

Approved: 03/24/08

Date

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE VETERANS MILITARY AND HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Don Myers at 1:30 P.M. on February 25, 2008 in Room 784 of the Docking Building.

All members were present except:

Representative Bob Bethell - excused
Representative Marti Crow - excused
Representative Barbara Craft - excused

Committee staff present:

Athena Andaya, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Art Griggs, Revisor of Statutes Office
Jill Shelley, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Barbara Lewerenz, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the committee:

Representative Mario Goico
Jeff Russell, Director, Legislative Services
Captain Eric Pippin, Commander of Capitol Police, Troop T
Captain Dan Brown, Troop Commander of Capitol Police
Wayne Bollig, Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs
Darrell Bencken, VFW
Jack Fowler, Chairman, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs

Others attending:

See attached list.

Moved by Representative Kelsey, seconded by Representative Proehl for approval of the Minutes of the House Committee on Veterans, Military and Homeland Security held February 13, 2008. Motion Carried.

Chairman Myers announced that February 26 is the last day for p.m. committee meetings prior to turn around. He requested the committee's permission to work the bills on which hearings were being held today.

Chairman Myers recognized Representative Goico, who introduced **HB-2905**. This bill minimizes some of the security risks in the Capitol Complex by designating a safety and security position in each state agency that will serve as a liaison between the agency and the capitol police at no cost. (Attachment 1)

Representative Goico introduced Jeffrey M. Russell, Director of Legislative Administrative Services, Captain Eric Pippin and Captain Dan Brown Troop Commanders of the Capitol Police.

Mr. Russell testified as a proponent of **HB-2905**. He stated that if each agency were to designate a current employee to serve as a security liaison, communications flow would be quicker, more accurate and more effective. (Attachment 2)

Moved by Representative Colloton, seconded by Representative Spalding for approval of **HB-2905**. Motion Carried.

CONTINUATION SHEET

MINUTES OF THE House Veterans Military and Homeland Security Committee at 1:30 P.M. on February 25, 2008 in Room 784 of the Docking Building.

Captain Pippin and Captain Brown answered questions regarding current security needs emphasizing the importance of good order, good communication and training for real events. Discussion emphasized the need to maintain a balance between strong security and the open atmosphere of a public building, with the goal of being a pro-active efficient law enforcement staff with state employees trained in safety awareness.

Chairman Myers appointed Rep. Goico to carry the bill on the House Floor

Representative Colloton requested Captain Pippin to make a future recommendation to the committee regarding the necessary level of scrutiny of individuals entering the Capitol Building that would maintain an adequate level of security to protect those who visit and work in the Capitol.

Chairman Myers recognized Wayne Bolling, Director, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs, who testified as a proponent of **HB-2923**. He stated that the mission of Veteran Services is to provide advocacy and resources to veterans in Kansas and their families. Staff shortages have prevented them from reaching all qualified veterans, especially those in rural and remote areas. **HB-2923** will increase the ability to reach the underserved veterans; lower the costs of other state agencies assisting these individuals; and increase the number of dollars back to Kansas citizens in the form of benefits. (Attachment 3)

Chairman Myers recognized Darrell Bencken, VFW, who testified as a proponent of **HB-2923**. He supported Wayne Bolling's comments and stated the VFW was in total agreement KCVA on **HB-2923**. He emphasized that a large portion of the veteran population was being overlooked in the smaller communities. This bill will assist in reaching these veterans and family members. (Attachment 4)

Chairman Myers recognized Jack Fowler, Chairman, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs. Mr. Fowler said that compared to other states, Kansas is not taking care of veterans as it should; and that by establishing a mobile van, the KCVA will be able to do outreach that previously has not been possible.

Moved by Representative Dan Johnson, seconded by Representative Goico for approval of **HB-2923**. Motion Carried.

Discussion regarding funding **HB-2923** followed. Representative Wilk recommended that the committee request the Legislative Division of Post Audit do an assessment to determine the number of people receiving state assistance who might qualify for veterans benefits. The conversion of these benefits could result in a substantial savings to the state that could offset the cost of funding the bill.

Chairman Myers directed Representative Ruff to carry the bill and request the audit suggested by Representative Wilk.

Meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

The Interim Joint Committee on Kansas Security requested the establishment of the Capitol Complex Security Advisory Group (CCSAG) as a result of recent security concerns and events. The advisory group reviewed member agency experiences, information gathered from other Capitol Police agencies, two independent security assessments which were made by the Department of Homeland Security and the United States Secret Service, and a security survey completed by state employees. This advisory group had several recommendations for enhancements of the capitol complex security and safety, one them is the basis of House Bill 2905. This bill minimizes some of the risk at "no cost".

A summary of the bill is that each state agency designate a safety and security position that serves as a liaison between their organization and the capitol police. This position would be responsible for scheduling safety training, assisting the capitol police with the training and ensuring that each employee has received the training. This group of employees will also serve as the Capitol Complex Security Advisory Group in the future, under the capitol police commander's leadership. The group would periodically review, reevaluate and recommend changes or needs for programs associated with security around the capitol complex, and continuing communication with the Joint Committee on Kansas Security and the legislature.

House Committee on Veterans
Military and Homeland Security
2/25/08
Attachment # 1



State of Kansas

Legislative Administrative Services

300 SW 10th Avenue, Suite 511-S Topeka, Kansas 66612 Telephone: (785) 296-2391 Fax (785) 296-1153 TTY: (785) 296-8430

Jeffrey M. Russell
Director

To: Committee on Veterans, Military and Homeland Security
From: Jeff Russell
Re: **HB 2905**
Date: February 25, 2008

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. I am Jeff Russell, Director of Legislative Services, and am appearing before you today in my capacity as a member of the Capitol Complex Security Advisory Group. Our charge was to prepare a report advising the Joint Committee on Kansas Security on any needed enhancements to security within the Capitol Complex.

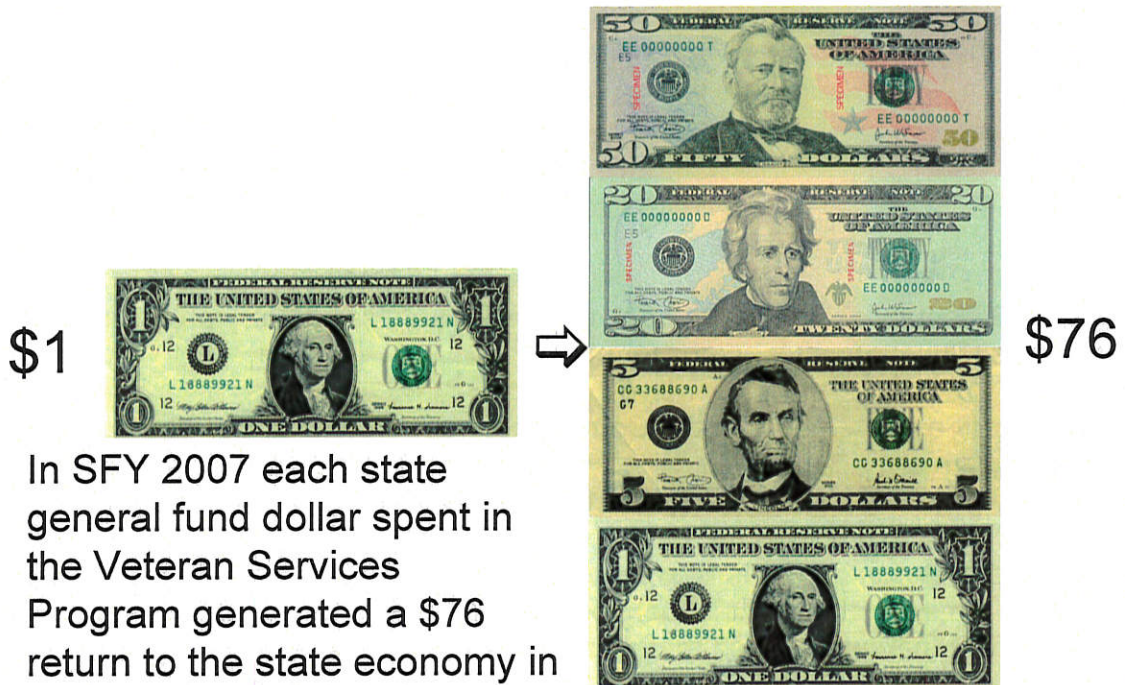
That report is completed and is in the process of being distributed to the joint committee.

