

MINUTES OF THE SENATE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Dwayne Umbarger at 12:05 P.M. on February 22, 2007, in Room 123-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except:

Senator Jay Emler- excused
Senator Chris Steineger- excused

Committee staff present:

Jill Wolters, Senior Assistant, Revisor of Statutes
Alan Conroy, Director, Kansas Legislative Research Department
J. G. Scott, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Audrey Dunkel, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Heather O'Hara, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Michael Steiner, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Melinda Gaul, Chief of Staff, Senate Ways & Means
Mary Shaw, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the committee:

George Webb, Executive Director, Kansas Commission on Veteran's Affairs
Ken Stodgell, Chairman, State Legislative Committee of Veteran's of Foreign Wars
Charles Yunker, Adjutant, The American Legion Department of Kansas

Others attending: -

See attached list.

Bill Introduction

Senator V. Schmidt moved, with a second by Senator Schodorf, to introduce a bill concerning a primary care safety net clinic capital loan guarantee act (7rs1213). Motion carried on a voice vote.

Chairman Umbarger opened the public hearing on:

SB 330--Veterans assistance; appropriations therefor; income tax credit; property tax abatement; military funerals; leave for employees; tuition rates

Staff briefed the committee on the bill.

The Chairman welcomed the following conferees:

George Webb, Executive Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs, testified in support of **SB 330 (Attachment 1)**. Mr. Webb explained that since the bill had only recently been presented to him, the KCVA would need to further study the bill, but he made brief comments. He noted that the Agency appreciated the intent of the bill to provide more support to the veterans of Kansas.

Ken Stodgell, Chairman, State Legislative Committee of Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), spoke in support of **SB 330 (Attachment 2)**. Mr. Stodgell explained that funding the bill contributes to making Kansas a competitive place for veterans to return home after they have served their tour of duty and would be a win-win situation for all involved.

Charles M. Yunker, Adjutant, The American Legion Department of Kansas, testified in favor of **SB 330 (Attachment 3)**. Mr. Yunker explained that the American Legion is in full support of the provisions contained in **SB 330** including salaries of State employees called to active duty and family leave in the event an immediate family member is injured or killed while on active military duty.

There being no further conferees, the Chairman closed the public hearing on **SB 330**.

The meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for February 28, 2007.

**SENATE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE
GUEST LIST**

Date February 22, 2007

Name	Representing
Wayne Bollig	KCVA
George Webb	KCVA
Charles M Yunker	The American Legion
KEM FODGELL	VFW
DANIEL BENCKEN	KS VFW
Richard Sammons	Kumy Music
Tony Folsom	KDOR
Sheli Swelney	Assoc. of Community mental Health Grs
Amy Campbell	KS Mental Health Coalition
Luke Thompson	KHPA
CHRISTIAN KRAMER	OAV
GEORGE WEBB	KCVA
Julia Thomas	DOB

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 330
February 22, 2007
George Webb
Executive Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on certain aspects of SB 330. Because this bill has only been recently presented to me, I will comment briefly. Some further study will be necessary by the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs to develop plans for implementation.

The Agency greatly appreciates the intent of this bill to provide more support to the veterans of Kansas. When we examined all states' programs for veteran's benefits a year and a half ago, we determined that Kansas is about in the middle or perhaps a little lower. An exact ranking is impossible due to the variables across the country. We do believe that the contents of SB 330 would go a long way toward helping veterans and their families most in need.

SB 330 would add \$1,350,000 in State General Funds in programs that support veterans. These amounts have not been discussed with or presented to those involved with the Agency's budget process – the Governor, the Division of Budget, the House budget committees, the Senate Ways and Means Committee, or the Agency's commission – so I cannot tell you with specificity how those funds would be distributed or spent. I am not saying that we would balk at additional funding, because there are genuine needs and we would use those funds wisely and properly – and we would be very happy to receive them. But I must say that as an Agency, we have not rolled these additional funds into our Agency budget for SFY 2008, and thus I cannot tell you yet with exactness where some of these funds would be spent.

This bill seeks to add \$350,000 to the budget of Veteran Services of the KCVA. It is likely that the Agency would add additional staff (Veteran Service Representatives) and perhaps a number of vans that would allow our VSRs to travel in mobile offices. Due to the ongoing discussions on variables in the Governor's 2008 budget recommendation, I cannot tell you today where or how many.

This bill seeks to add an additional \$500,000 to the veteran's assistance grant program which already has \$500,000 in the Governor's budget for SFY 2008. Since the two current grant recipient veteran service organizations are splitting the current \$500,000, we presume that the intent of this bill is to double the grant funding in order to make more funds available to other service organizations, something I completely support. However, a legislative dichotomy may occur. House Bill 2210 amends last year's grant program statute and further limits grant program recipients beyond the original statute's qualifiers. Our conclusion is that if HB 2210 is passed, no other veteran service organization in Kansas could qualify for the grant program for the foreseeable future other than the two receiving grant funds. The Agency would respectfully request that the Senate assist in helping us to understand legislative intent in light of this dichotomy.

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Attachment 1

This bill would appropriate \$500,000 for aid and assistance for veterans and their family members, as well as the families of reserve component personnel called to active duty. I believe this is a needed and welcomed helping hand. Because we have no experience in administering such a program, I can only say that we would do it right and carefully. Some staffing may be required, and certainly rules and regulations for oversight will need to be developed and implemented.

