

The Senate Agriculture, Veterans and Gaming Committee met on Wednesday, March 8, 2006 at 3:00 p.m. in Room 112, Capitol. The following members were present:

Vickerman, Chair
Skoe, Vice Chair
Hann
Johnson, Dean
Koering
Lourey
Murphy
Nienow
Rest
Sams
Solon
Wergin

Senator Skoe called the meeting to order at 3:07 p.m. and called on Senator Vickerman for S.F. 2654, the omnibus veterans-military initiative.

Senator Vickerman moved SCS2654A-1. Senator Skoe stated we needed to wait until a quorum was present.

Senator Vickerman went through and explained the bill.

Quorum present at 3:22 p.m. Senator Vickerman renewed his motion. AMENDMENT PASSED.

People testifying in support of the bill were:

Major General Larry Shellito, Adjutant General, MN National Guard; stated they welcomed home 1,700 Soldiers and Airmen in December, since 9-11-01 they have mobilized more than 11,000. They have proven themselves in more than 30 countries. He stated family support is an important program. They have 11 family assistance centers throughout the state. "See Attachment A."

Commissioner Clark Dyrud, Department of Veterans Affairs; said in 1943 the State Soldier Assistance Program was started to help veterans' and their families. He stated the Feds do not deal with families – just soldiers and that the Veteran's Service Offices are 100 percent funded by the counties. He added in this bill the campus representatives are the most important. One of his chief concerns is the fact that Minnesota is still one of nine states that tax military retirement/pay. Only three percent of the state's population are military retirees.

Theresa Anderson, Veterans Service Officer, Norman County, stated transportation is their major problem in Norman County and getting information out to veteran's and their families. She stated the Veterans Service Officers service enhancement grants is very important.

Dennis Anderson, Veterans Service Officer, Chippewa County, he said the thing that surprises him the most is the difficulty in getting the message out to veterans what their benefits are. He suggested public service announcements by using billboards.

Richard Shearer, Enrollment Management Director, Southwest MN State University, stated SW State now has a room, computer and are making strides in helping veterans as volunteers come forward. The SW Center for Independent Living is now volunteering a person. He suggested three things: We were behind the curve in 1970 and don't want that again, go where they are and people think that the war is over when they come home, and it isn't.

Jim Hubley, Lyon County Veterans Service Officer, stated he volunteers at SW State a couple times a week and that they have come together to avoid the confusion the young people have when they come home.

Susan Heegaard, Director, MN Office of Higher Education, she suggested work study folks get involved in staffing, talked about recognition of courses, and the delayed payment, where students can't be assessed late fees.

Steve Frantz, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, stated the fiscal impact won't be that much. He suggested being proactive in going beyond what we can do. He stated an office opened last month at Central Lakes College in Brainerd and they have had one in Minneapolis since 1972. He stated as of July 1, 2005, they have not charged late fees and he has no concern about the commitment – just logistics.

Col. Thomas Nesbitt, President, MN Council of Chapters, Military Order of America, stated the state is not taking into consideration new money they would receive from veteran's residing here.

Admiral J. Rodney Grubb, Military Officers Association of America, supports the bill, but the state needs to help the retired veterans by not taxing their pay.

Ralph Donais, State Legislative Liaison, Retired Enlisted Association, stated he lived in 30 places in 28 years; veterans never have the opportunity to build equity in a home, and urged the committee to look at taxation on military pay.

Doyle Larson, Major General, USAF Retired, stated he started a business in San Antonio because no retirees would live and work in Minnesota because of the tax on pensions.

Dennis Gorman, MN Commanders' Task Force, he stated the CTF will continue to work with all groups.

Jerry Kyser, President, United Veterans Legislative Council, stated there are 430,000 veterans that vote in this state. He stated their passion is to put this bill through and added, this bill change the picture here in Minnesota and make us veterans friendly.

Commissioner Dyrud stated in regard to the license plates – 6,000 have been sold and has brought in \$180,000.

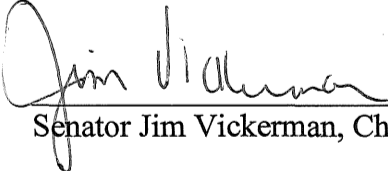
Senator Lourey asked about homeless veterans, children in school.

Major Shellito stated they are holding courses for children, they have youth camps, and try to provide extremely comprehensive programs.


Senator Vickerman moved that S.F. 2654, as amended, be passed and rereferred to Jobs, Energy and Community Development Committee. BILL PASSED.

Meeting adjourned at 5:13 p.m.

This meeting was taped.



Senator Jim Vickerman, Chair



by/ Sandi Brown

Senate Agriculture, Veterans and Gaming Committee

Wednesday, March 8, 2006

3:00 p.m.

Room 112, State Capitol

A G E N D A

S.F. 2654 (Vickerman) Omnibus veterans-military initiative.

Major General Larry Shellito, Adjutant General, MN National Guard, Department of Military Affairs

Commissioner Clark Dyrud, Department of Veterans Affairs

Richard Shearer, Enrollment Director, Southwest MN State University

Jim Hubley, Lyon County Veterans Service Officer

Susan Heegaard, Director, MN Office of Higher Education

Steve Frantz, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities

Dennis O'Gorman, Minnesota Commanders' Task Force

Jerry Kyser, President, United Veterans Legislative Council

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