



2010 Legislative Session Review

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Veterans Remain a Priority at the Capitol

To Our Friends in the Veterans Community:

Deficit. Unallot. Budget Cuts. These words have unfortunately become all too familiar in the past few years, as Minnesota again faced another budget shortfall. Confronted with a dire budget situation, the Governor and Legislature had to set priorities, and one was protecting Veterans programs.

While most agencies saw their budgets cut, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) – along with Military Affairs and core public safety programs – were kept whole. Protection of the Department's budget will allow MDVA to continue to provide vital services to Veterans, including direct assistance through programs such as the State Soldiers Assistance Program and C.O.R.E., assistance with U.S. VA claims and benefits, and care for residents at the five state Veterans Homes.

In addition to holding MDVA's budget harmless from cuts, the Governor and Legislature passed many initiatives advanced by the agency, as well as others advanced by legislators themselves.

MDVA thanks Minnesota's elected leaders for their continued support of programs that serve our Veterans!

Commissioner Michael Pugliese
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs



Capital Investment (Bonding) Bill

The Legislature and Governor funded all priority bonding projects for MDVA. They include:

- \$4 million in asset preservation. This money will be used system-wide for improvements and renovations at the Homes.
- \$450,000 to design, construct and furnish a new enclosure for the front entrance of the Minnesota Veterans Home – Luverne. The enclosure will provide protection from the elements when loading and unloading residents.
- \$9.45 million to remodel Building 16, demolish Building 17's north wing and design and rebuild a 72 single occupancy bed structure on the Minneapolis campus. (HF2700)

Omnibus Supplemental Budget Bill

Under normal budget circumstances, the Supplemental Budget Bill is used during the off-budget year to address additional, unanticipated funding needs for state agencies. With the large deficit this year, the bill had to instead cut hundreds of millions of dollars in state government spending.

The Supplemental Budget Bill was passed early in the session, and addressed more than \$300 million of the state's multi-billion dollar deficit. It should be noted that the bill did not cut any current MDVA funding – as per the Governor's recommendations – and did provide new, one time funding for the following:

- \$100,000 for Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV), and
- \$100,000 for Honor Guards.

The bill also transferred \$200,000 from the Support Our Troops Account to the C.O.R.E. program, and repealed language that required specific amounts to be spent on food, pharmaceuticals, fuel and utilities at the Homes (allowing MDVA to manage the budget according to need).

Not included in the supplemental budget bill was a \$1.5 million request from MDVA to fund operations at two new facilities that are anticipated to come online in 2011. The first is the new Adult Day Care at the Minnesota Veterans Home – Minneapolis, and the second is a 21-bed specialty care (Alzheimer's) unit at the Minnesota Veterans Home – Fergus Falls.

The supplemental budget bill earmarked existing MDVA funds for these programs, so the Department will again submit a funding request in the next legislative session. (HF1671)

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Search for Suitable Sites for Veterans Cemeteries Expands

Over the past year, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) has been searching for suitable land to locate two new Veterans cemeteries.

Under legislation passed in the 2009 Bonding Bill, the Department was directed to look for land in northeastern Minnesota and Redwood County. Since then, numerous sites have been looked at but were ultimately excluded, largely due to unsuitable soil conditions.

Legislation included in this year's Omnibus Agriculture/Veterans Bill expands the search for suitable land to southeast, southwest and northeastern Minnesota. The Department is to look first at land that is either publicly-owned or available for donation.

Several sites of interest were identified by the legislators, including Fort Ridgley and parcels in Fillmore and Redwood Counties. MDVA will

continue to work with officials in those areas to determine if any of the sites meet all the criteria, and will expand the search until suitable sites are identified. A report to the Legislature will be completed by January 15, 2011. (SF 2737)



Retiring Legislators

2010 is an election year for all legislative seats, as well as governor and other constitutional officers. Numerous legislators have announced that they will not be seeking re-election to their current seat. MDVA thanks these legislators for their service to Minnesota!

