits of all uniformed servicemembers and their families and survivors.” The 350,000 members organized into 31 councils, 299 chapters, 8 virtual chapters, and 9 satellite chapters gives MOAA voice at national and local levels. It is the 30,650 chapter members who continue to do the “heavy lifting” for the organization. Kudos to you for being part of the “heavy lifters”!



Military Officers Association of America

Issue #2026-03

On the 15th Bob and I, with our teammates CDR Brian Czarnecki, USPHS, and Genelle Felix, a MOAA staffer, visited both Illinois senators' offices, and each team visited separately four representatives' offices. As Col Norman points out MOAA has revised our visits by targeting specific Congressmembers instead of visiting all of a state's elected officials. Thus, we did not attempt to visit all of the Illinois delegation.

Even so, I logged over 10,000 steps in 93-degree weather making the trips between the Senate and House offices. Overall, approximately 160 MOAA members conducted nearly 300 in-person office meetings of which over 50 were with the lawmakers themselves. Additionally, over 25,000 emails were sent from members across the country in support of those visits. Again, I hope that several of our members have their emails included in that count! It was a good day. And, especially as our country nears its 250th birthday, it is an awesome feeling to walk the halls of this nation's governing bodies – that doesn't happen in very many places in the world. For those of us who have worn the cloth of our nation, it is a special and rewarding experience.

Other things in the week:

- I hand-delivered the Zip code files to the Chapter & Councils folks
- MOAA is committed to keeping the Council & Chapter framework. I personally see a shift to more virtual chapters in an effort to engage more members in the advocacy efforts. (More numbers and more emails)
- Updating the CM is essential (expect a name change in the future) – MOAA can't provide information and data to the right chapter members if we don't have the correct data in the CM
- The Total Force Plus event last year was successful despite the concurrent government shutdown (there were over 2,700 participants) – the next one is scheduled for February 2027
- We really need to be careful with the personal information (PPI) on our members contained in the NRT and prospective members listings
- MOAA has given out \$190,000 in Community Grants to 91 chapters
- The MOAA store will be stocking the ROTC medals "soon"
- MOAA encourages chapters to collaborate with other VSOs, especially for advocacy issues – the more the louder the message
- Victoria retires 1 May! – She will be missed after several decades at MOAA

Several of the MOAA "partners" promoted their offerings to our membership

MOAA Vacations is offering discounts on Viking cruises, even those already booked

Both Insurance providers (liability & medical) had good information

I found the "Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors" (TAPS) to be very applicable as an aid to our surviving spouse liaisons. Check them out at www.taps.org

At the Honoree Ceremony and Reception, MOAA recognized Senators Tim Kaine and John Boozman, Representatives Don Beyer and Mike Kelly, two staffers Patrick Flood and Jordan Nasif, and the Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation

I picked up our LOE and Harris Communication awards. I will be visiting your chapters to present them to you at your next meeting.

It was a productive, informative, and rewarding week that reminded us that "People Outrank Everything" and that we should "Never Stop Serving!"

Semper Fi – Bob Tyler

Legislative Column



On the 15th of April Colonel Bob Norman, the Southwest chapter president and I, with our teammates CDR Brian Czarnecki, USPHS, and Genelle Felix, a MOAA staffer, visited both Illinois senators' offices, and each team visited separately four representatives' offices. As Col Norman points out below, MOAA has revised our visits by targeting specific Congressmembers instead of visiting all of a state's elected officials.

Thus, we did not attempt to visit all of the Illinois delegation. Even so, I logged over 10,000 steps in 93-degree weather making the trips between the Senate and House offices. Overall, approximately 160 MOAA members conducted nearly 300 in-person office meetings of which over 50 were with the lawmakers themselves.

Additionally, over 25,000 emails were sent from members across the country in support of those visits. I hope that several of Lincoln Land's members have their emails included in that count! It was a good day. And, especially as our country nears its 250th birthday, it is an awesome feeling to walk the halls of this nation's governing bodies – that doesn't happen in very many places in the world. For those of us who have worn the cloth of our nation, it is a special and rewarding experience.

