

## Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations

For more information, please contact Jenee Margo Gonzales, 512-463-2211

### **Veteran & Military Bills Passed - 81st Session**

**1. SB 90 - Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (Van de Putte/Geren)**

Became effective on May 5, 2009; *the Interstate Compact* will streamline enrollment, eligibility, placement, and graduation requirements for military children who move to or from Texas. Nineteen other states have already enacted *The Interstate Compact*, in order to help ease the transition for military students as their parents move between military assignments.

**2. SB 93 - Hazlewood (HW) Legacy Act (Van de Putte/Castro)**

The HW Act provides an exemption of tuition and fees, other than the deposit and student service fees for up to 150 semester credit hours (also excluded are any fees for books, lodging, board or clothing) to an eligible Texas veteran. This legislation clarifies how the Texas veteran can establish his/her eligibility for HW benefits; it does not make distinctions between citizens and legal residents on educational benefits for veterans. Therefore, the bill aligns the state HW benefit with the GI Bill. Additionally, the legislation allows a veteran to transfer his/her unused HW benefit to his/her child. Also, the legislation allows the spouse of a fallen veteran to utilize the unused HW benefit if the veteran was KIA, MIA, or totally disabled.

**3. SB 279 - SAPCR Military Deployed Parent (Nelson/Aycock)**

Provides that a military conservator's deployment may not be used to justify modification of a court order providing for the conservatorship of a child. This bill protects the rights of a military conservator and prevents a court from using the military conservator's absence during deployment against him or her during child custody proceedings.

**4. SB 297 - In-state Tuition & Fees (Van de Putte, Ogden/Corte)**

Allows non-Texas veterans and their families to immediately pay in-state tuition and fees at a public university or college without requiring that they wait the one year to establish Texas residency. Additionally, if a military parent is deployed to a combat theater, that parent's child(ren) is(are) exempt from paying resident tuition at a public institution of higher education while that parent is on such a deployment.

**5. SB 847 - Hazlewood Fees (Averitt/Anderson)**

Currently, community colleges are able to issue and recover a fee for high cost programs, such as pilot training, to Hazlewood students. However, when this was written into the Texas Education Code (TEC), Texas technical colleges were not included. This legislation extends the ability to issue a high cost program fee for Hazlewood students to Texas technical colleges. Due to the costs associated to TSTC Waco's Aircraft Pilot Training (APT) program, the institution has been running at a major deficit that is expected to get larger while the numbers of Fort Hood soldiers returning home increases. In FY 2008 TSTC Waco lost almost \$100,000 in the APT program alone. In just September and October of 2008 TSTC Waco lost \$41,399. Word continues to spread about the low cost/no cost to Hazlewood students in the APT program, therefore the campus expects to see 100 Hazelwood students by the fall semester of 2011. At this level, the campus would be taking in too much debt to continue to offer the APT program, and would have to consider no longer offering the curriculum. TSTC Waco is the only technical school impacted by the Hinson Hazlewood APT program losses. Lamar Institute of Technology does not offer pilot training.

**6. SB 1325 - Veteran Mental Health (Nelson/Corte)**

Requires the Department of Health Services to solicit and train volunteers for peer-to-peer mental health intervention for veterans.

**7. SB 1655 - Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) Functions & Vet Themed Lotto Scratch-off Ticket (Van de Putte/Farias)**

Requires that under the career ladder program -- openings in all positions, except entry level positions, be

## Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations

posted within TVC concurrently with any public posting. This bill also authorizes TVC to utilize appropriated funds to purchase food, drinks, and promotional items for use at outreach and training programs. SB 1655 provides that Chapter 2167 (Lease of Space for State Agencies), Government Code, does not apply to a space leased by TVC for the veterans employment services program. Additionally, the legislation authorizes the creation of a vet themed lotto scratch-off ticket, whereby the funds generated from the ticket benefit the Fund for Veterans Assistance. Funds in this account can be utilized for the establishment of local support groups for veterans suffering from PTSD, transportation assistance, etc.

### **8. SB 1940 - Funding Stream for Fund for Veteran Assistance/"Veteran Courts" (Van de Putte/Ortiz, Jr.)**

Authorizes money in the fund to be appropriated to TVC to make grants to address veterans' needs and administer the fund. It also authorizes TVC to solicit and accept a gift, grant, devise, bequest of money, security, service, or property, including money raised or a service provided by a volunteer or volunteer group, to promote the work of TVC. Also, it provides that TVC, for the sole purpose of managing the fund for veterans' assistance, is considered an eligible charitable organization entitled to participate in the state employee charitable campaign, and entitles a state employee to authorize a deduction for contributions to TVC for the purpose of managing the fund as a charitable contribution. Similarly, it entitles a person, when a person registers a motor vehicle, to make a voluntary contribution in any amount to the fund. Additionally, the legislation authorizes county commissioner courts to establish a veterans' diversion court program for military service personnel and veterans whose service-related disability contributed to the non-violent criminal offense.

### **8. SB 2223 - Sustainability of Camp Bullis (Van de Putte/McClendon) was amended onto HB 2919 (King, S./Fraser)**

Allows for the creation of a Regional Military Sustainability Commission which would consider any development that might affect military operations within five-miles of the boundary line of Camp Bullis.

