

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE VETERANS MILITARY AND HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Don Myers at 1:30 PM on January 22, 2008 in Room 784 of the Docking Building.

All members were present except:

Dan Johnson - excused

Kenny Wilk - excused

Bob Bethell - excused

Committee staff present:

Scott Wells, Revisor of Statutes Office

Athena Andaya, Kansas Legislative Research Department

Art Griggs, Revisor of Statutes Office

Jill Shelley, Kansas Legislative Research Department

Barbara Lewerenz, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Darrell Bencken, VFW, Veterans Claims Advisory Committee

David Warnken, American Legion, Veterans Claims Assistance Advisory Program Committee

Wayne Bollig, Kansas Veterans Claims Assistance Program Director

Others attending:

See attached list.

Chairman Myers reported that Dan Johnson hopes to report to the committee by February 8th. He had surgery and is dealing with an infection. Staff members were introduced and new staff members, Scott Wells, Jill Shelley and Barbara Lewerenz gave brief remarks.

Chairman Myers asked for any bill introductions by committee members. Vice Chairperson Candy Ruff submitted a clean up issue on the claims bills passed in the last session. Chairman Myers introduced a bill that would allow student participation in the funeral services of soldiers by playing taps. The student would be given a \$25 voucher for providing the service and absence from school would be excused. There were no objections.

Chairman Myers recognized Darrell Bencken, VFW, who presented a report on the Veterans Grant Program for the VFW. (Attachment 1)

Chairman Myers recognized David O. Warnken, American Legion, who reported on the the Veterans Claims Assistance Advisory Program . (Attachment 2)

Chairman Myers recognized Wayne Bollig, Director of the Veterans' Claims Assistance Program. Mr. Bollig presented an overview of the Veterans Claims Assistance Program and accounted for the \$500,000 appropriated by the legislature. (Attachment 3)

Discussion followed the presentations that clarified issues dealing with outreach in rural areas, scholarships for veterans who served in combat, outreach to prisoners who are veterans, training representatives to deal with those suffering from post-traumatic-stress disorder, and the time frame for claims processing. It was noted that the number of claims for Veteran's benefits has increased by 18 percent and are expected to rise. The programs are funded by a \$500,000 appropriation from the State and from service organizations contributing \$178,000 in cash, service and in-kind. Wichita is the main office through which all claims are finally processed. Service members receive care from the military as long as the member is considered active duty. At the time of discharge, the member is eligible for veterans programs. Compared to other states, Kansas has one of the most generous veterans assistance programs.

There were no further bill introductions.

Chairman Myers adjourned the meeting at 2:55 PM.

The next meeting will be on January 23rd on the rail.

