

MINNESOTA

# COMMANDERS' TASK FORCE



2011 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



*Left to Right: Herman Hinrichs – USS Oklahoma, Ed Wentzloff – USS Arizona, Richard Thill – USS Ward*

## **Member Organizations**

American Ex-Prisoners of War

American Legion

AMVETS

Disabled American Veterans

Jewish War Veterans

Marine Corps League

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Veterans of Foreign Wars

Vietnam Veterans of America

# *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, and*
- working to seek and form Veterans service organization partnerships in program development (for example, the state's Veterans Day program).*

## **HIGHER EDUCATION VETERANS PROGRAM**

The CTF supports repeal of the **June 30, 2012 sunset date for the Higher Education Veterans Assistance Program**. This program has created on-campus Veterans Resource Centers throughout the state, providing an environment where Veterans, military members and their families can gain support and encouragement from others with similar backgrounds, experiences, and circumstances.

Campus coordinators work with colleges to enhance or develop “Veteran friendly” policies and procedures which may include: payment deferments while awaiting properly applied for educational benefits; military transfer credit; Veteran resident status; registration – flexibility and withdrawals due to deployments; providing information about services and resources, as well as referrals to appropriate service providers; and, facilitating communication between departments and staff who regularly interact with Veterans - admissions, financial aid, counseling, disability services, career services. This program is funded through June 30, 2011. Making it permanent would require \$945 thousand in funding per year.

## **HOME MARKET VALUE PROPERTY TAX EXCLUSION EXTENSION**

The CTF supports legislation that **repeals the time limit for a surviving spouse to receive the market value exclusion for property tax purposes, for Veterans with 70 percent to 100 percent level of service-connected disabilities**. Under current law, when a Veteran passes away the market value reduction is applied to the property for the balance of that calendar year, and for the next full calendar year. After that, property taxes are based on the normal assessed value of the property.



### *Home Market Value Property Tax Exclusion Extension (Cont.)*

This exclusion has been of great benefit to World War II, Korean and Vietnam War Veterans. The CTF supports extending this exclusion to the surviving spouse until he or she remarries, sells the home, passes away, or no longer homesteads the property.

## **HOLD MDVA PROGRAMS AND SERVICES HARMLESS FROM BUDGET CUTS**

The CTF supports maintaining current funding levels for the **Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)**. MDVA has built a strong structure of programs and services to support its mission of serving Minnesota's Veterans and their families. The Department's programs are non-duplicative of other benefits and services provided by the federal government or counties. The State Soldiers Assistance Program provides direct, emergency financial assistance to Veterans, their dependents and survivors. As a direct result of the Veterans Service Organizations' claims offices and the Department's claims and outreach offices, Minnesota's Veterans received just over \$1 billion in compensation, pension, education benefits and medical care.

Total FY 10-11 General Fund spending for MDVA Programs and Services is over \$32 million. The American Legion, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Vietnam Veterans of America and Veterans of Foreign Wars receive pass through funding from MDVA.

## **VETERANS HOME FUNDING**

The CTF strongly urges the Legislature to hold Minnesota's **Veterans Homes harmless from budget cuts**. The Homes strive to provide high-quality care to every resident in a therapeutic,

*Veterans Home Funding (Cont.)*

highly adaptive and dignified environment.

In addition to current operations, a 21-bed specialty care/Alzheimer's unit at the Fergus Falls Veterans Home and an Adult Day Care Program in Minneapolis are scheduled for completion in early 2011. Currently MDVA is funding this with existing one time carry forward dollars. New funding for operational costs will be needed. If funding is not provided, the state will be required to reimburse the federal VA for its 65 percent share of construction costs.

### **MILITARY HONOR GUARDS**

**The CTF strongly urges the Legislature to continue to fund military honor guards.** These dollars provide stipends to Veterans service organizations that provide honor guard detail at the funeral of a deceased Veteran. One-time funding of \$100,000 was appropriated in FY 2010-2011 for this very well-received program. Additional funds would allow the program to continue.

### **MINNESOTA ASSISTANCE COUNCIL FOR VETERANS**

**The CTF urges the Legislature to appropriate additional funding to the non-profit Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV).** This organization assists Veterans and their families affected by homelessness in securing safe and drug-free supportive housing; transitional homes for use during extended medical care; finding permanent housing; job skills training; assistance finding resources for food; mortgage assistance; health care; chemical dependency treatment and sobriety aftercare; and counseling and legal assistance. Due to the growing number of homeless Veterans, the program received \$100,000 in one-time funding last year but additional funding is needed to continue to provide assistance to them.

## **VETERANS HOME STUDY**

The CTF supports construction of a new Veterans Home in Minnesota if key issues are adequately addressed, including: appropriating long-term funding for ongoing operating costs, and locating the Home in an area that will provide the best possible benefits to Veterans.

## **INCOME TAXES**

The CTF supports amending military service income tax credits by allowing the tax credit to apply to all current military members and retirees. Doing so will encourage second career military personnel to stay in – or move to – Minnesota.

## **VETERANS TREATMENT COURT**

CTF supports the Judicial Branch and its partners in working toward establishing Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC) both as a pilot program in Hennepin County and throughout the state. These courts will provide an important step in helping Minnesota's Veterans facing challenges reintegrating into society after military deployments, especially when some face additional complications like Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Veterans benefit from restorative justice by a legal system that recognizes their unique issues and problems, and works appropriately and fairly to address them.

## **"BEYOND THE YELLOW RIBBON" PROGRAMS AND EVENTS**

Serving as the model for the national initiative, Minnesota's "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon (BTYR)" provides vital resources to service members and their families before, during and after deployments. The CTF supports legislative and community-based initiatives involved with BTYR, including extending the

*"Beyond the Yellow Ribbon" Programs and Events (Cont.)*

requirements for Veteran Resource Centers on college campuses, providing benefits to military members, Veterans and retirees, the First Lady's Military Families Initiative, sustaining the tuition reimbursement program for the Guard, and the base programs and funding that rely on the continued support of the legislative and executive branches.

## **CURRENT DEPLOYMENTS**

**The CTF extends its support and best wishes to the men and women of Minnesota's National Guard that have been and will be deployed, and asks for continued legislative support.**

The Minnesota Army National Guard is currently preparing for deployment in support of Operation New Dawn that will require 2400 soldiers to deploy to Iraq and Kuwait where they will assist in the drawdown phase of US military operations in Iraq. The 1st Brigade soldiers will also be involved in conducting base defense and convoy security operations. These are among several operations in Iraq that the soldiers are familiar with as the 1st Brigade still holds the record for being deployed for the longest period of time during Operation Iraqi Freedom.



***Thank You***  
***for supporting***  
***Minnesota Veterans and***  
***active duty members***  
***of the Armed Forces!***  
***~Minnesota Commanders' Task Force***

