

# Minnesota Commanders' Task Force 2016 Legislative Agenda





# About the Minnesota Commanders' Task Force

The Minnesota Commanders' Task Force (CTF) was created in 1988 and is comprised of elected commanders and appointed adjutants of nine congressionally-chartered Veterans Service Organizations in the state of Minnesota. Key functions of this group include:

- Developing a united veterans legislative agenda and actively advocating for it before state and elected officials.
- Serving as a non-partisan advisory group to the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), the Governor and Legislators on veterans' issues in the state.
- Working to seek and form Veterans Service Organization partnerships in program development (for example, the state's Veterans Day program).

## Member Organizations



American Ex-Prisoners of War



Marine Corps League



American Legion



Military Order of the Purple Heart



AMVETS



Veterans of Foreign Wars



Disabled American Veterans



Vietnam Veterans of America



Jewish War Veterans

## From the Chair of the CTF:

Fellow veterans, families and friends, last year at this time there was talk about how this nation is weary from the 13 years of nonstop combat. But events occurring in the world remind us that the tactical situation on the battlefield is in constant flux and our military needs to be prepared to do what needs to be done.

While there is no guessing what the political process will bring for men and women in the military, it reminds me of our legacy of service to our veterans and their families. This is one reason why we exist. There are still men and women in harm's way and many will come home with their lives changed forever.

This is where you can make a difference. We need to keep our elected officials abreast of the needs of the veterans and their families. We need to inform them of veteran issues and how they in their legislative capacity can help.

As both the Commander of the DAV of Minnesota and Chair of the Commanders Task Force I look forward to working with you this year and pledge to work tirelessly to ensure your voices are heard as we build upon our success of service to our veterans in past years. The following is my Vision, Goals, and Objectives:

**Vision:** Improve the quality of Life of Minnesota Veterans and their family members

**Goals:** Ensure all veterans in the state of Minnesota receive the benefits they have earned. Examples include enhanced education, employment, healthcare, housing, insurance, compensation and pension, and burial benefits

**Objectives:**

- Ensure every veteran understands there are cost free veteran resources available for them to help access their benefits
- Ensure Minnesota Veterans have every possible opportunity to enhance their education, skills and training resulting in improved employment opportunities
- Continue to support veteran housing efforts across the state to both public and private sectors
- Ensure Veterans Preference law is fair and equitable for both veterans and employers
- Continue to support and further efforts to enhance State Veterans Home Services and healthcare capacity
- Continue to support Minnesota's current military members (Active, Reserve and National Guard)
- Ensure Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs' (MDVA) budget is at a level sufficient to support the needs of Minnesota Veterans of all eras relative to programming and services
- Continue to support efforts to ensure MDVA's facilities are maintained so needed services and care can be delivered
- Continue to support all efforts to make Minnesota a more "veteran friendly state" to include encouraging military retirees to return to Minnesota

I have spoken with each of the Commanders of the member organizations, Commissioner Shellito and many County Veteran Service Officers (CVSO) and I truly believe they all care deeply for veterans and are fully committed to serving the Veterans of Minnesota. I look forward to working with the Commanders and Commandant of the CTF, MDVA, CVSO's and you the Veterans of Minnesota. It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your Chair. - Greg Remus



# Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

## Bonding & Funding

CTF urges lawmakers to support MDVA bonding requests for improvements and repair & betterment dollars. Each of the five **Minnesota Veterans Homes** require **significant asset preservation dollars** to maintain facilities with basic systems, life safety and to meet regulatory requirements.

In 2013, facility conditions audits (FCAs) were completed with the support of the Department of Administration and were reviewed and updated during the summer of 2015. A prioritized list of necessary repairs, replacements & upgrades was generated and MDVA is requesting asset preservation funding for the most high-priority items.

The **Minnesota Veterans Home-Minneapolis** is requesting bonding dollars to repair **the existing bridge** which, when open, provides campus access from Minnehaha Parkway. The bridge was closed by Minnesota Department of Transportation in 2014 due to safety concerns and failed bridge inspections.

