

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF CONNECTICUT



STATE LEGISLATIVE OFFICE

STATEMENT OF

ROBERT A. HUNTER
STATE LEGISLATIVE CHAIRMAN
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE
SELECT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT

WITH RESPECT TO PENDING VETERANS' BENEFITS LEGISLATION
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2011
HARTFORD, CT

Senate Chairman Maynard, House Chairman Hennessey, and members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the following veterans' legislation. The more than 18,500 members of the Department of Connecticut, Veterans of Foreign Wars greatly appreciate the voice you give them at these hearings that are critical to their well-being as veterans and citizens of the great State of Connecticut.

1. Proposed S.B. No. 112 AN ACT CONCERNING RIBBONS AND MEDALS FOR MEMBERS OF THE MERCHANT MARINE WHO SERVED IN TIME OF WAR.

The VFW will not take a position on this issue at this time.

2. Proposed S.B. No. 126 AN ACT CONCERNING PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR DISABLED VETERANS.

The VFW is in favor of this legislation, as it provides some modicum of relief to those who have given much in defense of their nation. Our brothers who have returned to our home upon leaving a portion of themselves while serving abroad on our nation's behalf are most deserving of our greatest consideration that they may prosper as civilians.

3. Proposed S.B. No. 368 AN ACT CONCERNING REPRESENTATION ON THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS.

While the VFW believes this bill is better served as a constituent element of Proposed S.B. 374.

4. Proposed S.B. No. 369 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONTACT LIST FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES AND VETERANS.

The VFW supports this bill, though we are concerned there might be a potential opening for those who are not veterans to commit fraudulent behavior through access to this list. We respectfully request the Department of Motor Vehicles insist on proof of eligibility immediately prior to their addition to this mailing list.

The VFW gratefully acknowledges the Department of Veterans Affairs' relentless pursuit to put meaningful benefit-oriented information into the hands of all eligible veterans.

5. Proposed S.B. No. 371 AN ACT CONCERNING IDENTIFICATION CARDS FOR VETERANS.

The VFW supports this legislation, if and only if it serves only to the benefit of eligible veterans and does not serve to single them out for the purposes of persecution by any agency or agent of the State of Connecticut or its municipalities.

6. Proposed S.B. No. 373 AN ACT CONCERNING THE AWARD OF THE WARTIME SERVICE MEDAL TO MEMBERS OF THE MERCHANT MARINE.

As stated in regard to Proposed S.B. 112, the VFW will not take a position on this issue at this time.

7. Proposed S.B. No. 374 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS.

THE VFW supports this legislation, provided the bill reflect appointments to the Board are actively drawn from the most current conflicts for at least 50% of the Board's composition.

8. Proposed S.B. No. 375 AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL "SILENT SERVICE" MOTORCYCLE NUMBER PLATES FOR VETERANS.

VFW takes no position on this issue at this time.

9. Proposed S.B. No. 376 AN ACT CONCERNING DISABILITY COMPENSATION FOR VETERANS.

The VFW supports this legislation, as it protects the disabled veteran by ensuring a continued, undiminished stream of compensation for losses accrued during their service to the United States. Such compensation may well be the normalizing factor in allowing the veteran to sustain a viable life following the dissolution of marriage proceedings.

10. Proposed S.B. No. 377 AN ACT CONCERNING INTEREST OWED ON PROPERTY TAXES BY MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES ON ACTIVE DUTY.

The VFW is in favor of this legislation, as it supports Connecticut's active duty military by allowing them to remain focused on their missions abroad, that they may return home intact to their families and civilian responsibilities. Moreover, this legislation will protect those who, by physical separation from reasonable means of communication, may not be able to attend to responsibilities otherwise easily managed while stateside.

11. Proposed H.B. No. 5058 AN ACT CONCERNING COLLEGE TUITION AND FEE WAIVERS FOR VETERANS.

The VFW is wholeheartedly in favor of this legislation, though would like to see a waiver of all tuition and college/university fees, regardless of full or half-time status, as stipulated in Sections 10a-26, 10a-77, 10a-99 and 10a-105 of the General Statutes.

Under the auspices of the Board of Governors for Higher Education in the mid to late 1980's, there was a transition from an accounting system from which tuition accounted for a large share of the students' cost of attending one of the state institutions of higher education, to that of the fee-based accounting system for which tuition accounted for little of the students' cost, and college/university fees accounted for more. The intent of the shift was to allow the colleges/universities greater latitude in the management of their monies in the operation of their schools.

When this transition was made, the intent of the aforementioned sections was inadvertently subverted by the fee-based system, and those entitled to the tuition waiver were suddenly faced with an instantaneously significant increase in their cost of their higher education.

The VFW intends to pursue returning the affected statutes to that of their original intent with respect to eligible veterans as stipulated in said statutes. The VFW believes those veterans are left with an inferior educational benefit than they had prior to the shift in the 1980's, and respectfully request the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs to take up the mantle for this worthy piece of legislation along with our additional requests.

12. Proposed H.B. No. 5115 AN ACT CONCERNING THE POSTHUMOUS AWARD OF RIBBONS AND MEDALS TO VETERANS FOR SERVICE IN TIME OF WAR.

The VFW is in favor of this legislation, as it makes available the Connecticut War Time Service Medal should the deceased veteran be entitled to such.

13. Proposed H.B. No. 5272 AN ACT PROVIDING FREE ADMISSION TO STATE PARKS AND FORESTS FOR STATE RESIDENTS WHO SERVE IN THE MILITARY.

The VFW is in favor of this legislation.

14. Proposed H.B. No. 5343 AN ACT CONCERNING VETERANS' LICENSE PLATES FOR ACTIVE MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES.

The VFW is in favor of this legislation, provided the active duty personnel have served continuously and honorably for at least 90 days.

15. Proposed H.B. No. 5498 AN ACT CONCERNING ADDITIONAL PAY FOR ACTIVE SERVICE AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001.

The VFW is in favor of this legislation.

16. Proposed H.B. No. 5955 AN ACT CONCERNING ASSISTANCE TO VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS FROM THE CONNECTICUT ENERGY EFFICIENCY FUND.

The VFW is in favor of this legislation, as it provides the State's many non-profit veteran-oriented groups the opportunity to achieve energy efficiency as they continue to serve veterans while not draining their fiscal resources. Many of the facilities are older, military-oriented buildings that are, while structurally sound, energy-inefficient. It also affords these organizations the opportunity, through improvement in energy-efficiency, to reduce their environmental expenses into the distant future.

17. S.B. No. 854 (RAISED) AN ACT EXEMPTING MEMBERS OF THE CONNECTICUT NATIONAL GUARD FROM CERTAIN FEES CHARGED BY THE COMMISSIONER OF MOTOR VEHICLES.

The VFW is in favor of this legislation.

18. H.B. No. 5273 (COMM) AN ACT EXEMPTING MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY FROM THE STATE INCOME TAX. (VA)

The VFW is in favor of this legislation, as it pays honorable tribute, and provides financial relief, to those veterans who have given a significant portion of their working lives to the service of this great country, and retired from said service with distinction and honor.

19. H.B. No. 5801 (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING A STATE SONG OF REMEMBRANCE. (VA)

The VFW is in favor of this legislation.

20. H.B. No. 6259 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING A STATE IDENTIFICATION CARD FEE WAIVER FOR BLIND VETERANS

The VFW is in favor of this legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my thanks for being given the honor of providing testimony before this distinguished committee. I look forward to the time when it will be a standing committee, which will befit the honor you pay our active duty members of the Armed Forces, and their veterans. I stand ready to answer any questions you may have regarding my testimony. Thank you.