

Approved: 3/12/97
Date

MINUTES OF THE SENATE ELECTIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE.

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Janice Hardenburger at 1:40 p.m. on March 11, 1997 in Room 529-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Senator Steineger
Senator Petty
Senator Vidricksen

Committee staff present: Dennis Hodgins, Legislative Research Department
Mike Heim, Legislative Research Department
Theresa Kiernan, Revisor of Statutes
Bonnie Fritts, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Don Myer, Executive Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs
William Richards, Kansas Council of Chapters of the Retired Officers Association
Jim Beckwith, Retired Officer, United States Army

Others attending: See attached list

Chairperson Hardenburger opened the hearing on **HB 2021**.

HB 2021 **Concerning the Kansas commission on veterans affairs; relating to certain employees**

Don Myer testified before the committee as a proponent to the bill. He stated this bill would require all Veterans Service Representatives appointed by the Executive Director of the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs be honorably discharged veterans of the United States Armed Forces. An honorably discharged veteran is an important element of being an effective and efficient Veteran Service Representative in assisting Kansas veterans and their spouses and dependents to obtain their entitled counseling, benefits and other services. Knowledge and experience of what military service entails are vital to the service representative as it allows him to relate to the veteran, and accurately determine the critical information needed. He testified that veteran status as a qualification for Veterans Service Representative is a fair job requirement and he urged the committee to give favorable consideration to the bill (Attachment 1).

William Richards appeared in support of the bill stating it is very difficult for a non-service person to attempt to provide the necessary services for someone who has been part of the armed forces.

Jim Beckwith also appeared in support of the bill. He stated the military is a different life-style than civilian life and it takes very special understanding. Those who have served would have a far greater understanding of some of the psychological stress that many veterans experience. He urged the committee to pass the bill.

Chairperson Hardenburger closed the hearing on the bill.

Senator Gooch made a motion to move the bill out favorably and place it on the consent calendar. Senator Becker seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:50 p.m.

The next meeting is scheduled for March 12, 1997.

SENATE ELECTIONS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COMMITTEE COMMITTEE GUEST LIST

DATE: 3/11/97

NAME	REPRESENTING
DON A. MYER	KCUA
Wendy Fritz	Dept of Admin - DPS
Willie Dickson	TRON
Anne Spiess	Peterson Public Affairs Group
Nancy Becker	
James L. Beckwith	

Testimony by Don Myer, Executive Director

Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs

on House Bill 2021

before the

Senate Committee on

Elections and Local Government

March 11th, 1997

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Don Myer, the Executive Director of the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs, and I would like to present testimony on House Bill 2021. I am in favor of this bill, which would require that all Veterans Service Representatives appointed by the Executive Director of the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs be honorably discharged veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

This bill was introduced in the senate last year, based on the request of the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs. It was overwhelmingly passed, and moved onto the house. There it died on the calendar as the 1996 legislative session ended.

This veteran status was a requirement in Kansas for more than thirty years. The State Division of Personnel determined that the specification for veteran status did not meet their definition of a necessary special qualification because it was not grounded in statute, law or regulation of some type. My agency was informed that unless we could base this qualification on a federal or state law the necessary special qualification would be removed from this position.

I believe that being an honorably discharged veteran is an important element of being an effective and efficient Veteran Service Representative in assisting Kansas veterans and their spouses and dependents to obtain their entitled counseling, benefits and services. The federal benefits that Veteran Services Representatives attempt to obtain for Kansas citizens are based upon the veterans service in the U.S. Armed Forces. Knowledge and experience

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ATTACHMENT 1

House Bill 2021 Testimony

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of what military service entails are vital to the service representative. It allows him to relate to the veteran, and accurately determine the critical information needed. This is especially true when filing a claim, or pursuing an appeal for service connected disability of any type with the Veterans Administration.

There is precedent in requiring veteran status as a qualification for positions in other governmental programs. Local Veteran Employment Representatives and Disabled Veteran Outreach Program specialists employed with the Kansas Department of Human Resources in Job Service Centers are required to be veterans based upon federal law. Additionally, other states have already taken similar steps. Nebraska, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Colorado all have made it a statutory requirement that veterans fill these positions. Arkansas has made it an Administrative Rule and Regulation. I believe it would only be appropriate for Kansas to follow this precedent by requiring those specifically tasked with assisting veterans in this capacity to be veterans themselves.

Currently, there are three VSRs who are not veterans employed by the KCVA. They are located in our field offices at Colby, Hutchinson, and Kansas City, Kansas. The VSR positions in these three locations were left vacant for extended periods of time due to the KCVA downsizing of FTEs and to meet budget reductions due to shrinkage rates. Each was an Office Assistant I at their respective location, and had served many years in that capacity. They were promoted in October or November of 1996 after serving as VSR Is in an acting assignment for up to a year. Due to their many years of experience in their offices, I believe they should be "grandfathered" in their present positions.

In conclusion, I believe that veteran status as a qualification for Veterans Service Representative is important, and is a fair job requirement. I encourage the passage of this bill, both as a veteran who has received the services of a Veterans Service Representative and as the Executive Director of the agency. This bill would reestablish a requirement that existed in Kansas for more than thirty years.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have at this time.