The Agency believes the monetary support to state employee reserve component troops called to active duty is warranted; we presume that these costs would come from within the employee's agency budget and not from a separate account.

Leaves of absence for family members of those killed on active duty are entirely appropriate in the interest of care and compassion.

The educational changes are also appreciated. We welcome the opportunity to work with campus veterans assistance staffs in this endeavor. I very much welcome to the change in wording for in-state tuition rates for military personnel and military retirees. From my own personal experience, I know that the awkward language in the earlier statute gave license to some administrators to deny in-state rates even when warranted. This language is clear.

We are also happy to support the concept of hunting and fishing license fees for certain disabled veterans. We hear about this routinely from veterans. We also hear about the real property tax benefit to disabled veterans.

Finally, we are very happy to see the ban on funeral picketing. You may know that in December, 2006 the United States Congress passed a bill on protest bans during funerals for military personnel and veterans. This will probably have to play out in the Supreme Court, but clearly the engines of support are firing up across the country.

Respectfully submitted,



George S. Webb
Executive Director
Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs

Testimony before the Ways and Means Committee
By
Ken Stodgell, Chairman
State Legislative Committee of Veterans Foreign Wars (VFW)

Chairman Umbarger, The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) would like to thank this legislative committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. With the unanimous passage of SB-396 last year the Legislature sent a clear message of their support for veterans and their commitment to the renewal of a 60 year partnership with the service organizations serving Kansas Veterans.

Once again the Kansas Legislature is stepping forward for veterans. SB-330 renews the support provided last year by appropriating \$500,000 for the veterans claims assistance program — service grants. This commitment by you is already showing strong dividends for Kansas. Recently the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs reported success in the Veterans Services Program showing a very strong \$108 in federal benefits returned to veterans for every \$1 in state funds spent. This is up from the \$61 they were reporting for several years. The Service Organizations believe this success in the KCVA Veterans Service Program is a direct result of the veterans claims assistance program — service grants. Grant funds combined with matching resources from participating service organizations allowed us to fully staff offices in the VA Hospitals. This increase in federal benefits returned to veterans for every state dollar spent bringing claims production up to levels not seen in over three years and showing the wisdom of the Legislature in supporting the grant program. More importantly, this shows that by working together veterans can be served and the state benefits.

We believe the funding of SB-330 contributes to making Kansas a competitive place for veterans to return home to after they have served their tour of duty. Also, we are positive this bill will continue to provide a return on investment many times greater than its cost. Each year veterans add in excess of \$350 million to the state economy in federal payments alone. By passing this bill you show support for our military, veterans, their spouses, widows and children while building the state economic base. This bill can only be defined as win-win situation for all involved.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) supports SB-330.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to appear before this committee.

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2-22-07
Attachment 2*

**Testimony Supporting
Senate Bill No. 330
February 22, 2007**

By

Charles M. Yunker, Adjutant
The American Legion Department of Kansas

The American Legion has long held that Kansas' biggest problem in assisting veterans in obtaining their federal benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is a lack of outreach programs alerting veterans that our State provides assistance in filing for VA benefits. SB 330's provisions to provide \$350,000 and \$500,000 for the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs' "Operating expenditures—veterans services" and the "Veterans claim assistance program—service grants" will help insure all Kansas veterans will have a means to obtain assistance in filing for VA benefits. Although the "Service Grant" program approved by the legislature last year has not completed a full year of existence I am happy to report that thus far The American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars has been able to obtain a return of \$108.00 in VA benefits for each state dollar spent; and those benefit dollars go directly to veterans where it does the most good not only for our veterans, but also into our state economy. In other words, the grant program is working and our rate of return is higher than it has been in more than twenty-five years.

I applaud the provision providing \$500,000 ear marked for "solder's assistance". The American Legion has had a similar program for more than eighty years however being a non-profit organization our resources are somewhat limited both in the amount of dollars available, and whom we may assist. That is, our program provides financial assistance only to veterans with minor children in the home. While our program is good, I believe the provisions in SB 330 goes 'that extra step' by removing the requirement of minor children in some cases. If SB 330 is approved by the legislature and

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signed into law by the Governor, I would suggest that KCVA assist in establishing a working relationship with organizations like The American Legion and others in order to avoid duplication of efforts and at the same time provide assistance in the most expedient manner possible.

The American Legion is in full support of the provisions contained in SB 330 including salaries of State employees called to active duty and family leave in the event an immediate family member is injured or killed while on active military duty, ---by the way I applaud Senators Umbarger and McGinn for including members of the military Reserve Forces as all too often those individuals are overlooked in legislation which benefits members of the National Guard and Air National Guard, and to a lesser extent members of the regular Armed Forces.

The provision providing educational credits for courses and training received while on active duty are long over due. Much of the training I received while in the Navy and later the Kansas Army National Guard mirrored courses I was required to take while a student at Ft. Hays State University. The educational credits provisions of SB 330 will lower the cost of obtaining a postsecondary education and allow veterans to enter the workforce in a more timely fashion. Thus providing veterans a means to catch up with their peers who did not sacrifice years of their lives to military service.

The provisions regarding hunting and fishing licenses, medical licensing, and property taxes are all in the best interests of all veterans, especially service connected disabled veterans.

Although the funeral picketing provisions of SB 330 are among the last listed in the bill, perhaps they are the most important and decent. Simply stated, families should be allowed to bury their loved ones with dignity and in private without being harassed by anyone.