

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA ITEMS

Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs — Bonding & Funding

CTF urges lawmakers to support MDVA bonding requests for improvements and repair & betterment dollars. Each of the five **Minnesota Veterans Homes** require significant **asset preservation dollars** to maintain facilities with basic systems, life safety and to meet regulatory requirements.

In 2013, facility conditions audits (FCAs) were completed with the support of the Department of Administration and were reviewed and updated during the summer of 2015. A prioritized list of necessary repairs, replacements & upgrades was generated and MDVA is requesting asset preservation funding for the most high-priority items.

The **Minnesota Veterans Home-Minneapolis** is requesting bonding dollars to repair the **existing bridge** which, when open, provides campus access from Minnehaha Parkway. The bridge was closed by Minnesota Department of Transportation in 2014 due to safety concerns and failed bridge inspections.

This bridge is a critical access and egress point for the Home for ambulance, fire, and other essential life safety requirements. It also provides campus access for employees, visitors and family members. The predesign work was funded last session. MDVA is currently seeking bonding dollars to complete the renovation and repair.

Minnesota GI Bill Use Expanded

CTF supports the expansion of permitted uses of the Minnesota GI Bill. Currently, eligible veterans may use Minnesota GI Bill benefits to pay for the cost of tuition at higher education institutions. However, **using the benefits to pay for costs such as school applications, exams, licensing, and other certifications** is not permitted.

By allowing a broader use of the Minnesota GI bill, Veterans could use their benefits at their discretion and in the most appropriate way. Expanding the approved uses of the Minnesota GI Bill would also bring parity with federal Chapter 33 (GI Bill) benefits.

Overall, these changes would empower Minnesota Veterans to make better use of the full spectrum of education opportunities at their disposal. **Broadening the approved uses of the Minnesota GI Bill would allow for benefits to be used on fees and expenses accrued in the process of self-betterment,** would add value to Minnesota communities and promote the welfare of veterans and their families

MnSCU Instate Tuition Waivers for 100% Service Connected (SC)

CTF supports legislation to provide additional incentive to 100% Service Connected Disabled Veterans to pursue higher education. Waiving tuition at MnSCH institutions for 100% permanent and total service-connected disabled Veterans would **reduce financial barriers and incentivize them to pursue higher education, ultimately enhancing their employability** and better positioning them to succeed in the workforce.

In addition to the potential for enhanced employment opportunities and commensurate increase in the standard of living for Veterans, another beneficial outcome would be a reduction in unemployment costs and numbers as it relates to Veterans.

Free Deer Hunting & Small Game and Lifetime Fishing Licenses for 50% SC Disabled Veterans

CTF supports a reduction in the threshold level of disability rating from the current 100% to 50% for Veterans to be eligible for free hunting and fishing licenses. This initiative has been put forth in various ways over the past four years by a variety of Veterans interest groups and is now supported by the nine largest Congressionally Chartered Veteran Service Organization in the state, the Commanders Task Force. Numerous states provide free hunting and fishing opportunities for a wider margin of their disabled veteran populations than does Minnesota.

If enacted, this initiative will allow more disabled veterans to enjoy the outdoors in the realm of hunting and fishing than currently do as a result of the no cost opportunity. **An increase in individuals' participation in hunting and fishing activities is also likely to have a positive economic impact in Greater Minnesota** in the form of increased traffic to various resorts, lodging & outdoor destinations.

Permanent Homestead Market Value Exclusion for Widows/Widowers of >70% Service Connected Veterans

CTF supports the extension of the Homestead Market Value Exclusion This proposal would amend M.S. 273.13 Subd. 34 (2)(C) to extend the eight-year homestead property tax exemption **to a permanent exemption for a Veteran's widow or widower**, if the Veteran was eligible at the time of death.

Military Pension Tax Exemption

CTF supports the elimination of taxes on pensions earned through military service. This proposal would eliminate taxes on Military Pensions for Minnesota residents.

Currently, pensions for Minnesota residents, including federal pensions, are taxable regardless of where the pension was earned. **Minnesota is one of the last few hold-out states still taxing military pensions.** According to 2014 Defense Manpower Data Center data, there are 19,203 retirees in MN, and of that, 19,125 are being paid by DOD. That equates to approximately \$28,500,000 per month coming into the state.

Many retirees are married with working spouses, and many retirees start second careers which continue to add to state revenues. **MN is not gaining military retirees at the same rate as states which exempt military pensions from state tax.** In addition, MN resident military members are electing to relocate to lower-tax states upon reaching retirement status and thus, the state is losing the potential economic benefits that veteran retirees and their spouses could provide to the state.

Removal of Guardianship language from Commissioner's Duties

CTF supports removal of the Guardianship language from Commissioner's Duties. This is a **housekeeping initiative** aimed at eliminating language for a program which is no longer in effect.

This proposal would amend MN Statute 196.05 Subdivision 1 (8) to eliminate language pertaining to the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs guardianship program, Minnesota Statutes 2014, section 196.051, repealed May 5, 2015.

Disclosure Statement

CTF supports the creation of a law requiring a disclosure statement & waiver language. This proposal would create a written disclosure statement and waiver that must be signed by Veterans if they are seeking Veterans benefits services from private, for-profit providers.

This statement will, at minimum, indicate that they understand that **advocacy and Veterans benefit services are offered at no cost** by federally chartered Veteran service organizations and by County Veterans Service Officers.

Dear Editor,

HR 3970, the Housing Our Heroes Act, was introduced in the House on November 5th 2015 and is currently sitting before the Subcommittee on Health. HR 3970 will "direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot project to acquire and renovate abandoned homes for homeless Veterans".