One item that arose out of the advisory group deliberations was the need for timely communications between the KHP and the various agencies within the Capitol Complex. The idea is that if each agency were to designate a current employee to serve as a security liaison, communications flow would be quicker, more accurate, and more effective. For these reasons, we would appreciate your support of HB 2905.

Thank you for your kind attention and opportunity to testify.

House Committee on Veterans
Military and Homeland Security
2/25/08
Attachment # 2

Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs



In SFY 2007 each state general fund dollar spent in the Veteran Services Program generated a \$76 return to the state economy in federal benefits paid directly to veterans an increase of \$1.50 over SFY 2006.

Wayne Bollig, Director, Veteran Services

Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs
Wayne Bollig, Director, Veteran Services

House Committee Veterans, Military, and Homeland Security

Don V. Myers - Chair

Mario Goico - Vice-Chair

L. Candy Ruff - Ranking

Minority Member

Dan Johnson

Eber Phelps

Bob Bethell

Bill Light

Pat Colloton

Sheryl Spalding

Shirley J. Palmer

Marti Crow

Kenny A. Wilk

Steve Lukert

Barbara Craft

Richard J. Proehl

Dick Kelsey

Raj Goyle

RE: HB-2923 - establishing the veterans enhanced service delivery program within the Veterans' Claims Assistance Program.

Chairman Myers and members of the Committee, I am Wayne Bollig, Director of the Veteran Services Program and Chair of the Veterans' Claims Assistance Advisory Board. Thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of HB-2923.

The mission of Veteran Services is to provide advocacy and resources to the veterans of Kansas, their families, and/or their survivors and to assist them in acquiring and utilizing the benefits to which they are entitled to under the law. When veterans are presented with the information regarding their entitlements, it results in a better standard of life for the veterans, dependents and survivors. This mission has been the focal point of the Veteran Services program for over 60 years and is the reason the field offices, the Veterans Claims Assistance Program, the Quality Assurance Program, Service Grants, and the Enhanced Service Delivery Program, is needed.

Veteran Services, while generating millions of dollars for the states economy, has little to do with dollars and more to do with the State of Kansas' commitment to all veterans. The State and the Federal government have gone to great lengths to provide service and support to our most recent heroes. We have programs like Heroes 2 Hometowns, Wounded Warriors, and others. We have new benefits and programs being instituted by the USDVA. The State of Kansas has always stepped forward to support and thank the men and women who serve for their sacrifices. The question is - how can veterans that return home to live in our small rural communities, or one that is home bound, or in a nursing home learn about the benefits that they are entitled to? Veteran Services is often the first and only contact that the veteran or their surviving spouse can rely on for information. Because of issues like Hearing loss, TBI, PTSD, the loss of limbs, or other illnesses, veterans often require personal contact. If the KCVA Veteran Services program is not available to fill that gap, who will the veteran depend on? How much will it cost them and their families?

Unfortunately, Veteran Services, which provides benefits support to our veterans, continues to struggle; often closing offices for weeks or even months at a time to stay within budget. Itinerant travel must frequently be kept to a minimum and even the purchases of basic office supplies can at times be a struggle. Most offices have only one staff member and must be

closed due to illness, vacations, and itinerant travel leaving offices locked and unmanned for extended periods. With 44 authorized positions and 19 vacancies, Veteran Services has just 14 staff members covering 82,282 square miles, to support the estimated 240,000 Kansas veterans, their dependents and survivors. The veteran service organizations have voiced support for HB-2923 since it keeps veterans at the center of Veteran Services. When Jack Fowler was appointed Chairman of the KCV A, he recognized the problem. In 2003, I had a discussion with Chairman Fowler and we spoke of the possibility of filling Veteran Services positions that have been vacant for years due to budget reductions and reorganizing the Veteran Services Program to better serve veterans. We discussed a program initiated in other states using mobile offices and outreach to take services to rural areas, the homeless, homebound veterans, veterans in nursing homes, and severely disabled veterans. Chairman Fowler understood the concept and became an avid supporter, not only of filling vacant positions within the Veteran Services Program but in support of the mobile office concept. He understood the importance of adopting it in Kansas and how it was an essential enhancement to providing needed support to veterans living in rural Kansas communities.

