

VFW Mid Winter Conference

Good Afternoon... I would like to begin my brief remarks by saying that I am honored to once again be before your ranks...for a fourth consecutive year at your Mid-Winter Conference. As well, I would like to thank Adjutant Mullen and State Commander John Biedrzycki for my personal invitation to address this noble body today.

As you are aware, the Pennsylvania General Assembly recently concluded a two-year legislative session...(PAUSE) a session which I feel had a positive impact on the veteran community of Pennsylvania. Via the partnership between my standing committee and the PA State Veterans Commission and the PA War Veterans Council... both of which the VFW has strong membership representation,... we were able to eliminate the residency requirement for the state administered Paralyzed Veterans Pension Program, as well as the requirement that the

veteran's paralysis must have occurred "during a period of war or armed conflict". Under this newly amended law, a Pennsylvania veteran, who is receiving this monthly \$150 pension, would not be stripped of this pension if he or she would relocate to another state for retirement or possible health purposes.

We also were able to obtain the passage of two pieces of legislation that created an "Operation Recognition" Program for veterans of both World War II and the Korean War. This Operation Recognition Program would allow veterans, who did not graduate high school due to their wartime service,...an opportunity to receive their high school diploma. This is indeed a befitting tribute to those heroic men and women who spent their formative years...not in the classroom...but on the battlefields of Europe, the Pacific theatre or the frozen tundra of Korea...in defense of their country.

As well, we were able to secure yet another \$250,000 line item in last year's state budget...for the purposes of funding the DAV Transportation Network. This Transportation Network is available to all veterans who are in need of transportation to VA medical facilities, and I will work hard to ensure that this funding remains in the forthcoming state budget.

In regard to the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, we were able to dedicate this proud structure in October of 2001. This dedication ceremony brought into fruition a 14-year mission which was undertaken by the veteran community of Pennsylvania. As a follow up to the design and construction of this magnificent memorial, we were able to make yet another change in the law which would allow for memorial trust fund monies to be used for the perpetual care of this memorial...thereby ensuring that its presence will be around for many future generations to reflect upon.

As for our State Veterans' Home System, we were able to finally dedicate a 6th State Veterans Home in the Delaware Valley outside of Philadelphia, as well as construct a new dining facility at the Southeastern Veterans Center in Spring City. Through the strong advocacy of the VFW and your brethren veterans service organizations...you made these projects happen...and I applaud the great work that you have done in regard to these important capital projects that are of great benefit to the veteran community in Pennsylvania.

Lastly, via the unbridled respect that your membership has for the United States flag...and those men and women who served to protect that flag and the freedoms that this flag stands for...we were able to obtain passage of HB 592, which now requires that the Pledge of Allegiance be "offered" each and every day in the classrooms of our schools.

This legislation had been a high priority of the veterans service organizations long before the events of September 11th,...long before the subsequent resurgence of patriotism across our great country...and long before the 9th Circuit courts' controversial interpretation of the..."Under God"...language in the Pledge of Allegiance.

You, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and your brethren veterans service organizations...realized the inherent importance of this daily affirmation of loyalty and respect for our country...and fought hard over the past five years to ensure that every child in the Commonwealth has the opportunity to reflect on the freedoms that so many have died to protect. I applaud your efforts...and I personally want to thank Almon Long and Adjutant Mullin for their attendance at multiple key meetings on this important legislation.

(PAUSE)

It has been a great legislative session, but more work remains in the upcoming new legislative session which begins on January 27th. My committee has now been assigned to subcommittees which will enable the committee to enhance its focus on many key issues that loom on the horizon. The subcommittee on Security and Emergency Response Readiness will indeed have its work cut out for it...given the times we are currently in. As well, the subcommittee on Military and Veterans Facilities will stand ready to address future proposals to enhance not only the Commonwealth's military and veteran infrastructure,...but also the many important programs which make these facilities viable to veterans, military personnel and their families across Pennsylvania.

It is a new legislative session, under a new Governor,... and I am here today to tell you that the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee is once again reporting for duty...and stands ready to work with the Veterans of

Foreign Wars...on behalf of the veterans of Pennsylvania and their families.

Thank you for once again affording me the opportunity to speak with your delegation...and I want to personally thank each and every one of you for your past service to your country...and your continued service to your brother and sister veterans.

Have a great mid-winter conference.

Thank you.