Col Norman prepared an excellent summary of our legislative efforts during the AinA week that I will simply share with y'all. He captured the week very well. His report is copied below.

If you've been a member of the Military Officers Association of America for more than one year, you probably have an idea of the legislative advocacy undertaken by the national organization on a daily basis and the annual event that invites volunteers from all over the United States to bring a calculated message to the US Congress on one day. The former name of the event, taken from a tactical military operation, may not be appreciated by many, so the name was changed to Advocacy in Action (AiA) starting in 2021. Each year during the event, MOAA's Government Relations team provides a few pieces of legislation to focus the message to the legislators. Our Council President, Col (ret) Bob Tyler has participated for 10 years. I have done 3 years in person and 2 years virtually

Legislative Column

The legislation that MOAA was focusing on this year were

[The Shutdown Fairness Act \(S.3168/H.R.7137\)](#)

[The Major Richard Star Act \(S.1032/H.R.2102\)](#)

[The Governing Unaccredited Representatives Defrauding \(GUARD\) VA Benefits Act \(H.R.1732\)](#)

[The Military Care, Access, Reporting, and Evaluation \(CARE\) Act \(H.R.6796\)](#)

The GUARD VA Benefits Act and the Military CARE Act do not currently have companion bills in the Senate, but we were given to understand that the Senate is working on bills for both Acts.

The summary of these four pieces of legislation will be laid out later in this column. MOAA has assembled e-mails in the Legislative Action Center (LAC) that anyone, whether a member of MOAA or not, can send to their respective legislators. Just one, two, or a few messages may not bring any of these to the level of attention necessary for a legislator to be informed of the issue, so if there is any way possible to get more messages from a larger cohort, the impact will likely be hard-hitting.

Impact cannot be attained by one person sending messages multiple times. That just becomes noise. So encouraging your Chapter members to send messages will go a long way to creating the impact necessary. If you haven't sent messages from the LAC recently, consider maybe sending a message on the same legislation monthly. But watch for any activity that is happening in Congress with regard to the bill. Go to Congress.gov and search for the bill number in the respective chamber (S for Senate, HR for House of Representatives).

You'll be able to find out lots of information that could be helpful to you, including the status of the bill and where in the respective chamber it sits.



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Let's continue with AiA 2026. Almost every State was represented by a member of an Affiliated Council and/or Chapter. The number of legislators being visited on Wednesday determined the number of volunteers would be required. In the past, the Illinois delegation required visits to 19 offices—2 Senate, 17 Representative. Starting in 2025, MOAA's strategy moved to a more focused strategy, sending volunteers to members of the House who serve on specific Committees—Armed Services, Appropriations, Ways and Means, Veterans' Affairs, and possibly Administration. A contractor service—Soapbox—was hired to create the schedule for the volunteers to follow, which offices to visit, who would be visited, and if no visit, then dropping off materials for the staffs to consume.

This strategy eliminated over half of the Illinois Representatives from visits, so the day for the Illinois teams was not onerous. Team 1 from Illinois consisted of the Council President, Bob Tyler, and a MOAA-selected individual, CDR Brian Czarnecki, USPHS. Team 2 was Southwest Chapter President Bob Norman, and a MOAA staffer, Genelle Felix, Development Directorate. Both teams met with the staffs of the Senators, and each team also met with one or two Representative staffs, and also had one or two drop-offs to make. Each office visited welcomed the teams and listened to the issues and copious notes were taken by each one. Some of the questions routinely asked about the bills were who introduced the bill, how many co-sponsors, what is the cost associated with passage. Training by MOAA on several occasions with a last update the day prior to the event, helped prepare all teams to carry the message to the legislators.

Most of the bills were well understood by the staffers, especially those that were co-sponsored by the respective legislator. Now, a word of caution—just because a legislator co-sponsors a bill does not necessarily lead to their voting in favor of the bill when it comes to the floor. The hope is that the vote will be favorable, but there are several things to consider about the legislation and what it represents in costs that might cause negativity toward the legislation. The Congressional Budget Office provides estimates on some bills that may or may not be accurate, or may not be understood given realities of the affected population affected.

