



Office of
Jason Crowell State Senator
The Crowell Connection

Senator Jason Crowell – Serving Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison, Mississippi, Perry, and Scott Counties.

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Our Missouri Veterans: A Top Priority

Last year's General Assembly approved several measures improving the lives of veterans including: National Guard Tuition Assistance; the "Guard at Home Program", that provides financial assistance for families of National Guard members or reservists who have been deployed for active duty; tax exemptions for property of veteran-service organizations; and a ban on military funeral protests. Additionally, we secured over \$8.3 million in state funding for more beds in veterans' homes, a 4 percent pay increase for state workers at the homes and an 8 percent pay raise for nurses. But we still have more work to do.

To lay out a plan for this session, the Senate and House veterans committees came together this week in their traditional joint meeting to discuss the most pressing issues facing Missouri's veterans. Every man and woman who courageously defends the tenets of democracy through military service earns the right to be eligible for residency in a state veterans' home should they ever need it. Unfortunately, last year's funding increase of \$300,000 wasn't enough to fully staff the veterans' homes, meaning the progress we made by providing new beds and financing renovation projects was not as significant as we had hoped.

Cape Girardeau Veterans Home



Currently, the average occupancy of the seven state-run veterans' homes is 1,161 residents total. But that leaves empty 14 percent of available beds. More than 1,000 veterans are on the waiting list to get in; the Cape Girardeau facility's waiting list alone is nearly 300 names. The beds will remain open and the waiting lists will continue to grow unless the state Legislature

allots enough funding to allow the homes to meet their staffing needs. To increase the occupancy level from 86% to 97% capacity rate the Missouri Veteran's Commission is suggesting we appropriate an additional \$2.1 million for our state veteran's homes. It is also important to note that the Missouri Veterans Homes operate under a signed agreement with the federal Veteran's Association requiring them to fill the available beds since they helped pay for 65% of the construction costs of each home. Failure to operate under this agreement could require the Missouri Veterans Commission to repay the federal construction grants for the homes.

Another concern that needs to be addressed this year is increasing the state funding for the Veterans Service Officer (VSO) Grant Program. VSOs help veterans obtain their rightful federal benefits. The most recent statistics show that \$664 million was injected into Missouri's economy by veterans receiving their benefits. The Missouri Veterans Association estimates that 10,000 to 15,000 veterans now living in the state are eligible for but not receiving veterans'

benefits. I have sponsored legislation to increase from \$750,000 to \$1 million the cap on the amount of money that goes toward enabling VSOs to help process veterans' claims when they aren't receiving the benefits to which they are entitled. Senate Bill 287 will



Senator Crowell Receives an Award from the Missouri Veterans Organization

help those who have sacrificed so much.

In addition to these important issues I have also filed SB 286, a 100 percent exemption from state income tax for military pay, pensions and retirement benefits. Our neighboring states of Illinois, Kansas and Kentucky have done this and Missouri should too. These benefits are already exempt from federal income tax calculations. A matching movement at the state level not only rewards the brave men and women for their dedication to freedom, but it will also help recruit future soldiers.

The Senate Committee for Pensions, Veterans' Affairs and General Laws that I serve as chairman on also met this week and heard two bills. SB 12 will provide up to twenty-five tuition grants that will pay fifty percent of total tuition plus other expenses to the surviving spouse and the children of any member of the military from our state that served in armed combat and was killed in the line of duty. The second bill heard was SB 75. This act will provide that all institutions of higher learning that receive state funds from Missouri shall limit the tuition charged to combat veterans to fifty dollars per credit hour.

Contact Me

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions and concerns. Please feel free to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2459. You may write to me at Jason Crowell; Missouri Senate; State Capitol; Jefferson City, MO 65101, or email me at: jcrowell@senate.mo.gov or visit me on the web at <http://www.jasoncrowell.com>.

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