The bill contains specifications as to what groups or agencies qualify for consideration to obtain grants to perform the renovations, establishes selection priorities as to "entities who serve communities that the Secretary determines have the greatest need of homeless services". It also sets criteria for fair distribution among homeless Veterans in different geographical areas.

The entire bill may be viewed at CONGRESS.GOV. just type in HR 3970

According to the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans website, it is estimated by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that about 11% of the adult homeless population are Veterans and roughly 47,725 Veterans are homeless on any given night, and to further the discussion the number of young homeless Veterans is increasing. There are many other additional details and issues that pertain to this topic and the Coalition website (nchv.org) is certainly worth the look.

Why are these Veterans, men and women, homeless?

Again quoting from the National Coalition website, " In addition to the complex set of factors influencing all homelessness — extreme shortage of affordable housing, livable income and access to health care — a large number of displaced and at risk Veterans live with the lingering effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance abuse, which are compounded by a lack of family and social support networks. Additionally, military occupations and training are not always transferable to the civilian workforce, placing some Veterans at a disadvantage when competing for employment. A top priority for homeless Veterans is secure, safe, clean housing that offers a supportive environment free of drugs and alcohol."

According to CONGRESS.GOV (which I would like to point out is the official website for the House and Senate) there are 17 cosponsors of HR 3970, none of which are from Minnesota. In our opinion a co-sponsorship is the truest form of support we can see from our elected officials and given that we would encourage your readers to contact by phone or email at the very least the office of Congressman Nolan but to further the cause take the additional effort and contact all 8 congressional offices for the State of Minnesota. Yes, it's a bit of a chore, but these men and women deserve our support, they've served us well, and the least we can do is provide them what they need so they can move forward with their lives and be given the opportunity to enjoy a happy and healthy life. It's the least we can do.

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8th District VFW Legislative Chair 2015-2016
Senior Vice Commander VFW Post 4456 Gilbert MN

Julie Stoehr
8th District VFW Auxiliary Legislative Chair 2015-2016
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Dear Congressman Nolan,

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It's incredible that these fine men and women have to deal with experiences that we can only imagine only to find themselves struggling not only emotionally but to also have to wonder where they'll find themselves taking care of their basic needs, someplace warm and safe, food, and clothing. They've given so much for their Country; how can we not do what we can to give them their lives back?

I would encourage the Congressman to become a cosponsor of HR 3970 to show his concern for all Veterans. In addition, and if possible to bring pressure on the new Speaker to bring this bill to the Floor for a vote as soon as humanly possible.

Respectfully,

Dear Congressman Peterson,

HR 3970, the Housing Our Heroes Act, was introduced in the House on November 5th 2015 and is currently sitting before the Subcommittee on Health. HR 3970 will "direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot project to acquire and renovate abandoned homes for homeless Veterans".

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I would encourage the Congressman to become a cosponsor of HR 3970 to show his concern for all Veterans. In addition, and if possible to bring pressure on the new Speaker to bring this bill to the Floor for a vote as soon as humanly possible.

Respectfully,

Dear Congressman Emmer,

HR 3970, the Housing Our Heroes Act, was introduced in the House on November 5th 2015 and is currently sitting before the Subcommittee on Health. HR 3970 will "direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot project to acquire and renovate abandoned homes for homeless Veterans".

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Respectfully,

Dear Congressman Ellison,

HR 3970, the Housing Our Heroes Act, was introduced in the House on November 5th 2015 and is currently sitting before the Subcommittee on Health. HR 3970 will "direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot project to acquire and renovate abandoned homes for homeless Veterans".

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Congressman Ellison, I have noted your support of Veterans as indicated by the legislation you've cosponsored in the past and I truly appreciate that. I would now encourage the Congressman to continue his good work and become a cosponsor of HR 3970. In addition, and if possible to also bring pressure on the new Speaker to bring this bill to the Floor for a vote as soon as humanly possible.

Respectfully,

Dear Congresswoman McCollum,

HR 3970, the Housing Our Heroes Act, was introduced in the House on November 5th 2015 and is currently sitting before the Subcommittee on Health. HR 3970 will "direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot project to acquire and renovate abandoned homes for homeless Veterans".

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I would encourage the Congresswoman to become a cosponsor of HR 3970 to show her concern for all Veterans. In addition, and if possible to bring pressure on the new Speaker to bring this bill to the Floor for a vote as soon as humanly possible.

Respectfully,

Dear Congressman Paulsen,

HR 3970, the Housing Our Heroes Act, was introduced in the House on November 5th 2015 and is currently sitting before the Subcommittee on Health. HR 3970 will "direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot project to acquire and renovate abandoned homes for homeless Veterans".

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I would encourage the Congressman to not only become a cosponsor of HR 3970 to show his concern for all our Veterans but to also bring pressure on the new Speaker to bring this bill to the Floor for a vote as soon as humanly possible.

Respectfully,

Dear Congressman Kline,

HR 3970, the Housing Our Heroes Act, was introduced in the House on November 5th 2015 and is currently sitting before the Subcommittee on Health. HR 3970 will "direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot project to acquire and renovate abandoned homes for homeless Veterans".

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I would encourage the Congressman to not only become a cosponsor of HR 3970 to show his concern for all our Veterans but to also bring pressure on the new Speaker to bring this bill to the Floor for a vote as soon as humanly possible.

Respectfully,

Dear Congressman Walz,

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I would encourage the Congressman to not only become a cosponsor of HR 3970 but also use his considerable influence as a member of the Veterans Affairs Committee to bring pressure on the new Speaker to bring this bill to the Floor for a vote as soon as humanly possible.

Respectfully,

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