

California VFW Legislative Report–7-1-2011
William Manes, State Legislative/PAC Chairman

Now that the Legislature has passed a State Budget for Fiscal Year 2011-2012, and the Governor has signed it, it is a good time to review the status of veterans' issues pending in the state.

Budget:

A total of \$34 million has been cut from the Budget of the Department of Veterans Affairs compared to the last fiscal year. Most significantly, over \$12 million was cut from the expenditures which were scheduled in the coming year for the development of the Veterans Homes in Fresno and Redding. Fresno was left with \$879,000 and Redding with \$878,000 which will allow for continuation of planning for the two facilities but the dates for opening of the Homes will be delayed at least for one year. Some of the other reductions for operation of the Department include \$5 million for increased funding for the County Veteran Service Offices, \$2.3 million for Operation Welcome Home to provide additional services for California veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and \$2.6 million for additional grant funding to Counties and to veteran service organizations for veterans services. Although these funds had been provided in the Budget for the current year, the Brown Administration refused to permit the funds to be spent, and they were not included in the new Budget. The current Budget does provide for a restoration of \$2.6 million for state funding to Counties for the Veterans Service Offices which had also be removed in the original Budget plan sent to the Legislature by Governor Brown.

VFW Department of California is providing strong protests to the funding reductions in the Budget for the Veterans Homes. More information concerning potential specific actions is expected to be available after the July 4 holiday. The Legislature is expected to be in session until July 15 when the Members will start a month long recess. There will be efforts made during that 10-day period to make the protests of the veterans heard.

Other Legislation:

AB 167 California Stolen Valor Act (Paul Cook, Yucaipa; Chairman, Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs). Establishes the California Stolen Valor Act, to include current provisions in state law which provides that any person who, orally, in writing, or by wearing any military decoration, falsely represents himself or herself to have been awarded any military decoration, with the intent to defraud, is guilty of a misdemeanor, or in the case where the person committing an offense is a veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States, and infraction or a misdemeanor. The law also requires that certain elected officers to forfeit their office upon conviction of a crime pursuant to the federal Stolen Valor Act.

The bill passed the Legislature and has been sent to the Governor.

AB 201 Veterans Courts (Betsy Butler, El Segundo)

Would authorize superior courts to develop and implement veterans courts for eligible veterans of the United States military with the objective of creation of a dedicated calendar or a locally developed collaborative court-supervised veterans mental health program or system that leads to the placement of as many mentally ill offenders who are veterans, including those with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, substance abuse, or any mental health problem stemming from military service, in community treatment as is feasible and consistent with public safety.

The bill has passed the Assembly and the Senate policy committees and is waiting for a floor vote.

AB 387 Pupils: excused absences: military deployment activities (Susan Bonilla, Concord)

Would include spending time with an immediate family member, who is an active duty member of the uniformed services, as defined, and has been called to duty for, is on leave from, or has immediately returned from deployment to a combat zone or combat support position, as another type of excused absence.

The bill has passed the Assembly and the Senate Committee on Education. It is now waiting for a hearing by the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 487 Veterans homes: fees and charges (Paul Cook, Yucaipa)

Current fees for residents of the State Veterans Homes are set as a percentage of the person's annual income. This bill would set a cap on the on the fees.
Failed to pass the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

AB 557 Veterans: National Guard: California Interagency Council on Veteran Services and Program (John A Perez, Los Angeles, Speaker of the Assembly; Paul Cook, Yucaipa, Chairman, Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs; Richard Pan Sacramento, Vice Chairman, Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs.)

Would create in state government the California Interagency Council on Veteran Services and Programs, composed of specified members, for the purpose of bringing together key state agencies and departments, federal officials, legislative representatives, local governments, and stakeholder organizations to ensure that the state's programs that serve veterans are efficiently administered and properly integrated with federal and local government and other stakeholder organizations.

The bill has passed the Assembly and is waiting for committee hearings in the Senate.

AB 697 Veterans benefits: Veterans' Farm and Home Purchase Act of 1943 (V. Manuel Perez, Indio)

This bill would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs to refinance a loan, as long as it was not a loan under the Cal-Vet Farm and Home Loan Program.

Passed by the Assembly and by the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs. Waiting for hearing by the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 882 Department of Veterans Affairs: consolidation of services to veterans. (Paul Cook, Yucaipa)

establishes a pilot project in four counties for the purposes of collaborating with the Employment Development Department in order to more effectively achieve increased compensation and pension benefit claims for veterans.

Requires that the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Employment Development Department enter into agreements with the four counties in order to establish the project after a determination that services to be provided could improve the delivery of services and benefits to veteran and aid veterans in obtaining benefits.

The bill has passed the Assembly and the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs. It is waiting for a hearing by the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 905 Disposition of remains: authorized agent (Richard Pan, Sacramento)

Seeks to formally recognize in state law the U.S. Defense Department (DD) Form 93, Record of Emergency Data, as an acceptable written instrument of a military service member's designation of a person to direct the disposition of his or her remains (PADD) in the event of death.

The bill is sponsored by VFW Department of California.

The bill has been passed by the Assembly and by the Senate Committee on Judiciary. Waiting for a hearing by the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 946 Property tax exemption: principal residence: veterans and their unmarried surviving spouses. (Betsy Butler, El Segundo)

Under current law, as administered by the County Tax Collectors, the effective date of a property tax exemption for a disabled veteran is the first day of the year following the date that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) issues the disability rating. This bill would make the effective date of the disability rating as determined by USDVA.

The bill has passed the Assembly, and is waiting for a hearing by the Senate Committee on Government and Finance.

AB 1209 Department of Veterans Affairs: veterans services. (Paul Cook, Yucaipa and Richard Pan, Sacramento. Also, some 28 co-authors in the Assembly and the Senate.)

Would appropriate \$7.3 million from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs for disbursement in accordance with the following schedule:(a) Two million four hundred thousand dollars (\$2,400,000) for disbursement to the counties for the Veterans Service Offices; (b) Two million dollars (\$2,000,000) for disbursement to the counties for grants for veterans' services; (c) Two million three hundred thousand dollars (\$2,300,000) for use in Operation Welcome Home or its successor program; (d) Six hundred thousand dollars

(\$600,000) for grants to nonprofit organizations such as veterans' service organizations and community-based organizations.

The bill failed to receive a hearing by the Assembly Committee on Appropriations.

SB 251 Vehicles: drivers license: selective service (Lou Correa, Santa Ana)

Would require the Department of Motor Vehicles to revise the application for an original or a renewal of a driver's license, to include a specified statement that would allow a person who is required to register pursuant to the federal act to consent to registration with the federal Selective Service System.

Failed passage in Senate Committee on Appropriations.

SB 813 Public postsecondary education: veterans' enrollment. (Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, Senator Lou Correa, Santa Ana, Chairman.

Existing law requires the California State University and each community college district, and requests the University of California, with respect to each campus in their respective jurisdictions that administers a priority enrollment system, to grant priority for registration for enrollment to any member or former member of the Armed Forces of the United States, and who is a resident of California, as defined, for any academic term attended at one of these institutions within 2 years of leaving active duty.

This bill would grant priority enrollment to these members or former members of the Armed Forces of the United States within 4 years of leaving active duty.

The bill was passed by the Senate and is waiting for committee hearings in the Assembly.