

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE – State Objectives - Virginia

Despite the severe shortfall of state revenues during the last session of the General Assembly, we fared very well in accomplishing our state legislative objectives for 2009. We **accomplished four of our six major objectives**. They were “Turbo Vet”, Interstate Compact for the Education of Military Children, a study of Homeless Veterans in Virginia, and the constitutional amendment for Tax Relief for 100% Disabled Veterans continues to make progress. Since this requires a change to the Virginia constitution, it will need to be passed again by the next General Assembly and then be put to a vote by the electorate. In particular, the **Interstate Compact issue, for which the VCOC was the JLC sponsor, was accomplished largely due to the excellent lobbying efforts of all of our members**. Kudos to BG Wes Edwards, Col Don Kaiserman, our patron Delegate Mark Cole, our DOD sponsors (Julie Gifford and Tom Hinton), and all those who contacted key state senators and delegates to voice their support for the Interstate Compact. A great team effort made the difference!

We have already started to look at next year’s possible legislative objectives. The last meeting of the JLC identified some probable legislative objectives for next year. Our **VCOC Legislative Committee will vote at our 10 July meeting** on our submission to the JLC. The JLC will vote on its legislative priority objectives at its 12 August meeting. The following is a listing of the potential priority legislative objectives currently under consideration by the JLC. I would suggest that our **VCOC chapters discuss these issues** so that their legislative representatives can bring their chapters’ suggestions to the next meeting of the Legislative Committee. The possibilities are:

Real Estate Tax Relief for 100% Disabled Veterans: This is a continuation of last year’s effort which will need to be passed by the General Assembly after this fall’s election of the House of Delegates as required by the Virginia constitution.

Burial Vaults for Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries: This is a continuation of the objective which failed in the last session of the General Assembly.

Military Family Relief Fund Nontaxable: This is also a continuation of the bill which never even got introduced in the House of Delegates due to a rule to not hear any bill proposing any tax relief whatsoever.

Continue Funding for the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program: The funding will run out in 2010 and the VWWP will need general funds to keep operating. They also want to add one more full time position to their staff.

Establish Special Veterans Courts: Special courts to try veterans suffering from PTSD/TBI have been set up in some states and appear to be very successful.

Fund War Memorial Operating Budget and FFE: To fund the necessary furniture, fixtures, and equipment and a higher operating budget after the Galanti Education Center is completed.

Unemployment Compensation for Trailing Military Spouses: This issue is being pushed by DOD, but may be part of a bigger political issue concerning the use of unemployment compensation funds.

/Sam Wilder, COL, USA, Ret, VCOC 1st VP, and Legislative Chair email:sdwilder1@comcast.net

For more about MOAA’s Virginia Council of Chapters (VCOC) state legislative priorities or Virginia’s Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Services Organizations (JLC) see “**State Legislative**” section of VCOC website: **VirginiaMOAA.com**