The KCVA, VFW, and the American Legion all agree HB-2923, if passed, will make the KCVA and Veteran Services stronger. Currently there are thousands of veterans in rural communities; home bound veterans, and veterans in nursing homes that struggle from day to day. These veterans are underserved, at best, but often simply overlooked. They may have no knowledge of the assistance they deserve and the federal benefits to which they may be entitled to. Consequently, HB-2923 allows the KCVA to take information and support to these veterans.

HB-2923 will allow the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs change for the better the way Veteran Services delivers services to a large portion of the estimated 240,000 Kansas veterans, it will bring millions of dollars back to Kansas citizens in the form of benefits. If passed, HB-2923 will reduce State costs by increasing the number of veterans enrolled in the VA health care system and receiving benefits such as hospitalization and prescription drugs. These veterans will no longer have to rely on State assistance.

HB-2923 will not just have a positive impact on veterans benefits it can also reduce the need for support from other state agencies by ensuring the veteran receives 100% of the support due him/her from the Federal VA.

Last State Fiscal year Veteran Services contributed \$76 in direct cash benefits to the Kansas economy for each \$1.00 in state general fund dollar appropriated.

Attachment 1 is a map of Kansas counties. \$1,409 is the average compensation received per veteran in the United States. In Kansas the average is \$1,209, this is \$200 per veteran less than the national average. Kansas currently has only 17 counties in which veterans receive compensation at or above the national average. In contrast, if all counties were brought up to this national average, benefit payments to Kansas veterans would increase by between \$50 and \$76 million per year.

Is this possible? Two years ago the legislature passed the Veterans Claims Assistance Program and appropriated \$500,000 to operate the program for the first year; a program that received unanimous support in both the House and the Senate. The program went into full

swing October 1, 2006. In just nine months of operation, the program spent just over \$418,000. In return, benefits paid to veterans increased by 18%, an increase in benefits revenue of \$12.7 million, and an increased return to the Kansas taxpayers of \$30 per dollar spent.

Conversely, in fiscal year 2008, the Emporia field office was closed for approximately six months. To date, production in this office has dropped by 80% costing the community and state over \$941,000 in benefit revenues.

This is a bill for veterans designed in cooperation with legislators, veteran service organizations (the AL and VFW) and KCVA staff. It is a bill designed around the strengths of the KCVA, its Commission, and the Advisory Board. In partnership with the American Legion and the VFW we request that you pass HB-2923 out of committee.

HB-2923 conveys the message to veterans that each veteran is equally important to Kansas. It thanks them for their sacrifices and brings needed support to them.

Thank you for this opportunity to bring testimony before you and I will now stand for questions.