So, why did MOAA choose to focus on these pieces of legislation when there are so many out there that should be presented? Well, I cannot and will not provide an opinion on why these were selected except for the Star Act. I will say that the New Year's Resolutions for Congress that MOAA published at the outset of 2026 actually covered three of these bills and the Star Act. The other two bills that didn't make the cut this year for AiA were the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) and the Veteran Caregiver Reeducation, Reemployment, and Retirement Act. At AiA, I learned that the WOTC had expired at the end of 2025, but is being resurrected to address the hiring of military spouses. The Star Act has also been around for a few years, has the support of nearly three-fourths of the Congress (319/78), and has yet to reach a vote as either a stand-alone bill or in a NDAA.

Let's look at the bills one at a time. First, the Major Richard Star Act seeks to eradicate the combat-wounded veterans' tax much like the widows' tax for SBP-DIC that was overcome through legislation just a few years ago. Right now, combat-wounded veterans who are medically retired short of a full career (less than 20 years) and are entitled to VA benefits will have their military retirement pay offset by the VA disability dollar for dollar. Every service member who has served and is medically retired deserves to have the benefit of retired pay for the years that they served, and to not have that pay offset by a different benefit for their disability. I had heard that many legislators were not confident that the bill could stand alone and would be better if included in the NDAA. We'll see. Continue to send messages periodically to the members of Congress to get this legislation moved along.

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Next, the Shutdown Fairness Act will ensure that the military members who are required to work in spite of a government shutdown get paid. This offers financial security for the family and also helps recruiting and retention. Whotheir partisan purposes. Also,

MOAA is asking for amendments to cover all uniformed services—NOAA and USPHS. These are set apart from other uniformed services (police, fire, etc.) because they are commissioned officers who are eligible for veteran benefits.

Non-payment during a shutdown does not just impact the member and his family, but also affects readiness of the Reserve Component. They will not be able to participate in non-active training that prepares them for their roles to back up the active duty military.

This is critical for the All-Volunteer Force, recruitment and retention. Continue sending messages to your legislators.

Third, the GUARD VA Benefits Act restores “teeth” to the penalties for unaccredited claims agents and those who charge exorbitant fees from the veterans they are helping.

MOAA’s position is that the initial filing of a claim by a veteran should be without cost. Since 2018, the VA has only been able to submit letters of reprimand to unaccredited agents, which as one would imagine, does nothing to stem the tide of these agents. These agents may promise greater benefits or faster response times with their assistance. Promises by these fraudulent agents are often overblown and never fulfilled. There is no expediency associated with an agent other than a Veteran Service Officer (VSO) filing a claim.

Each claim goes through the same process at the VA. There are over 14,000 VSOs across the US who provide filing assistance free of charge, yet there are still many veterans who do not know where they can go to contact VSOs, or they are unable to travel to see a VSO.

Other accredited agents who help with claims filing for a fee may be doing so with a compassionate mind-set, but are still charging a fee, sometimes as much as \$12,500. This Act returns penalties for the unaccredited agents who prey on unsuspecting veterans with fraudulent claims.

Please submit the prepared e-mails to your elected representatives and, if you have one, add your own story to the message. These personal stories go a long way to strengthening the message.

Lastly, the Military CARE Act focuses on the currently serving and the care and access that these members and their families experience in the Military Healthcare System (MHS).

During last year’s AiA, this issue did not even have a bill in Congress. But through the groundwork laid by

MOAA and the emphasis brought by the AiA participants, there is now a bill sponsored in the House of Representatives, wants to work, let alone put one’s life at stake, for an organization that will not pay for their services?

Several other bills have been introduced that cover military and federal employees. And many only cover Fiscal Year 2026. This Act specifically covers military pay during a government shutdown in perpetuity so that whichever party controls the Chambers of Congress cannot hold hostage the military personnel for their partisan purposes.