This bridge is a critical access and egress point for the Home for ambulance, fire, and other essential life safety requirements. It also provides campus access for employees, visitors and family members. The pre-design work was funded last session. MDVA is currently seeking bonding dollars to complete the renovation and repair.

## 2016 Legislative Initiatives: Military Pension Tax Exemption

CTF supports the **elimination of taxes on pensions earned through military service**. This proposal would eliminate taxes on Military Pensions for Minnesota residents.

Currently, pensions for Minnesota residents, including federal pensions, are taxable regardless of where the pension was earned. **Minnesota is one of the last few hold-out states still taxing military pensions**. According to 2014 Defense Manpower Data Center data, there are 19,203 retirees in MN, and of that, 19,125 are being paid by DOD. That equates to approximately \$28,500,000 per month coming into the state.

Many retirees are married with working spouses, and many retirees start second careers which continue to add to state revenues. **MN is not gaining military retirees at the same rate as states which exempt military pensions from state tax**. In addition, MN resident military members are electing to relocate to lower-tax states upon reaching retirement status and thus, the state is losing the potential economic benefits that veteran retirees and their spouses could provide to the state.

## Permanent Homestead Market Value Exclusion for Widows/Widowers of >70% Service Connected Veterans

CTF supports the **extension of the Homestead Market Value Exclusion** This proposal would amend M.S. 273.13 Subd. 34 (2)(C) to extend the eight year homestead property tax exemption **to a permanent exemption for a Veteran's widow or widower**, if the Veteran was eligible at the time of death.

## Disclosure Statement

CTF supports the **creation of a law requiring a disclosure statement & waiver language**. This proposal would create a written disclosure statement and waiver that must be signed by Veterans if they are seeking Veterans benefits services from private, for-profit providers. This statement will, at minimum, indicate that they understand that **advocacy and Veterans benefit services are offered at no cost** by federally chartered Veteran service organizations and by County Veterans Service Officers.

## Minnesota GI Bill Use Expanded

CTF supports the **expansion of permitted uses of the Minnesota GI Bill**. Currently, eligible veterans may use Minnesota GI Bill benefits to pay for the cost of tuition at higher education institutions. However, **using the benefits to pay for costs such as school applications, exams, licensing, and other certifications** is not permitted.

By allowing a broader use of the Minnesota GI bill, Veterans could use their benefits at their discretion and in the most appropriate way. Expanding the approved uses of the Minnesota GI Bill would also bring parity with federal Chapter 33 (GI Bill) benefits.

Overall, these changes would empower Minnesota Veterans to make better use of the full spectrum of education opportunities at their disposal. **Broadening the approved uses of the Minnesota GI Bill would allow for benefits to be used on fees and expenses accrued in the process of self-betterment**, would add value to Minnesota communities and promote the welfare of veterans and their families.

## MnSCU Instate Tuition Waivers for 100% Service Connected (SC)

CTF supports legislation to provide additional incentive to 100% Service Connected Disabled Veterans to pursue higher education. Waiving tuition at MnSCU institutions for 100% permanent and total service-connected disabled Veterans would **reduce financial barriers and incentivize them to pursue higher education, ultimately enhancing their employability** and better positioning them to succeed in the workforce.

In addition to the potential for enhanced employment opportunities and commensurate increase in the standard of living for Veterans, another beneficial outcome would be a reduction in unemployment costs and numbers as it relates to Veterans.

## Free Deer Hunting & Small Game and Lifetime Fishing Licenses for 50% SC Disabled Veterans

CTF supports a reduction in the threshold level of disability rating from the current 100% to 50% for Veterans to be eligible for free hunting and fishing licenses. This initiative has been put forth in various ways over the past four years by a variety of Veterans interest groups and is now supported by the nine largest Congressionally Chartered Veteran Service Organization in the state, the Commanders Task Force. Numerous states provide free hunting and fishing opportunities for a wider margin of their disabled veteran populations than does Minnesota.

