

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 10, 2009, in Room 711 of the Docking State Office Building.

All members were present.

Committee staff present:

Art Griggs, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Scott Wells, Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Corey Carnahan, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Chris Courtwright, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Barbara Lewerenz, Committee Assistant

Conferees appearing before the Committee:

Representative Lee Tafanelli
Representative Raj Goyle
Ken Stodgell, Legislative Chairman, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Wayne Bollig, Director of Veterans' Services, Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs (KCVA)
Donnie Behrens, Assistant Adjutant for the Department of Kansas, American Legion
Dan Ramlow, Veteran
Jim Beckwith, Veteran

Others attending:

See attached list.

Moved by Representative Crow, seconded by Representative Goyle, for approval of minutes of the House Committee on Veterans, Military and Homeland Security, held February 5, 2009. Motion Carried.

The Chairman announced that the refueling tanker training mission was still open to participants and appointed Vice Chairman Goico to coordinate the mission with Lt. Col. Hans Neidhardt, Kansas National Guard.

Revisor Scott Wells briefed the Committee on **HB 2171** - Veterans; Vietnam war medallion program. The bill creates within the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs (KCVA), a "Vietnam War Medallion, Medal and a Certificate of Appreciation" for every veteran who honorably served on active duty in the United States Military Service at any time beginning February 28, 1961, and ending May 7, 1975. Any veteran who is entitled, or if the veteran died prior to making application, any spouse or the eldest living survivor of a deceased veteran would be entitled to apply. It also creates a "Vietnam War Veterans' Recognition Award Fund," which will consist of gifts, donation and bequests to the fund. Subject to Federal restrictions, the KCVA shall transfer money in the "Veterans' Cemeteries Federal Construction Grant Fund" to the "Vietnam War Veterans' Recognition Award Fund."

The Chairman opened the hearing on **HB 2171 - Veterans; Vietnam war medallion program.**

Proponents

Representative Lee Tafanelli testified in favor on **HB 2171** (Attachment 1). Representative Tafanelli said he would like Kansas to be among a number of other states that have recognition programs for the Vietnam veterans, a generation of veterans who were not afforded proper recognition for their service. In addition to recognizing the service of these veterans, this would be a way of locating those who have not asked for assistance, but are potentially eligible.. He said Kansas currently has approximately 10,800 Vietnam veterans receiving veterans benefits and that additionally there are approximately 15, 500 that might qualify for health care and possible disability compensation if identified.

Wayne Bollig, KCVA testified in favor of **HB 2171** (Attachment 2). Mr. Bollig said the KCVA supports the effort to recognize the heros of the Vietnam Era. Other states have implemented recognition programs for these veterans and the program would provide the means to reach veterans who are potentially eligible for benefits. There are approximately 87,000 veterans from this era in the state of Kansas. In Kansas we reach only about 12 percent of veterans.

CONTINUATION SHEET

Minutes of the House Veterans, Military And Homeland Security Committee at 1:30 p.m. on February 12, 2009, in Room 711 of the Docking State Office Building.

Ken Stodgell, VFW, testified in favor of **HB 2171** ([Attachment 3](#)). He said that if this program is initiated it will create an invaluable database for the KCVA to do outreach to veterans who are possibly eligible for benefits. If passed the bill must contain language to mandate the KCVA to make contact with these veterans to outline potential benefits and assist those who need help in applying.

Donnie Behrens, Kansas American Legion, testified in favor of **HB 2171** ([Attachment 4](#)). He agreed with the program in concept and suggested the bill be passed without funding, to be implemented at a later date, if funding is not available. He commended the committee on drafting a bill that recognized all Vietnam veterans regardless of where they served.

Dan Ramlow, veteran, testified in favor of **HB 2171** ([no testimony](#)). He stated that he received recognition of this type from the state of Missouri and felt that it was an outstanding program.

Opponent

Jim Beckwith, veteran, testified against **HB 2171** ([Attachment 5](#)). He said he applauded the concept of the bill, but did not agree that anyone who was not either directly involved in either the conflict or activities in support of the conflict (even if based elsewhere) should be given this recognition. He recommends language be added to the bill giving the KCVA discretion to screen applicants for this recognition based on participation in the Vietnam conflict, or in operations in support of that conflict.

Discussion was held regarding the reluctance of Vietnam veterans to seek assistance from the government; funding of the recognition program with donations and the transfer of money from the "Veterans' Cemeteries Federal Construction Grant Fund;" and the appeals process for denials.

The Chairman closed the hearing.

The Chairman then turned the meeting over to Vice Chairman Goico.. The Vice Chairman recognized Revisor Scott Wells who briefed the Committee on **HB 2267** - Requires senate confirmation of KCVA appointees. This involves changes in the statute related to appointments made to the KCVA. Persons appointed to the commission shall be subject to confirmation by the Senate and must have received an honorable discharge as evidenced by their military discharge papers.

Vice Chairman Goico opened the hearing on **HB 2267 - Requires senate confirmation of KCVA appointees**.

Proponents

Representative Goyle testified in favor of **HB 2267** ([Attachment 6](#)). He said the bill would strengthen the Kansas Commission on Veterans' Affairs by requiring that commissioners nominated by the Governor be confirmed by the Senate and that each commissioner be a veteran honorably discharged from the military. It has the support of the KCVA and veterans groups.

Ken Stodgell, VFW testified in favor of **HB 2267** ([Attachment 7](#)). He stated that the VFW supports the bill and believes that Senate confirmation and proof of eligibility are simply basic tenets of good business.

Donnie Behrens, Kansas American Legion testified in favor of **HB 2267** ([Attachment 8](#)). He said it is important to have a check and balance system to assure members of the commission are veterans of honorable character who understand the varied and unique needs of veterans.

Opponents

None

Vice Chairman Goico closed the hearing.

The next meeting is scheduled for February 12, 2009.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.