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Lastly, the Military CARE Act focuses on the currently serving and the care and access that these members and their families experience in the Military Healthcare System (MHS). During last year's AiA, this issue did not even have a bill in Congress. But through the groundwork laid by MOAA and the emphasis brought by the AiA participants, there is now a bill sponsored in the House of Representatives and soon to be in the Senate. The current feedback program—Interactive Customer Evaluation—that uses surveys after the fact do not receive the attention nor are they aggregated to determine a trend that needs addressing. The CARE Act requests that the Department of War direct the MHS to come up with a digital system that will offer real-time feedback, coalesce the data, provide transparency on issues, and enable the Defense Healthcare Agency (DHA) to find opportunities to fix an issue or break a log jam.

Adding to the frustration of the currently serving, their opportunity to seek healthcare options in the TRI-CARE system has been removed and they are now only eligible to change their healthcare options during Open Season or by a Qualifying Life Event. This issue also effects recruiting and retention. I'm sure that many, if not all, of us have experienced frustration interacting with the system during our military service. Use those stories to highlight the importance of capturing data that would support providing options to our currently serving members and their families. Go to the Legislative Action Center and send the message to your elected members of Congress.

There are several more pieces of legislation identified in the Legislative Action Center that help ensure that the military community receives their earned benefits. Don't just stop with the first page of four AiA items. Encourage your Chapter members—and anyone else who might willingly support our efforts—to read about the other opportunities to send messages on other topics. And keep in mind that not all legislators will be familiar with or knowledgeable about each and every issue, so they need to be informed.

Ideally, there will be a groundswell of messages received by the members of Congress from the many members of MOAA. Data shows that less than 25,000 of the 350,000 National members are members of Chapters. We can have a great impact with the 25,000, but we all need to be encouraging the remaining ones who are not Chapter members to add their voices to the message, join a Chapter, or somehow be engaged.

I was asked if I thought AiA 2026 (our Illinois team) efforts were successful, that the information provided went to the right audience, that these staff members took to heart all the requests, and that Congress would be limited. Our message was clear. Copious notes were taken. Two of the three staff members I met with were familiar with the issues.

But, my work beforehand, to provide to the staffs of the District offices the same information two to three weeks prior to AiA may have had a hand in the preparation of the DC staffs. Grassroots work and building a relationship with the District offices has helped me a great deal with my confidence to approach the Illinois and DC office staffs. Try it out. Start small so that you can gain a foothold and start the conversation. You may just want to stop by a District office and offer thanks for support of a particular bill by the legislator. Get your foot in the door. That's the beauty of our ability within the State to set the stage for further engagements. Be bold. You're doing for the next generation what the previous generation has done for us. Never stop serving.

Col Norman captured the day on the Hill well, and he highlighted the importance of keeping engaged in “protecting the earned benefits of all uniformed servicemembers and their families and survivors.” It was a productive, informative, and rewarding week that reminded us that “People Outrank Everything” and that we should “Never Stop Serving!”

MOAA STANDS READY TO:

PROTECT the value of service-earned health benefits from new TRICARE fees, disproportionate TRICARE cost-share increases, or barriers to accessing care in the military health system or through the VA.

PRESERVE the pay earned by those in uniform, to include scheduled pay increases, and established concurrent receipt provisions and eligibility.

PREVENT burdensome delays in VA claims processing and/or reduction of earned VA benefits.

DEFEND the veterans and military spouses who continue their service in the federal government — and other federal employees who serve veterans.



Chaplain's Comments

Kindest Greetings to the Council with many thanks for your able leadership !

We are now in the month of May when a lot of spring rain is behind us and we are now enjoying the beauty which nature offers. We also note that this month is full of ceremonies with tears from they who have given sons, daughters, fathers and mothers to various war efforts. Chaplains have stood at many grave sites, giving what comfort they could, shots have been fired and bands have played " Abide with Me " and other hymns as caskets are brought to the grave. More positively. we will observe many patriotic events in which the history of the Colonies is reviewed, leading to the formation of The United States under a system of government unheard of anywhere else, government of the people, by the people and for the people. This principle though is constantly challenged . Before the US Supreme Court in recent days has come the issue of privacy.

