

**LinkVet** is a toll-free, one-stop customer service line for all Minnesota veterans. The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, along with Crisis Connection, will provide information referral, immediate crisis intervention and psychological counseling 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

If you, or a veteran you know, have questions about benefits or need assistance, please call  
LinkVet at: 1-888-546-5838.



[minnesotaveteran.org](http://minnesotaveteran.org) | **1-888-LinkVet**  
(546-5838)

## MINNESOTA COMMANDERS'



2008 Legislative Session

## Who is the Minnesota Commanders' Task

*The Minnesota Commanders' Task Force is comprised of nine congressionally chartered veterans service organizations, which are listed below. As the elected leaders of our respective organizations, we meet regularly to discuss the many issues affecting veterans and their families.*



American Ex-Prisoners of War  
David Claypool  
Commander



American Legion  
James Cooper  
Commander



AMVETS  
Gene Degier  
Commander



Disabled American Veterans  
William Woolie  
Commander



Jewish War Veterans  
Sid Schmuckler  
Commander



Marine Corps League  
John Mauritz  
Commandant



Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Richard Jenkins Sr.  
Commander



Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Robert Bjorkman  
Commander



Vietnam Veterans of America  
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## The Purpose of t

The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with the information we believe you, as state legislators, need for the 2008 legislative session. Each page contains an issue along with our recommendations.

We hope you will refer to this booklet during the session and find the information useful. We appreciate your support of our state's veterans and their families, and all citizens of Minnesota.



## Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Budget (MDVA)

In the past, appropriations to the department have not been sufficient to fully fund vital veterans programs. While the department received an increase in funding in 2007, more financial support is necessary to meet the needs of Minnesota's veterans.

Increased funding is necessary to tackle technology upgrades, continue operating the one-stop website, LinkVet, State Veterans Cemetery, State Soldiers Assistance; County Service Offices Grant; Higher Education on Campus Veterans Representative and Outreach programs.

*We would like to take this opportunity to provide you with information on these MDVA programs that the CTF supports, such as:*

- the **MDVA Claims Office** helps process over 50% of claims filed on behalf of Minnesota veterans. Additional monies are necessary to help reach outstate veterans.
- the veterans' linkage line, **LinkVet**, was launched on August 1, 2007. Since then, this customer service/crisis line for veteran has fielded several thousand calls, emails and chats from veterans from across our state and nation. This, 24 hours a day and seven days a week, hotline provides immediate care during a crisis and assistance to veterans who are seeking the services and benefits for which they are eligible.
- the **Grants to County Veteran Service Officers** program provides the department with grant making authority to enhance benefits, programs and services to veterans. Priority is given to outreach for under-served veterans, reintegration of combat veterans, and reducing homelessness. All 87 counties are eligible to apply.

## Commanders Task Force

The CTF supports this initiative to help veterans and TBI in returning OIF/OEF combat veterans and their families' emotional and mental health of returning veterans. A determining factor in the successful reintegration of returning veterans is the support of employers and community.

## State Soldier Assistance

The State Soldiers Assistance Program provides assistance in the form of shelter payments (rent), personal needs grants to veterans who are unable to work as a result of a temporary disability. This assistance with dental and optical needs for veterans who meet strict income and asset requirements. The impact war has on veterans and their families is a significant financial needs funding for personal counseling. The department envisions this program to have a higher rate now that deployed troops are returning.

MDVA is asking for an additional \$1.5 million to meet the needs of these veterans who are experiencing hardships.

## Commanders Task Force

The CTF supports this request due to the widespread usage of this program.

## Policy

Amending current Power of Attorney to remove restrictive powers and require account access.

## Commanders Task Force

The CTF supports strengthening laws to protect military personnel from fraud and abuse.

## Commanders Task Force Recommendation

The Legislature should exempt military retirement pay and the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) payments to surviving spouses from state taxation.

Many military retirees choose a location for retirement based, at least in part, on how their retired pay is taxed at the state level. Many retirees, originally from Minnesota, choose to retire in states which do not fully tax this retirement benefit. By taxing this benefit, Minnesota loses out on any revenue these individuals would generate whether as a part of an academic, professional, medical or technical brain-trust, or as individuals who pursue second careers fueling the economy with new business starts and job creation.

