



**MINNESOTA COMMANDERS'
TASK FORCE**

2013 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

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.
- Working to seek and form Veterans Service Organization partnerships in program development (for example, the state's Veterans Day program).

MINNEAPOLIS VETERANS HOME PHASE 3 CAPITAL INVESTMENT

The CTF urges the Minnesota State Government to fund the completion of the three phase construction remodel on the Minneapolis Veterans Home Campus. In 2007 the Governor placed the Veterans Homes back under the purview of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and they were mandated to "fix" the Homes and to ensure veterans have an appropriate up-to-date place to live where they would be safe and where the residents' needs would be the foremost priority. In order for MDVA to meet those standards it was determined that new or updated facilities were required so that current medical standards of care could be met. MDVA has undertaken a three phase improvement plan on the Minneapolis Veterans Home Campus. Phase 1 is complete, phase 2 is funded and will begin in the winter of 2012, and **phase 3, the most critical phase which ties the campus infrastructure together, has only been partially funded.** The CTF urges the Legislature to commit to the full remaining funding requirements necessary to complete the project BEFORE looking at other potential Veterans Home locations in the state.

VETERAN LOTTERY TICKET


The CTF supports the generation and implementation of State Veteran Lottery Tickets to generate revenue for the emerging needs of Minnesota's veterans. As federal and state budgets begin to tighten, the nationally chartered organizations of the Commanders' Task Force recognize the need for new innovative sources of revenue.

MDVA has stated that as the wars draw down and they transition into a post war organization to deal with increasing numbers of veterans, their ability to assist with short term solutions to gaps in the system could possibly diminish.

In order to maintain standards of services, programs and solutions provided to Minnesota's veterans that essentially bridge the slowly evolving gap found between state and federal services, the CTF highly recommends that the Minnesota State Government support this effort in generating new veteran funding solutions BUT NOT USE IT AS A REPLACEMENT FOR CURRENT LEVELS OF MDVA FUNDING.

EXPAND THE MINNESOTA GI BILL

The CTF supports the expansion of the MN GI Bill to all eras of veterans in order to reduce veteran unemployment and assist veterans in obtaining necessary new skills for today's competitive job market.



Currently, the MN GI Bill (Minn. Stat. 197.791) is only applicable to post 9-11 veterans and surviving spouses or children of a totally disabled veteran from this current era. This is a “last dollar in” program in that if no other funds for financial aid are available to those stated above then this financial aid can be sought.

Last year the Legislature only supported one provision of the expansion which authorized usage of the MN GI Bill for apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities. This has not solved veteran unemployment issues or kept the thousands of veterans still in the state’s labor force competitive. The expansion of the MN GI Bill will benefit veterans from ages 18-61 years old.

The 2011 Bureau of Labor and Statistics data displays the fact that about 11.3 million veterans are in the national labor force of which 7 million are from WW II, Korea, Vietnam and peace time eras. Less than 4.5 million are from Gulf War I&II which currently receive the most robust education benefits in U.S. history. The MN GI Bill expansion will reduce veteran unemployment and assist the overwhelming majority of veterans currently in the labor force in obtaining necessary new skills in today’s competitive job market.

GOLD STAR PROGRAM FUNDING


The CTF supports transitioning the Gold Star Program to MDVA and its continued funding. Because of the federal budget deficit and persistent security threats, the Department of Defense and the Department of Military Affairs are making budget cuts and one of the programs they are cutting funding to is the Gold Star Program.

Gold Star Families are surviving members of deceased veterans, and because of that the right place for the program is within the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs. This program, as it now stands, consists of an annual venue where a deceased veteran’s surviving family members come together to heal emotionally.

In order to continue this valuable program for the family members whose veteran “paid the ultimate price for this nation,” MDVA reports that it will cost \$100K in ongoing funding.

COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE GRANTS

The CTF supports the combination and expansion of the CVSO Competitive Enhancement Grants and Operational Grants Programs. Recently there have been two programs under which MDVA provided



grants to counties to help fund programs and services to veterans. The first is the “CVSO Enhancement Grant,” which is a competitive grant that gives priority to proposals that meet programmatic goals established by the MDVA Commissioner. Chapter 45 of the 2007 legislative session directed that funding for the program be added to MDVA’s base budget through FY 2011. That program sunset on June 30, 2011 but received a minimal onetime appropriation for 2013 of \$200K. The second program outlined in Minn. Stat. 197.608 is the “Veterans Service Office Grant Program.” The grants under Minn. Stat. 197.608 are \$95K and are awarded on a three-year rotating cycle and determined by a county’s veteran population.


Because of the discontinuation of the CVSO Enhancement Grants, CVSOs’ outreach and veteran service capabilities have been and will continue to deteriorate thus causing a disservice to veterans. This is unacceptable as CVSOs enter into a busy and critical time for Minnesota’s veterans that will likely steadily increase for years to come as the nation downsizes its military forces and produces more veterans.