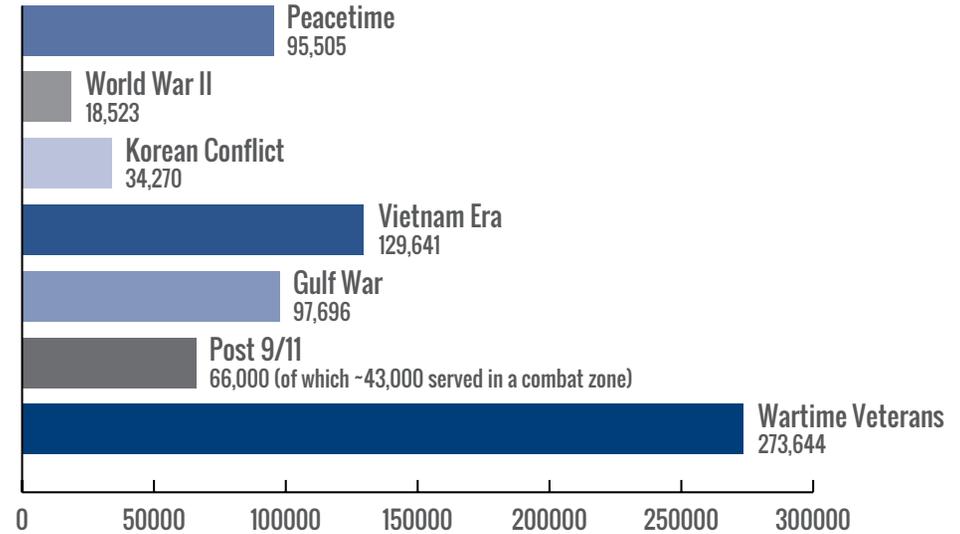
If enacted, this initiative will allow more disabled veterans to enjoy the outdoors in the realm of hunting and fishing than currently do as a result of the no cost opportunity. **An increase in individuals' participation in hunting and fishing activities is also likely to have a positive economic impact in Greater Minnesota** in the form of increased traffic to various resorts, lodging & outdoor destinations.

## Removal of Guardianship language from Commissioner's Duties

CTF supports removal of the Guardianship language from Commissioner's Duties. This is a **housekeeping initiative** aimed at eliminating language for a program which is no longer in effect.

This proposal would amend MN Statute 196.05 Subdivision 1 (8) to eliminate language pertaining to the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs guardianship program, Minnesota Statutes 2014, section 196.051, repealed May 5, 2015.

## State Veteran Numbers by Era

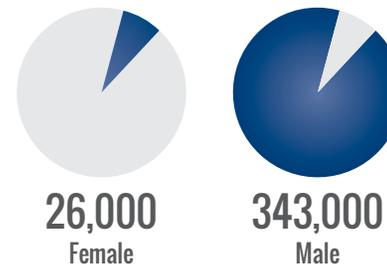


MN Total Population: 5,457,000

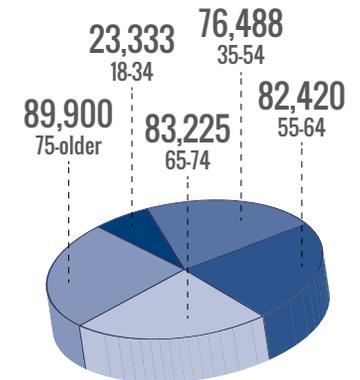
(2014 estimate)

MN Total Veteran Population: 369,000

(~7% of the state population)



MN Veterans by Gender



State Veteran Population by Age

Most recent numbers available (9/30/14)



# Thank You

for supporting Minnesota  
Veterans and members  
of the Armed Forces!

- Minnesota Commanders' Task Force



[minnesotaveteran.org](http://minnesotaveteran.org)

**1-888-LinkVet**  
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