

California VFW Legislative Report–9/6/09

William Manes, State Legislative/PAC Chairman

The State Legislature is now in the final week of the regular session for 2009. Friday, September 4, was the final day to amend any bills on the floor. Monday, August 31, started a period during the final two weeks that no committees were supposed to meet, but only floor sessions could be conducted. At least, that is the rule. However, any rule can be waived with "unanimous consent" and apparently that is being done. There are still many bills which were supposed to have hearings by the Senate Appropriations Committees but there are no reports of such committee actions.

It is also the time for fun and games in the Legislature. During these final days, the legislators frequently take bills that are ready for a final vote on the floor and use the "gut and amend" process to delete the entire bill and substitute something completely different. One of the reasons for doing this is that the substituted language would never have seen the light of day had it gone through the normal committee hearing process. By using this process to amend the bill, the author hopes to avoid the necessity of defending the proposal in committee hearings.

There are three bills on veterans issues that have already suffered this fate:

AB 1265 Sales and use taxes: consumers: itinerant vendors. (Fiona Ma, San Francisco)

Would exempt an itinerant vendor, who is a service-connected disabled veteran, from collecting sales taxes on products being sold. In the words of the author, the bill "represents one small step towards recognizing our disabled veterans who have already made, or are making the transition from military to civilian employment." The bill had been passed by the Assembly and was waiting for a final floor vote in the Senate. As now amended, the bill would authorize the mayors of some cities to perform marriages. It can only be assumed that the author, from the City of San Francisco, is attempting to support the Mayor of that city in his efforts to perform "same sex marriages" in defiance of the Constitution of the State of California. Hopefully the Legislature will follow its own rules and send this bill back to committee hearings since it is clearly a complete change from the original subject of the bill.

AB 1568 Veterans benefits. (Mary Salas, Chula Vista)

Would allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to identify veterans enrolled in the Medi-Cal program who could receive medical benefits through the federal Veterans Health Administration that would either replace or supplement Medi-Cal benefits. The bill had passed the Assembly and was waiting for final committee hearing by Senate Committee on Appropriations. As now amended, the bill is on the subject of property tax exemptions for homeowners who lost or had damage to their homes in various fires during past years.

AB 1570 Veterans service providers. (Mary Salas, Chula Vista)

Would have set up a procedure for entities which wanted to contract with departments of the state government to receive a qualification and certification from the Department of Veterans Affairs before they could provide services to veterans. The bill had passed the Assembly and was waiting for a final floor vote in the Senate. As now amended, would set certain rules for approval of desalination plants in coastal areas. It should be noted that the original bill was of dubious value and probably would have faced a veto by the Governor. There is no similar requirement for entities that seek to contract with the state on matters other than services to veterans.

There has been progress on a couple of veterans bills:

AB 264 Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. (Paul Cook, Yucaipa; and Ted Lieu, Torrance.

Coauthors, Assembly: Kevin DeLeon, Los Angeles; Chuck DeVore, Irvine; Jean Fuller, Bakersfield; Danny Gilmore, Hanford; Diane Harkey, Laguna Niguel; Kevin Jeffries, Riverside; Roger Niello, Sacramento; Jim Silva, Huntington Beach. Coauthors, Senate: Dave Cogdill, Fresno; Dave Cox, Fair Oaks; Jeff Denham, Merced; Bob Huff, Glendora.)

Would require the Governor to annually proclaim March 30 as "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day."

Status: All problems have been resolved. Bill was enrolled and sent to the Governor on August 28.

AB 343 Pupils: military families. (Lori Saldana, San Diego. Coauthors: Anthony Adams, Hersperia; Kevin Jeffries, Riverside; Ted Lieu, Torrance; Roger Niello, Sacramento.)

Would ratify the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children to facilitate the enrollment, placement, advancement and transfer of the academic records of the children of military families, and would provide for the administration of that compact.

Status: Has now been passed by the Assembly and the Senate. Ready for enrollment and for the Governor.

Complete information on all state legislation involving veterans issues is available at the website:

<http://www.califveterans.com>