

## County Veteran Directors

Good Morning,

I would first like to say thank you for allowing me to address this body at your annual conference. As well, I would like to thank your President, Bob Harris and Vice-President Barre Shepp from your central district for personally inviting me here today . . . thus giving me the opportunity to welcome you to the Harrisburg area. . . and more importantly . . . welcome you to your annual meeting of the 67 county veterans affairs directors.

In my capacity as Majority Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, . . . . I believe it is safe to say that I am indeed. . . . “familiar with your work” . . . or more direct to the point . . . I am very familiar with the constituency that you serve.

Here in our State Capitol, . . . the veteran community has a strong voice. In your capacity as County Veterans Affairs Directors, . . . each one of you is a part of that voice.

The role of the committee that I chair is to not only assist veterans, . . . but also to assist those groups and individuals that are on the front lines everyday . . . helping veterans with their VA claims . . . helping them get connected with various state and federal veterans programs, . . . and most importantly . . . just being there to talk with a veteran in his or her time of need.

(Pause)

In regard to assisting veterans, the legislature, through the strong lobby efforts of the veteran community, . . . was able to secure \$250,000 in

last years state budget to assist the PA department of the Disable American Veterans with the purchase of ten (10) vans for their Transportation Network.

As well, the legislature was able to provide \$4.5 million dollars for the PA Veterans Memorial at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery. At this point in time . . . HB 1356, which I had the privilege to prime sponsor, is currently on Governor Schweiker's desk for his signature. This legislation will allow PA Veterans Memorial Trust Fund monies to be used for the maintenance and perpetual care of this long

sought after memorial to our Commonwealth's Veterans.

(Pause)

Due to time constraints, I am unable to give you a full legislative update . . . nonetheless, I am sure that your State Liaison Officer, Mr. Tom Wasco, will be providing you with the pertinent information on what has been going on in Harrisburg. Tom has indeed been an important source of information to my committee . . . and I would like to personally thank him and your

organization for assisting the efforts of the legislature over the past several years.

(Pause)

I would be in remiss if I did not mention that the legislature this week is finalizing the State Budget for fiscal year 2002-03. I anticipate a floor vote on this measure this week or next week . . . hence . . . that is why I am somewhat pressed for time this morning, . . . and unfortunately cannot stay with you and participate in your important discussions and deliberations. Nonetheless, . . . I will tell you

that even though this is a “very” tight budget year . . . the State Veterans Homes and the Scotland School for Veterans children did receive substantial increases in their operation costs . . . when compared to other agency programs that were either flat lined or decreased. As well, it is my hope that the DAV Transportation Network line item will remain fully funded . . . as is the case for the various state veterans programs which will continue to have the necessary funding to operate.

In closing . . . I would like to mention one piece of legislation which is also on the Governor’s

desk for his signature. This legislation, Senate Bill 1093 (Robbins), cleans up any confusion that there may have been by County Recorder of Deeds offices . . . in regard to the free recording of Military Reservist DD-214's and National Guard NGB Form 22 discharges. It appears the words . . . “discharged from Active Duty” in the law have caused some confusion in the past for some offices, . . . nevertheless, the law now is very clear that all honorable discharges will be recorded free of charge.

Another important item on this subject . . . is section 2 of this law, which is Act 37 of 1868.



Section 2 . . . which again is already current law, states that these military discharge papers are “confidential”, . . . thus, the only authorized person that can obtain a copy of these discharge papers is the veteran, an immediate family member, a person with Power of Attorney authority, or a Veterans Affairs Director or a State/Federal agency for veterans benefits purposes.

I wanted to take the time today to mention this important section of current law because, you all may be aware of recent articles that have warned veterans that their discharge papers

could be used by “deceptive” persons in “identity theft” type crimes. This could be the case in other States in regard to their open records laws. But, in Pennsylvania, we are confident that our law, which is very explicit, would prevent this crime of identity theft . . . provided that the pertinent people at our county courthouses are fully aware of this law. Thus, I would ask you to please discuss this issue with your county recorder of deeds office, thereby ensuring that a veteran in your area does not fall victim to identity theft.

Once again, thank you for inviting me here today to meet with your membership. I applaud each one of you for the tremendous work that you do for the Veterans across our Commonwealth's 67 counties.

Keep up the great work, and I hope that your stay here in Harrisburg is enjoyable. I wish you Godspeed on the important deliberations that your organization has before you this week, and I look forward to working with you on future legislative matters. My office door is always open, so please, feel free to stop by and visit my Harrisburg office anytime. As well, as my

committee travels across the state on legislative matters, I will make it a point to stop by your office if I have the pleasure of being in your county seat.

Thank you, and have a great conference.