Senate

Tarryl Clark, DFL-St. Cloud (running for 6th Congressional District)
Mee Moua, DFL-St. Paul
Debbie Johnson, R-Ham Lake
Steve Murphy, DFL-Red Wing
Steve Dille, R-Dassel
Pat Pariseau, R-Farmington
Jim Vickerman, DFL-Tracy
Dennis Frederickson, R-New Ulm
Yvonne Prettner Solon, DFL-Duluth (running for Lieutenant Governor on the Dayton ticket)

House of Representatives

Laura Brod, R-New Prague
Randy Demmer, R-Hayfield (running for 1st Congressional District)
Rob Eastland, R-Isanti
Tom Emmer, R-Delano (running for Governor)
Dan Severson, R-Sauk Rapids (running for Secretary of State)
Cy Thao, DFL-St. Paul
Mary Ellen Otremba, DFL-Long Prairie
Doug Magnus, R-Slayton (running for State Senate – Vickerman's seat)
Marty Seifert, R-Marshall
Jeremy Kalin, DFL-North Branch
Margaret Anderson Kelliher, DFL-Minneapolis (running for Governor)
Paul Kohls, R-Victoria
Larry Haws, DFL-St. Cloud
Karla Bigham, DFL-Cottage Grove

Additional Legislation of Veteran Interest

Free Entrance to State Parks

The Omnibus Environment & Natural Resources Bill contains a provision that modifies a program which provides free entrance to state parks for Veterans. Currently, any Veteran with a total and permanent disability can receive a free annual park permit. Under the new law, the program is extended, giving any resident Veteran with any level of service-connected disability a daily park pass. To utilize this program, Veterans must present a copy of their determination letter to a park attendant. (SF3275)

Veterans License Plates

New plates will be available for Veterans that are recipients of the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, the Korean Defense Service Medal, the Bronze Star Medal or the Silver Star. Also, members of the U.S. Armed Forces who are active duty and a recipient of the Purple Heart are eligible to purchase Purple Heart plates. Previously, these plates were available only to Veterans. (SF2540)

Military Reservist Economic Injury and Veteran-Owned Small Business Loans

The Omnibus Economic Development Policy Bill expands the Military Reservist Economic Injury Loan Program. Under this program, the commissioner of the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) may make one-time, interest-free loans of up to \$20,000 to recently-separated Veterans to start a Veteran-owned small business. (SF2510)

American Legion Day and VFW Day

There are now two new special days in Minnesota: September 16 has been identified as “American Legion Day,” and May 28 is “Veterans of Foreign Wars Day.” (SF2373 & SF2475)

Waiver of Fees for K-12 Activities

Under a provision included in the Omnibus Agriculture/Veterans Bill, a school board may waive any deposit or fee for any pupil whose parent is serving in, or within the past year has served in, active military service. (SF2737)

Veterans Memorial Highways

Three new memorial highways were designated – Trunk Highway 200 from the border of North Dakota to Mahnomon; portions of Trunk Highways 34 and 87 in Becker County; and Trunk Highway 59 from Karlstad to the border of Canada. (SF2540)

Lawful Gambling Dollars

Lawful gambling proceeds will now be allowed to be used to pay for the utilities (electricity, heating, sewer and water) of the portion of a building used as the primary headquarters of a licensed veteran or fraternal organization. (HF3729)

Survivor Education Benefit Expansion

Definitions were amended to include step-children as eligible for the benefit, and “deceased Veteran” to include persons who were residents of Minnesota within six months of entering the Armed Forces, or for the six months preceding the Veteran’s date of death. (SF2737)



Veteran-Owned Small Business Law Amended

Under current law, bid-preference for state contracts is limited to veteran-owned businesses that are majority owned and operated by service-connected disabled Veterans, and Veterans with post 9/11 active duty service.