The CTF supports the amending of Minn. Stat. 197.608 to combine the two grants with an ongoing funding level of \$1.1 million annually, and seeks to provide more flexibility in the use of funds as established by the Commissioner.

FUNERAL HONOR GUARDS

The CTF strongly urges the Minnesota State Government to provide sustained funding for Funeral Honor Guards. These dollars provide stipends to Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) that provide honor guard details at funerals of deceased veterans. Currently, World War II and Korean veterans are passing rapidly as that generation ages into their 70’s and beyond, and Vietnam veterans are not far behind. In 2010 the Department of Human Services (DHS) reported that nearly 10,000 veterans were buried throughout the state, 2012 burials exceeded 4000 honor guard services and for 2013 the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) expects that there will be nearly 4700 requested honor guard services.

This very well-received program was adopted as part of the 2008-2009 appropriations at a rate of \$100K per year. In 2010 a one-time supplemental authorization was granted for \$100K and in 2012 MDVA received another one-time appropriation of \$100K to be used in 2013. As the number of veterans passing increases, so, too, do the demand for honor guard services



and the requirement for funding.

Currently statute allows a reimbursement stipend of \$50.00 per service for the VSO which provided the service. As the requirement is doubling, the CTF recommends funding this program at \$200K annually.

SOUTHEAST VETERANS CEMETERY OPERATIONAL FUNDING

The CTF supports MDVA in their requirements and efforts to properly staff, equip and fund the operations of the new Southeast State Veterans Cemetery. In 2011 the Legislature amended law governing the appropriation received by MDVA in 2009 which granted authority and funding to build additional State Veterans Cemeteries. The new Southeast Veterans Cemetery is scheduled to open for business in the summer of 2015 and requires staffing, equipment and operational funds.

MDVA TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES


The CTF urges the Minnesota State Government to support MDVA's efforts to implement proper Information Technology (IT) requirements in order to keep veterans, Veterans Home Residents and their personal information safe. MDVA has reported a series of incidents in the past surrounding veterans and Veterans Home Residents that have occurred due to insufficient IT.

When the MDVA and the State Veterans Homes were combined by Executive Order in 2007, minimal resources were put towards IT merger efforts. This neglect puts nearly 800 vulnerable veterans at risk in the event of a catastrophic IT failure.

Corrective action will require significant increase in technology investments to achieve industry standards of care through proper technology compliance, infrastructure and recovery capabilities. The CTF strongly supports MDVA's efforts to appropriate the necessary funding to achieve those goals.

STATE TAX FORM DONATION

The CTF supports State Tax Form Donations to veterans to generate revenue for emerging veterans' needs. Currently the Department of Natural Resources is able to collect donations of \$1.00 from the citizens of the state to be used for nongame wildlife (Minn. Stat. 290.431). The CTF encourages State Government to authorize this.



MDVA has stated that as the wars draw down and they transition into a post war organization to deal with increasing numbers of veterans, their ability to assist with short term solutions to gaps in the system could possibly diminish.

In order to maintain standards of services, programs and solutions provided to Minnesota's veterans that essentially bridge the slowly evolving gap found between state and federal services, the CTF highly recommends that the Minnesota State Government support this effort in generating new veteran funding solutions BUT NOT USE IT AS A REPLACEMENT FOR CURRENT LEVELS OF MDVA FUNDING.

NEW VETERAN LICENSE PLATES

The CTF supports the generation of five new veteran license plates to generate revenue for emerging veterans' needs. Currently the MDVA generates approximately \$500K in revenue annually from the sale of Support Our Troops (SOT) license plates. The use of those revenues is statutorily regulated and thus somewhat limited as to what issues can be addressed. MDVA has standardized the uses of those revenues; however, new issues or gaps in veterans' issues continuously surface.

In order to maintain standards of services, programs and solutions provided to Minnesota's veterans that essentially bridge the slowly evolving gap found between state and federal services, the CTF highly recommends that the Minnesota State Government support this effort in generating new veteran funding solutions. BUT NOT USE IT AS A REPLACEMENT FOR CURRENT LEVELS OF MDVA FUNDING.

MILITARY SERVICE CREDIT

The CTF supports extending or eliminating the repeal date of Minnesota Statute 353.013. The current repeal date for this statute is July 1, 2013. This law allows a public employee who has at least three years of allowable service with the Public Employees Retirement Association or the public employees police and fire plan and who performed service in the United States armed forces before becoming a public employee, or who failed to obtain service credit for a military leave of absence under Minn. Stat. 353.01, subdivision 16, paragraph (a), clause (8), is entitled to purchase allowable service credit for the initial period of enlistment, induction, or call to active duty without any voluntary extension by making payment under section Minn. Stat. 356.551.

The CTF supports this law and believes it needs to be extended on behalf of the veterans of Minnesota.

Thank You
for supporting
Minnesota Veterans
and active duty members
of the Armed Forces!

- Minnesota Commanders' Task Force



minnesotaveteran.org

1-888-LinkVet
(546-5838)