

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS

OF THE UNITED STATE

DEPARTMENT OF MINNESOTA

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VFW Legislative News

February 2016

Special Report

Comrades,

As it is only one month away, I am sharing this important reminder of the **March 16 Veterans Day On the Hill**.

Hopefully by now you are making plans to attend. I invite you to work with your Auxiliaries and other Posts in your area with carpooling or arrangements to share a van or bus.

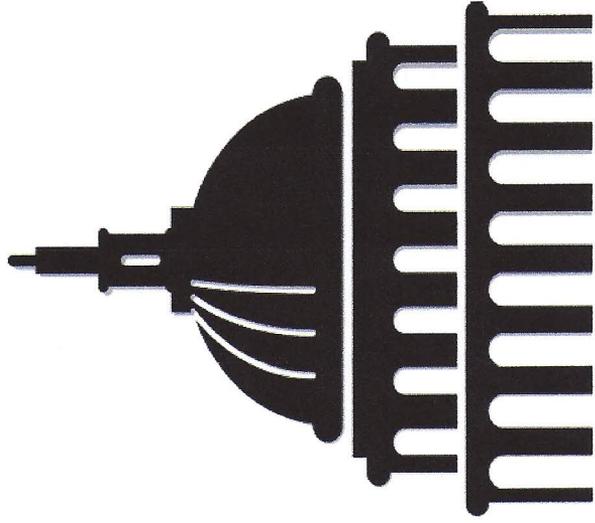
It is important that this event is well attended and your local legislators are aware VFW members from their area are in attendance.

I am providing you the **2016 Legislative Priorities for Veterans Legislation in Minnesota** this session and a **print-out guide for discussing issues with your legislators**. Please share this information with all your members who will be attending with you.

Tom McLaughlin
State Legislative Chair



**THE VOICE OF 369,000
MINNESOTA VETERANS**



VETERANS DAY ON THE HILL

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16TH, 2016 AT 10 A.M.
CEDAR STREET ARMORY
600 CEDAR STREET, SAINT PAUL



Hosted By:
Minnesota Commanders' Task Force
United Veterans Legislative Council of MN
MN Association of County Veterans Service Officers



Minnesota Commanders' Task Force

2016 Legislative Agenda

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 MnSCU 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.



Tips and Hints for Legislative Meetings

- **Schedule the Meeting**
 - Call your legislator's office to schedule the meeting, or work with your Legislative Chair.
 - Let the legislator's office know what issues you would like to discuss.
- **Preparing for the Meeting**
 - Plan to discuss no more than two or three issues.
 - Learn everything you can about the issues you intend to discuss.
 - Learn everything you can about any opposition to your position (usual opposition to Veterans issues stem from cost).
 - Bring your talking points. If you notice the conversation straying use those as a reference point.
 - If you are attending as a group agree on a lead spokesperson.
- **At the Meeting**
 - Introduce yourself and all members or your group. Let them know who you are and where you live (this establishes the local connection).
 - After a minute or two of small talk (time is very limited) you should present your position on your issue(s).
 - Be concise and factual, brief, respectful, and be sure to listen carefully.
 - Be ready to answer questions. If you are unsure of the answer, let the legislator know you will follow up with them with the answer. Contact your legislative support staff and let them know who to follow up with.
 - If the legislator disagrees with you, you can respectfully debate the issue, if you are comfortable.
 - Remain nonpartisan throughout the meeting.
- **After the Meeting**
 - Send a follow-up letter or email thanking your legislator for the meeting.
 - Stay in touch throughout the legislative session.