

The following is the outcome for the major Veteran related bills considered by the 83rd Texas Legislature. Please distribute to your members.

Veteran Related Tax Exemptions:

For tax exemption bills, Texas Veterans disabled less than 100% will have to wait until the 84th Texas Legislature to see the dollar amount that may be exempted from the appraised value of their principal residence increased. Due to the fiscal impact to the State, SB 465 and SJR 30 were not able to gain support in the Senate or the House, and the bills died in Finance and Ways & Means committees. This will be a top priority for TCVO during the 18-month Interim leading up to the start of the 84th Texas Legislature in January 2015.

Bills pertaining to 100% property tax exemption for surviving spouses of service members killed in action or dies while on active duty **HJR 62 passed the House 5/10/13 and passed the Senate on 5/21/13. HJR 62 will be sent to the Secretary of State as a proposed amendment to the State Constitution.**

On the Senate side **SB 163**, which would exempt the surviving spouse of a member of the armed services of the USA who is killed in action. **SB 163 passed the House and Senate on 5/24/13, and was approved by Governor Perry on 5/27/13. NOTE: this Act takes effect 1 January 2014, but only if HJR 62 (a change to the Texas Constitution) is approved by the voters in the November Proposition ballots.**

HJR 24: proposing a constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to provide for an exemption from ad valorem taxation of part of the market value of the residence homestead of a partially disabled veteran or the surviving spouse of a partially disabled veteran if the residence was donated to the disabled veteran by a charitable organization. HJR 24 was signed by the House on 5/24/13 and the Senate on 5/26/13, and was filed with the Secretary of State on 5/28/13.

HB 97, the enabling legislation for HJR 24 passed the House on 5/10/13, and passed the Senate as Amended on 5/22/13, and was approved by Governor Perry on 5/27/13. **NOTE: this Act takes effect 1 January 2014, but only if HJR 24 (a change to the Texas Constitution) is approved by the voters in the November Proposition ballots.**

Service Disabled Veteran Owned Businesses:

HB 194: Farias / Ratliff / Menendez / Guerra

Will place SDVOBs as "economically disadvantaged" which will allow SDVOBs to compete for State contracts in the same category as HUBs (Historically Underutilized Businesses: race, gender, and ethnicities) if their VA rated disability is 20% or greater. The bill was voted out of the House Defense Affairs Committee favorably without amendments on 3/28/13. HB 194 passed with amendments from the House on 5/8/13, passed the Senate on 5/22/13. 5/27/13: HB 194 was signed in the House and the Senate, and was signed by Governor Perry on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

The passage of HB 194, which will allow Service Disabled Veteran Owned Businesses to compete for State contracts in the same category as HUBs (Historically Underutilized Businesses: based on race, gender and ethnicity) was a major victory was. This is the 4th Legislative Session (and the 8th year) that the Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations has been advocating for passage of this bill. Full credit goes to the Texas grassroots veterans who answered the call repeatedly to contact their State Representative or Senator in support of SDVOB legislation. Jim Brennan, TCVO Research/Resource Director took up residence at the State Capitol working the halls, the offices, and the phones of key House and Senate legislators

to educate them on the benefits of HB 194, and to answer their questions, to ensure passage of this important piece of legislation. This was a true team effort. Without the support of our grassroots veterans, no veteran-related legislation would have passed.

Bills passed that positively impact the Texas Veterans Commission:

State Strike Force and Fully Developed Claims Teams Initiative: one of the most significant commitments began in Summer 2012 when Gov Rick Perry, Lt Gov David Dewhurst, and House Speaker Joe Straus committed over \$1.5 million to a one-year State Strike Force and Fully Developed Teams Initiative to help address the backlog of federal claims in Texas. In January 2013, state leaders committed an additional \$500,000 to the effort. The 83rd Texas Legislature chose to continue the initiative through the 2014-2015 biennium, appropriating an additional \$4 million over the next two years to help address the backlog.

Housing4TexasHeroes;

The Legislature also chose to continue to enhance its commitment to providing funding for non-profit and local government organizations that provide housing services for Veterans by allocating another \$3 million to continue the Housing4TexasHeroes grant program. Since the awarding of the first eight grants in January 2012, Housing4Texas Heroes grantees have reported serving 845 Veterans, dependents, and surviving spouses, or 157% of the projected number of Veterans and family members to be served.

Veterans Mental Health:

State budget writers allocated an additional \$4 million to the Veteran Mental Health Program within the Department of State Health Services, in effect doubling its size and capacity throughout the State. Senator Van de Putte was also able to secure, through emergency appropriation, additional mental health resources for the Texas National Guard. HB 2392 recognized the need to expand and enhance mental health services available to Texas Veterans.

Fund for Veterans Assistance:

HB 633 Farias / Moody

Relating to a voluntary contribution to the fund for veterans' assistance when applying for a driver's license or personal identification certificate. Governor Perry signed HB 633 on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013. Senator Wendy Davis authored similar legislation during the 82nd Legislature, which created an option for Texans to donate to the Fund for Veterans Assistance when registering their vehicle with the Department of Motor Vehicles. Since the passage of that legislation, that revenue source has generated over \$600,000 in donations to FVA. It is anticipated that the new revenue source created by House Bill 633 will yield similar results.

Veteran Entrepreneur Program:

SB 1476: West.