Currently Minnesota is losing these highly sought after individuals, along with their leaderships skills, professional experience and retirement revenue to states who treat this income differently.

## TBI/PTSD Outreach & Education

Throughout history when soldiers have fought in battles and survived combat, there has been PTSD. It wasn't until after the Vietnam war that this psychological phenomenon was clinically identified, and treatment options developed and implemented.

Today's returning veterans still must face the emotional and psychological effects of their deployment in a war zone. Also, these new OIF/OEF combat veterans are also at high risk for Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBIs).

MDVA is requesting an additional \$250,000 each year for PTSD/TBI outreach and education. Monies will be used to promote existing federal screening programs, and to commission a study regarding future mental health needs of returning veterans.

- the **MDVA Outreach Program** implementing programs that assist including women and minorities. This needs additional funding to help veterans suffering from Trauma and Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- the **State Soldiers Assistance** temporary cash assistance in the utilities, and personal needs grant to work as a result of a temporary medical needs for veterans and their families for those who meet strict income "special needs" allowance has been needs of veterans, military personnel

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs this past year to increase access for benefit information. Reintegration, programs continue to see an increase in additional dollars which may not be available

The CTF also supports two other legislative tax exemption for military retire pay military personnel to permanently serve change to strengthen Power of Attorney personnel and veterans from fraud and

During this time of budget deficits a made available to MDVA to do as AB frequently in his second inaugural address the work we are in, to bind up the nation who shall have borne the battle and for

The CTF strongly recommends that and vote in favor of the Minnesota Department legislative package.

## Veterans Claims Office Staff

MDVA is asking for \$250,000 each year for additional claims office staff. There is a need for claims staff to be readily available statewide to provide services. These additional funds are needed for increased travel and training to improve service delivery for veterans. This request would also include hiring a female Veterans Service Officer/Coordinator.

### Commanders Task Force Recommendation

The CTF supports this initiative, because MDVA processes over 50% of all claims filed on behalf of Minnesota veterans.

### LinkVet Case Workers & LinkVet Line Funding

LinkVet, the toll-free customer service/crisis line for veterans, will need \$720,000 each year to continue to help Minnesota veterans and their families access the benefits, services and care for which they are eligible.

This funding will keep this vital hotline in operation and help finance program software, a contract with crisis connection counselors, and provide additional staff and training.

### Commanders Task Force Recommendation

The CTF supports this program and the request for additional monies for LinkVet. LinkVet continues to field calls from veterans needing assistance with housing, health, education, claims, pensions and many other issues. From its implementation in August of 2007, Linkvet Vet has answered 108 live chats, 1548 phone calls and 457 email contacts.

The additional funding is necessary to hire staff to actively provide casework for veterans and their families who are experiencing complex multi-faceted issues in their lives. The goal is to have caseworkers remain assigned to the veteran until the veteran's issue is resolved.

## CVSO Training & CVSO

This proposal for an additional \$750,000 addresses the demand for grant requests from the state. Grants can be used for multiple purposes: reintegration of combat veterans, reducing the veteran population, and improving service delivery. A priority on outreach to underserved veterans is included.

The staffing request is to create a position for training, and oversight of the grant program. The grant will provide overall leadership, and coordinate the work of CVSOs.

### Commanders Task Force Recommendation

The CTF supports this funding request as the "first point of contact" for veterans with service-related issues.

CVSOs are experts in navigating through the complex veterans services, benefits, claims, and pension issues. They are trained to ensuring that CVSOs have sufficient resources, offices, and receive excellent training to effectively fully assist Minnesota's veterans.

### Income Tax Exemption for

Currently, there are more than 15,000 Minnesota who receive hard-earned income tax benefits.

Whether or not states tax military retirement is a deciding factor on where individuals plan to retire. Many states which do not tax their military retirement.

States differ in whether they exempt military retirement benefit. Currently, Minnesota has no exemption for Retired Pay. *(continued on page 8)*