We all rejoice that we have many freedoms as citizens as well as they who are legally in the US temporarily. But what protection do we all have concerning privacy and the right to be left alone at times ? This matter came up in the last North Shore and Chicago meeting .The presenter mentioned the need to be very careful about use of anything involving communication. A few of us raised the question of what guarantees the US Constitution or any other documents against invasion of privacy gives? What follows is what the US Constitution says about it. The US Constitution, according to one author, contains no express right to privacy. The Bill of Rights, however raises the concern of James Madison for protecting specific aspects of privacy, such as the privacy of beliefs, (1st Amendment) privacy of the home against demands that it be used to house soldiers protection against unreasonable searches and protection against self-incrimination.

The question which the author raises on whether the Constitution protects privacy in ways not expressly provided in the Bill of Rights is controversial. Many originalist, have argued that no such general right to privacy exists. The Supreme Court though in 1923 has broadly read the " ;liberty " guarantee. The 14th Amendment gives a fairly broad right to privacy that has come to encompass decisions about child rearing, marriage, procreation and termination of medical treatment. This same author (unidentified) notes concerning the 14th Amendment that No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States, nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law within its jurisdiction. , I believe we all can agree that there is some right to privacy.

No one has said that we cannot have locks on our doors or to be forced to put up with obscene messages or conduct. What we all should do is to be as obedient as possible to every civil, military and church regulation required of us. There is the thinking these days that it is somehow right to take something which does not belong to you since some people don't have it. God is a God of order and we are to obey every statute which does not violate His sense of order. May God Be with us as we go through these uncertain days mindful that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Ralph Woehrmann

CH Major USA Retired

Survivor Outreach Services Coordinator



Survivor Outreach Services

Many choose new goals for the beginning of the Year.

Organization is a great place to start. DFAS, BENEFEDS, MILCONNECT and the VA are all great online resources and a great place to start.

As a reminder the Survivor Benefit Plan

Marital Status Update form (Formally Certification of Eligibility) is due annually

on the Annuitants' birthday. If you have questions, contact either individual below:

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PROVIDING **CRISIS RELIEF** TO OUR NATION'S HEROES

Together, we can offer support and stability to the uniformed services and veteran communities during a crisis.



OUR GOAL

Our goal is to raise \$1 million to endow The MOAA Foundation's Crisis Relief Fund and continue our great work.



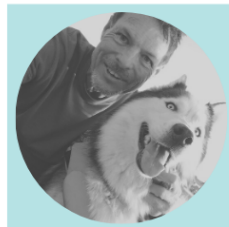
WHY CRISIS RELIEF?

More than 12 million veterans without a VA disability rating have virtually no support when disaster strikes.



CAN YOU HELP?

Our hope is your generous contribution will help us reach our goal to fund this program in perpetuity.



READY TO ASSIST

In April 2020, The MOAA Foundation launched an emergency COVID-19 Relief Fund to support uniformed services families impacted by the pandemic.

As the pandemic has ebbed, we know crisis-related needs of uniformed services families and veterans still exist.

To answer the call for help, we established The MOAA Foundation Crisis Relief Fund — an enduring emergency relief fund to assist uniformed services personnel, veterans, and their families (including caregivers and survivors) in the midst of crisis.

WHAT SETS US APART



Our streamlined application takes less than 20 minutes to complete, saving applicants the time they need to address other urgent priorities.



Funds reach an approved applicant's bank account within days of approval — timely relief when it can have the most impact.



Financial grants are awarded to qualifying applicants to help with housing costs, utilities, medical and insurance bills, groceries, and more.



100% of our Crisis Relief applicants would recommend our program to others in need.



(800) 234-6622



moaa_foundation@moaa.org



charities.moaa.org/crisisrelief

Reasons to join a MOAA Chapter

Joining a MOAA chapter offers a range of benefits and opportunities for military officers and their families. Here are some of the reasons to consider joining a MOAA chapter:

Make Yourself Heard: MOAA chapters provide critical grassroots support for MOAA's national legislative agenda, helping to protect the benefits of military servicemembers and their families.