### **9. HB 269 - College Credit for Military (Lucio, III/Van de Putte)**

Allows a student to receive up to 12 hours of course credit at a public institution of higher education for at least two years of honorable military service. The course credit could be applied to physical education and free elective course requirements.

### **10. HB 551 - Electronic Application for Voting (Madden/Harris)**

Allows a federal postcard application be scanned and submitted electronically by service members and their families to the local voter registrar or elections administrator versus submitting solely by mail and in some instances fax. By allowing for an electronic submission this allows for timely delivery of an absentee ballot to those deployed overseas who desire to participate in an election in which they are eligible and qualified to vote.

### **11. HB 965 - Disabled Parking Placard (Pickett/Van de Putte)**

Previous law entitled a veteran of the United States armed forces to specialty license plates and disabled placards for two registered vehicles. This legislation entitles a veteran to register, for the person's own use, any number of motor vehicles for which the registrant may be issued specialty license plates for disabled veterans and disabled parking placards.

### **12. HB 1452 - Fed. State Alignment Defined Eligible Vet/Spouse (Eissler/Van de Putte)**

Aligns the state definition of "active military, naval, or air service," "covered person," and "veteran" with federal law for the purpose of receiving priority of service in certain job training and employment assistance programs. The term "covered person" includes, among others, the spouse of a member of the armed forces who died while serving on active military, naval, or air service. Additionally, the bill entitles a covered person to priority in obtaining services or resources regarding job training and employment assistance programs and authorizes a covered person to take precedence in obtaining services or resources over persons who are not covered. Also, the bill requires a job training or employment assistance program or service that is funded wholly or partly with state money, in selecting applicants to receive training or

## Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations

assistance, to give priority of service to a covered person who meets the minimum eligibility requirements to participate or enroll in the program or receive the service. The legislation authorizes the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to provide services to enhance the employment and training opportunities of veterans, covered persons, active duty service members, spouses of active duty service members, and members of the Texas National Guard and requires TVC to operate certain federally funded veteran job training and employment programs. These services must be provided by state employees.

### **13. HB 2806 - Reinstatement after Military LOA (Maldonado/Van de Putte)**

Amends the reinstatement policy for a firefighter or police officer so that upon the return from a military leave of absence, the person who filled the vacancy keeps the rank if that person has more seniority than the other at that rank and the individual at that rank with the least seniority is demoted. This demotion occurs only if there was a surplus in the rank at which the returning individual is reinstated, and the demoted individual is placed on a position reinstatement list in order of seniority. Therefore, those placed on the list are given priority for any future promotions based on seniority.

### **14. HB 3139 - Toll Road Discount for Certain Vets (Herrero/Van de Putte)**

Grants a toll project entity the authority to establish a discount program for certain veterans: those who are disabled, received a Purple Heart, or were awarded the Medal of Honor.

### **15. HB 3452 - Texas Armed Services Scholarship Program (Gattis/Ogden)**

Establishes a scholarship program whereby the governor, lieutenant governor, state senators, and state representatives can nominate entering freshmen at a Texas public or private institution of higher education that are enrolled in and are in good-standing with the institutions' ROTC program for an annual scholarship of up to \$15,000 (based on legislative appropriation). The student is required to complete the 4-year ROTC program, graduate within 5 years from the institution, and after graduation enter into a 4-year commitment to the Texas Army or Air National Guard or a contract to serve as a commissioned officer in any branch of the US Armed Services. The governor and lieutenant governor can nominate two students each per year. Each state senator and representative can nominate one student per year. The program will be administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Board and is based on the federal program which allows for congressional nominations to the four U.S. service academies.

### **16. HB 3593 - License Plates for DAVs (McReynolds/Van de Putte)**

Grants a toll project entity the authority to establish a discount program for certain veterans: those who are disabled, received a Purple Heart, or were awarded the Medal of Honor.

### **17. SB 469 (Carona, et al./Flores) - Homestead Property Tax Exemption for Totally Disabled Vets was amended onto HB 3613 (Otto/Williams)**

Allows a disabled veteran who receives from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or its successor 100 percent disability compensation due to a service-connected disability and a rating of 100 percent disabled or of individual unemployability an exemption from taxation of the total appraised value of the veteran's residence homestead. The joint resolution to this enabling legislation was passed during the 80th Legislative Session and the constitutional amendment (Proposition 9) passed in the November 2007 election by a vote of 86%.

### **18. HJR 116 - VLB Bond Authority (Corte/Van de Putte)**

"Reauthorizes" or "evergreens" all previously authorized general obligation bonding authority in the Veterans' Housing Assistance Fund, the Veterans' Housing Assistance Fund II, and the Veterans' Land Fund. Current federal tax law limits the Veterans Land Board (VLB) to the issuance of no more than \$250 million of qualified veterans mortgage bonds per year; therefore, the proposed constitutional amendment should provide a sufficient amount of general obligation bonding authority to VLB to continue funding of these programs for approximately eight to 10 years.