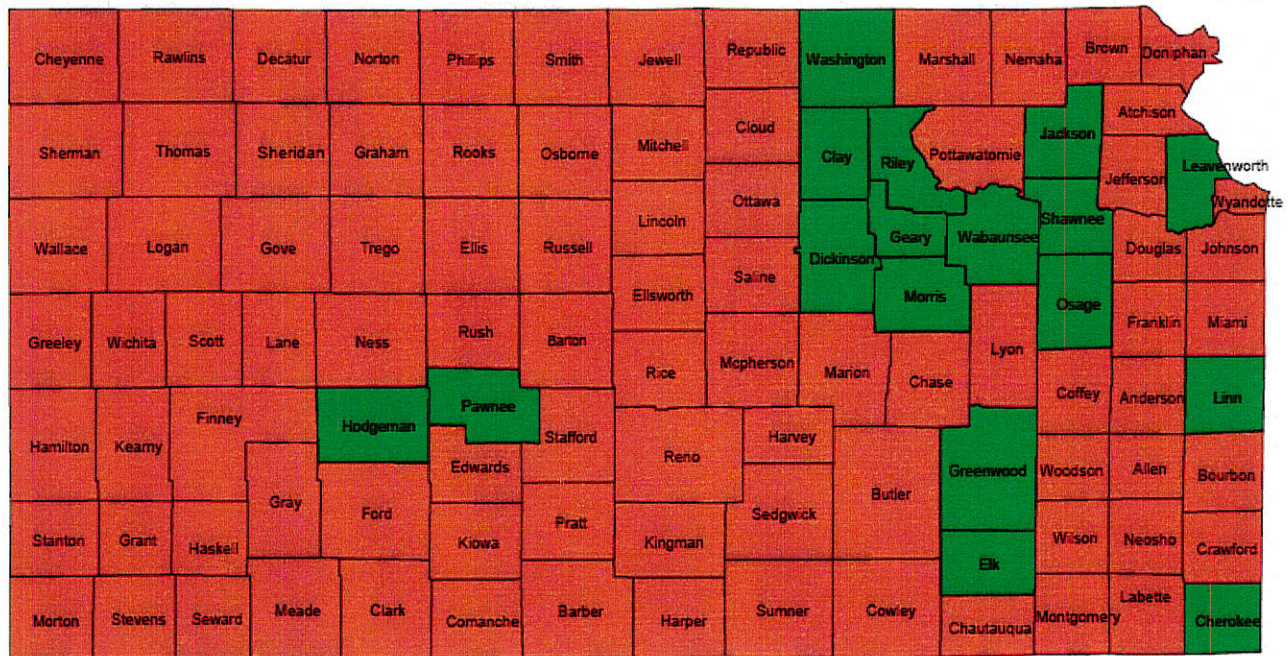
2007 Kansas Per Capita Compensation and Pension

National Average: \$1,409

State Average: \$1,202

(population figures are from Vet Pop
2004, version 1.0, 9/30/06)
2006 VA C&P data

- > \$1409 per Veteran
- < \$1409 per Veteran



KANSAS VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS TESTIMONY
DARRELL BENCKEN
House Committee Veterans, Military and Homeland Security
HB-2923 – establishing the veterans enhanced service delivery program within the
Veterans' Claims Assistance Program

Chairman Myers and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify as a proponent of HB-2923.

Recent attacks on our nation have reminded Americans once again how much this great country depends on our Armed Forces. Unfortunately when these young men and women return home they often feel forgotten. Not because of any thing we do intentionally but often because of the unintentional consequences of inadequate funding and budget cuts.

The VFW has come to you over the years asking for support and you have always stood behind us. In recent years we have come to you to help and assistance and we are proud to say your faith was well placed. Last year which was the first year for the Grant Program. That program in its first year paid back 30 fold. It allowed us to hire staff, and reach out to veterans' that could travel to a KCVA field office or one of our offices in a VA hospital. Because of this program we were able to help Kansas veterans, dependents and survivors receive over 64 million dollars in benefits. But we can only provide those benefits to those who could come to either a KCVA representative or a representative in one of the hospitals. There is a whole segment of the veteran community being overlooked, veterans confined to nursing homes, homebound or those unaware of their entitlements.

The Service Organizations are proud of our history with the KCVA, so when Chairman Fowler asked the VFW to work with them on getting funding and filling positions, we agreed. We looked forward to working with them to rebuild a relationship that has spanned almost 65 years. Representative Ruff and Senator Ostmeyer encouraged us to find a way to help the KCVA, a way that would demonstrate to Legislators and veterans alike that the KCVA and the Service Organizations can and would work together to benefit veterans. HB-2923 does this.

The KCVA, and the VFW agree HB-2923, if passed, will make veterans service stronger. It will provide needed support to thousands of veterans in rural communities; home bound veterans and veterans in nursing homes that struggle day to day, and deserving of assistance in filing for federal benefits they have earned.

The funding required to properly implement HB-2923 is minimal when weighed against the sacrifices and service of veterans. We are constantly looking for ways to assist our disabled veterans, working together. HB-2923 allows us to do this by taking needed services and assistance to the veteran, by reaching out to them where they live and when they can not come to us.

The benefit of HB-2923 reaches beyond the veteran, it will also provide assistance to spouses and children who live in rural communities.

We ask that you pass HB-2923 out of committee and that the legislature support veterans as they have in the past.

Thank you for this opportunity to bring testimony before you and I will now stand for questions.

*House Committee on Veterans
Military and Homeland Security
2/25/08
Attachment # 4*