Language in the Omnibus Agriculture/Veterans Bill expands bid preference by extending it to: 1) recently separated Veterans who have served in active military post 9/11; 2) Veterans with service-connected disabilities; or 3) any other veteran-owned small business verified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as either veteran-owned small business or service-disabled veteran-owned small business. The bill also clarified that the veteran-owned small business certification is verified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Omnibus State Government Finance bill further amended the statute due to conflict with federal laws. Current state law awards veteran-owned businesses up to a six percent preference, but no less than the percentage awarded to any other group. The amended language allows an exception to that provision when mandated by the federal government as a condition of receiving federal funds. (SF3134)



CVSO Working Group Recommendations Adopted

The Omnibus Agriculture/Veterans bill codified changes to County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) statutes that were agreed to by the CVSO Working Group. This group was created by the 2008 legislature to review the findings and recommendations of the 2008 Office of the Legislative Auditor's Report on CVSOs.

The working group included Senators Erickson Ropes & Hann; Representatives Juhnke & Smith; MDVA staff; Minnesota Association of

County Veterans Service Officers; MN Commanders Task Force; Minnesota Inter-County Association; and the Association of Minnesota Counties.

Changes include: clarifying that county boards are the appointing authority for CVSOs; qualifications for CVSOs and Assistant CVSOs may be obtained through on the job training and are not required in advance of hiring; that MDVA is a resource for CVSOs and does not have supervisory authority over CVSOs; that CVSOs are county

employees; and when designing CVSO training programs MDVA is to consult with the MN Association of CVSOs.

The bill also adds Assistant CVSOs to the list of persons eligible for the MDVA training program; specifies a final date for counties to comply with requirements for qualifications for Assistant CVSOs; and states that counties noncompliant with the requirements for qualifications of assistant CVSOs must do so no later than June 30, 2013. (SF2737)

“The results of the work carried out by the CVSO Working Group will foster an even stronger partnership between MDVA and Minnesota counties. Ultimately, those we serve in our veteran and military communities will benefit through enhanced service delivery.”

- MDVA Commissioner
Michael Pugliese

Veteran's Preference Act Changes

Technical Modifications: These changes clarify and modify information that a Veteran must provide when petitioning the MDVA for a veteran's preference hearing. Petitions must now include a telephone number and a copy of the Veteran's DD214. The petition must be notarized and submitted via U.S. Mail. Hearings will now be scheduled to be held within 120 days of the Department's receipt of a complete petition (up from 20 days).

Teacher Hiring: Directs that the current law, giving Veterans 5 or 10 preference points, must be used if the school district uses a 100-point scale for rating applicants. Districts not using the scale are directed to interview all applicants that are qualified, properly licensed and a Veteran. Discontinued are veteran's preference law protections for teachers facing dismissal. Both of these provisions are clarifying previous legislative intent.

Veteran's Preference in Dismissals from Public Employment: This provision extends application of a 2009 law pertaining to Veterans hired into public employment. As originally enacted, the law inadvertently applied only to Veterans hired on or after the effective date of the law, thereby excluding those hired before that date.

(SF2737)

Higher Education Veterans Program Sunset Date Extended

Widespread support of the popular Higher Education Veterans Program resulted in the sunset of the program being extended from June 30, 2011 to June 30, 2012. However, the legislature will have to fund this program next year for it to continue. To help in the planning process, the legislature directed MDVA to report to committees with jurisdiction over the Department on ideas on alternative ways to fund the Higher Education Veterans Program. (SF2737)

Department of Military Affairs Funding and Policy Provisions

Capital Investment (Bonding) Bill)

- \$4 million – Asset Preservation
- \$1 million – Facility Life Safety Improvements
- \$900,000 – Facility ADA Compliance
- \$5 million – Cedar Street Armory Renovation
- \$1 million – Camp Ripley Troop Support Facility

Policy

- Flag folding – Despite the fact that Minnesota has had an official state flag since 1893, standard instructions on how to fold it for presentation and display were never developed. Language in the Omnibus Agriculture/Veterans bill details proper state flag folding procedures, which were developed by the Department of Military Affairs. (SF2737)