Relating to the creation of the Veteran Entrepreneur program by the Texas Veterans Commission. 5/16/13: approved by the House and the Senate. 5/27/13 approved by the Governor. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013. This is a new program to promote Veteran entrepreneurship and business ownership throughout the State. The Vetpreneur program was formally created by the passage of SB 1476, authored by Senator Royce West. Representative Ralph Sheffield, who sponsored the legislation in the House, successfully secured funding in the State budget to fund this new program. The bill established the Veteran Entrepreneur Program at the Texas Veterans Commission, based on a highly successful pilot program launched in April 2012.

Education:

SB 1158/1159: Van de Putte / Diane Patrick

Relating to higher education for certain military personnel and their dependents: readmission to

graduate and professional programs. SB 1159 was signed in the House and Senate on 5/27/13. Governor Perry signed SB 1159 on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013. Both bills focus on sustaining Texas' commitment to Veterans education by:

- Creating a \$248 million Permanent Fund Supporting Military and Veterans exemption;
- Moving administration of the Hazelwood Exemption program to Texas Veterans Commission;
- Establishing a network of Veteran Education Counselors to assist Texas Veterans maximize their education benefits;
- Establishing the Veteran Education Excellence Recognition Award to recognize institutions of higher education that meet or exceed standards for providing specific services to Veterans, and
- Directing a study of the sustainability of Federal and State Veteran education benefits in Texas.

Occupational / Professional Licenses and Certifications:

The 83rd Legislature passed a number of bills that allow employers and industries in Texas to maximize the professional skills acquired by servicemembers during their military careers by enhancing the State's occupational licensing laws. These changes allow training and education servicemembers received while members of the Armed Forces in specialized fields to count towards training needs for certain professional and occupational licenses and certificates. Bills include:

- HB 2028: authored by Rep Chris Turner; professional licenses for plumbers;
- HB 2029: authored by Rep Chris Turner; professional licenses for electricians;
- HB 2135: authored by Rep Philip Cortez; private security licenses;
- SB 162: authored by Senator Van de Putte, sponsored by Rep Dan Flynn: occupational licensing requirement;
- SB 229: authored by Senator Wendy Davis: commercial drivers licenses;
- SB 242: authored by Senator John Carona: general occupational licensing.

General:

SB 597: Birdwell / Uresti

Relating to the issuance of specialty license plates for certain Operation Enduring Freedom veterans. 4/4/13: passed the Senate; 5/23/13: passed the House. 5/24/13 SB 597 is enrolled and was signed by Governor Perry on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

SB 904: Van de Putte

Amends the Election Code to require the Secretary of State to create optional guidelines to be used by early voting clerks in processing an application and providing balloting materials to military and overseas voters. Bill establishes certain election related deadlines and repeal Section 50, Chapter 1318 (SB 100), Acts of the 82nd Legislature, Regular Session, 2011, thereby prohibiting the Secretary of State from adjusting or modifying affected election dates. Effective 9/1/2013.

SB 981: Van de Putte / Davis / Hinojosa

Relating to electric utility bill payment assistance programs for certain veterans burned in combat. 5/20/13 passed the House; 5/24/13: signed in the Senate. Governor Perry signed SB 981 on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

HB 150: Larson / Rick Miller / Sheets / Farias / Anderson

Relating to the display of flags at half-staff at the Capitol building to honor service members killed in action. 5/20/13: signed in the House and Senate; 5/20/13 and was signed by Governor Perry on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

HB 396: S Thompson

Bill amends the Election Code to allow a person to apply for a ballot with a single federal postcard application for one or more elections in which the person is eligible to vote. Effective 1 September 2013.

HB 402: Sarah Davis

Relating to a medal for certain members of the state military forces who served during the Cold War; authorizing a fee. 5/20/13: signed in the House and the Senate; was signed by Governor Perry on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

HB 485: Sarah David / Guillen / Ralph Sheffield

Relating to the amount of the fees paid by certain peace officers, correctional officers, members of the state military forces, and veterans of the armed forces for a license to carry a concealed handgun and to the issuance of such a license to certain peace officers and members of the state military forces; authorizing a fee. 5/21/13: signed in the House and the Senate; 5/22/13 and was signed by Governor Perry on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

HB 489: Menendez

Bill relates to rights and responsibilities of persons with disabilities, including with respect to the use of service animals that provide assistance to those persons. It includes seizure disorder and PTSD as reasons for a service animal. Effective 6/24/2013.

HB 1123: Herrero

Toll road exemptions for Medal of Honor, Legion of Valor, Disabled Veterans, and Purple Heart recipients. Passed the House on 5/8/13; passed the Senate on 5/22/13. 5/23/13: Senate passage reported in the House. 5/25/13: signed in the House. Governor Perry signed HB 1123 on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

HB 1129: White et al

Bill requires the Secretary of State to select certain counties to participate in the e-mail ballot program and operate the program as a pilot program until its expiration on 1 Sept 2015. The bill requires the Secretary of State to file a report with the Legislature no later than 1 Jan 2015, which may include recommendations to the program.

HB 1514: Donna Howard

Provides World War II veterans with veterans license plates that allow them to receive privileged parking benefits including use of most parking meters free of charge. Governor Perry approved the bill on 5/27/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

HB 1678: Frullo /Duncan

Relating to the issuance of specialty license plates for surviving spouses of disabled veterans of the United States armed forces; authorizing a fee. 5/26/13 HB 1678 has passed the House and the Senate; 5/27/13 and was signed by Governor Perry on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.

HB 3064: Menendez / Moody

Relating to the disposition of unclaimed cremated remains of certain veterans. 5/20/13: signed in the House and the Senate; 5/20/13 and was signed by Governor Perry on 6/14/13. The bill becomes effective 1 September 2013.