

California VFW Legislative Report–3-8-2010
William Manes, State Legislative/PAC Chairman

SACRAMENTO UPDATE

The Constitutional deadline has passed for the Legislature to pass budget fixes before the end of the emergency session called by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger last month. This session gives the Legislature 45 days to pass legislation aimed at addressing the state's budget deficit. The main consequence is that lawmakers can not act on unrelated legislation. However, the Legislature interprets "act" as sending the governor a bill, which lawmakers generally would not do for months so there is no visible effects caused by the constitutional restrictions.

Part of the budget fix delay is because of a gas-tax swap plan. The gas-tax proposal would cut an estimated \$1.8 billion from the state's \$19.9 billion deficit through June 2011, in part by replacing the sales tax on gasoline with an excise tax, circumventing recent court decisions requiring that gas sales tax money go toward transit. The plan also would raise \$650 million in tax revenues by delaying corporate tax breaks that were included in previous budget agreements.

There are some 44 bills currently pending in the Legislature that have some bearing on veterans issues. A very large part of this group appear to be "spot" bills which have no substance at this time but which were introduced to meet the Rules of the Legislature which stated that all bills must be submitted by February 19. The authors of these bills are expected to amend them at a later date. However, any bill which has a fiscal impact must be passed by the policy committees (Veterans Affairs, Revenue and Taxation, Transportation, etc.) no later that April 23. Other bills which do not commit expenditure of funds from the State Budget have an extended deadline to May 7.

The following are a few of the more significant bills which are now in the policy committees. More bills will be reported in subsequent messages.

AB 1703 State Nursing Assumption Program of Loans for Education: veterans homes. (Stephen Knight, Lancaster)

Under the State Nursing Assumption Program of Loans for Education (SNAPLE), any person who is enrolled in an eligible institution, and who agrees to work full time as a registered nurse in a state-operated 24-hour facility, including a veterans home, is eligible to receive a conditional loan assumption agreement, up to a total loan assumption of \$20,000.

This bill would provide for an additional loan assumption of up to \$5,000 per year of additional qualifying service, with a maximum loan assumption amount equal to the participant's total outstanding liability under the qualifying loans, for participants completing 5 or more years of qualifying clinical registered nursing service at a state-operated veterans home.

The bill is scheduled for a hearing by the Assembly Committee on Higher Education on March 13.

AB 1757 Veterans cemetery. (William Monning, Santa Cruz)

Current law establishes an Endowment Fund to receive donations for the start up of a state veterans cemetery at the site of the former Fort Ord Army Base in Monterey County.

This bill would now direct the California Department of Veterans Affairs to design, develop and construct the California Central Coast State Veterans Cemetery at this site.

Referred to the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs.

AB 1829 Military decorations: fraud. (Paul Cook, Yucaipa)

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, as specified, with the intent to defraud, is guilty of a misdemeanor.

AB 282 by Assemblymember Cook, adopted in October 2007, originally provided for the same penalty, but that bill was amended during committee hearings to make the offense merely an infraction. This bill is another attempt to make the offense a more serious affair.

Referred to Assembly Committees on Public Safety and Veterans Affairs.

AB 2309 Veterans' Home of California. (Nathan Fletcher, San Diego)

Would designate the California State Veterans' Home, Chula Vista, as the "John Smith Memorial Veterans' Home." John Smith, who recently died, was an active leader of the veterans community in San Diego. At the time of his death, he was also a member of the National Legislative Committee of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

SB 1056 Income taxes: hiring credit: veterans. (Jeff Denham, Merced)

Existing law authorizes various credits against business taxes, including a credit for an increase in qualified employees by an employer.

This bill would, for taxable years beginning on and after January 1, 2010, allow a credit in an amount equal to 25% of the wages, not to exceed \$6,000, paid to each qualified veteran by the taxpayer during the taxable year.

Special Notes:

AB 498 Special license plates (Mary Hayashi): This bill will be coming up for a hearing very soon in the Assembly Committee on Transportation and housing. I sent a request to Districts which have Post members who are constituents of the legislators on this Committee. Please remind these Posts that these letters are very important and time is now short. A sample letter is posted on the Department website at <http://www.vfwca.org/legislative.html>

VFW Legislative Day at the Capitol, April 20: We are now expecting the two Chairs of the Veterans Affairs Committees in the State Legislature to be speakers at our Legislative Day event: Senator Jeff Denham, Merced, and Assemblymember Mary Salas, Chula Vista. Both speakers will also receive the VFW Legislator of the Year Award for their support of veterans legislative issues. Also speaking will be the two Vice Chairs, Senator Lou Correa (Santa Ana), and Assemblymember Paul Cook (Yucaipa), both of whom have received the VFW Award in past years. The luncheon Speaker will be the recently appointed Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Roger Brautigan. The meeting, starting at 9:00, will be held at the Sutter Club, a short distance from the State Capitol.

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

<http://www.califveterans.com>