Give Back to the Community: Chapter members serve as ambassadors in their communities, supporting various programs that positively impact the lives of others.

Networking Opportunities: Chapters include second-career members in the workforce and retired servicemembers, providing valuable connections and networking opportunities.

Stay Informed: Chapter newsletters, websites, and meetings offer the latest information on local, state, and national issues and changes to military benefits.

Influencing State Legislation: MOAA chapters can lobby for and pass state-level legislation that affects military members and their families. Joining a MOAA chapter is a way to contribute to the advocacy efforts of the organization and to support the rights of military service members and their families.

Council of Chapters

Website

The Council has a website. Address is <http://www.ilcouncilmoaa.org>

If you have any items or input for the website, contact MAJ (USAF, Ret) Dave Knieriem at the following email address: dknieriem@casscomm.com

MOAA is the nation's largest and most influential association of military officers. It is an independent, nonprofit, politically nonpartisan organization.

While MOAA is permitted by law to lobby—and does so actively—its status as a tax-exempt veterans organization precludes it from participating in political activities, which are defined as intervening directly or indirectly in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.

Stated briefly: the association may advocate issues, but it may not advocate the election or defeat of particular candidates or political parties. This newsletter follows the policies of MOAA National.



Never Stop Serving!!!

MOAA Store and ROTC/Junior ROTC Items

The MOAA store has re-opened at <https://moaa.estore.shop/>. In addition to promotional gear, you can find ROTC and Junior ROTC (JROTC) award certificates (in stock now) and medals (place orders now for backorders to be shipped when medals are in stock, expected by the end of April). Electronic certificates may be customized and downloaded [online](#) at any time. Note that medals have been updated to reflect all eight uniformed services, and JROTC certificates have been updated with language more appropriate to high school students rather than ROTC students.

The cost of medals to affiliates will remain at \$3.00 per medal due to a MOAA subsidy. Additionally, the store recently added the USPS live rate to shipping options, providing a lower-cost alternative.

Council Meetings

According to the Council By-Laws: There shall be a regular meeting of the Council during each of the first two trimesters of each calendar year. Notice of such meeting, provided by the Secretary, shall be mailed, via post or electronically, to each officer, appointive official of the Council, and each member of the Council at least 30 days before the time appointed for such meeting.

MOAA Legislative Action Center

You can help MOAA by visiting their legislative action center and contacting your elected officials regarding pending legislation MOAA is working. You can reach the Legislative Action Center at the following email address: [take action.moaa.org](mailto:takeaction@moaa.org)

Never Stop Serving



The Greatest Casualty is
Being Forgotten!

Now and Always
We'll be There.



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THE OFFICIAL TRAVEL AGENCY OF MOAA

Booking travel through MOAA Vacations offers several advantages for members including:

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MOAA Exclusive Amenities: As a member, you receive additional perks and benefits on most cruises and tours including additional dollars off, free shipboard credit, cabin upgrades and more.

Book with Confidence: MOAA Vacations always guarantees the lowest price and is the only travel agency in the country that provides travel on a Satisfaction Guaranteed basis. Should you have any issue or problem before or during your trip, we guarantee to resolve the issue to your satisfaction.

Group Travel: We offer the opportunity to travel with your fellow MOAA members from your local chapter and across the country, thereby increasing the fun for your next vacation.

MOAA Support: MOAA Vacations supports MOAA National and Local Chapters. By booking through us you are also supporting MOAA's mission and initiatives, as a portion of the proceeds helps fund advocacy and support programs for the military community and their families.

If you're considering booking a trip, it's worth exploring what MOAA Vacations has to offer!

Regent All-Inclusive Luxury Cruises



The World's Most Luxurious Fleet™ offers the most inclusive luxury travel experience at an extraordinary value. If you compare Regent's all-inclusive voyages to the competition in Alaska, Asia, the Tropics, the Mediterranean and Northern Europe the research shows Regent Seven Seas Cruises® offers the best value in each of these regions.

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