



July 20, 2009

Honoring Missouri's Veterans

I am honored to serve as the chair of the Veterans' Affairs, Pensions and Urban Affairs Committee. While chairing this committee, I have the opportunity to guide bills toward passage that will positively impact our veterans and soldiers. Helping and honoring men and women who have served our country is extremely important, and I am pleased with the accomplishments we made this session to that end. Governor Nixon recently traveled to Cape Girardeau and visited the Missouri Veterans Home to sign into law several bills to acknowledge the service of veterans in Missouri.



In 2007, we passed [House Bill 444](#), which phased-in a state income tax exemption for Social Security and public retirement benefits, including military pensions. The exemption, however, only applied to veterans who were 62 or older. This year we worked to pass [House Bill 82](#), which exempts military retirement benefits immediately upon retirement, without

waiting until the retiree turns 62. The exemption increases by 15 percent annually beginning in 2010 until it is fully implemented at 100 percent in 2016. Many other states already have this type of exemption, and the legislation shows that Missouri wants veterans to stay in our state by allowing them to keep more of their hard-earned income.

Another important piece of legislation that we worked hard to pass this year is [House Bill 683](#), which established the Heroes Way Interstate Interchange Designation Program. The program allows relatives of fallen service men and women to submit their loved one's name to the Missouri Department of Transportation for recognition at a highway interchange. In order to be eligible for recognition, an individual must have been killed in action during active military duty in Afghanistan or Iraq on or after September 11, 2001, and must have sponsorship from at least one member of the General Assembly. Once an application is approved, two signs will be erected in the North/South or East/West directions at the designated interstate interchange.

The inspiration behind Hero's Way was Ross Gartman, a former member of the Missouri National Guard, regarding a way to honor his friend and fellow soldier. Bradley J. Skelton. Staff Sgt. Skelton of Gordonville was killed by an explosion in Baghdad on Feb. 6, 2008. I then worked with family members of all Southeast Missouri fallen soldiers on Hero's Way. In addition to Staff Sgt. Bradley J. Skelton, the soldiers from our community who lost their lives in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom are:

Staff Sergeant Charles R. Sanders, Jr. of Charleston: April 6, 2005

Sergeant Robert G. Davis of Jackson: August 18, 2005

Specialist Blake W. Hall of East Prairie: August 21, 2005

Corporal Jeremy R. Shank of Jackson: September 6, 2006

Sergeant Adam J. Kohlhaas of Perryville: April 21, 2008

Several other pieces of legislation to recognize veterans and show them the respect they deserve were also signed into law by Governor Nixon. [House Bill 678](#) establishes May 1 as

Silver Star Families of America Day in recognition of sick or wounded veterans. [House Bill 400](#), allows veterans who have earned certain distinctions to park for free in metered spots in participating localities. And [House Bill 111](#), provides protections for funeral homes and veterans organizations that work together to ensure unclaimed remains of veterans are interred with dignity, usually in a veterans' cemetery.

We owe an unpayable debt to our veterans for their service and sacrifice. There are but two who have offered their lives for you. The first is our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the second is the American Soldier.



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.senate.mo.gov/crowell>.

From Southeast Missourian on July 3, 2009:

Nixon signs bills to help veterans

Friday, July 3, 2009

By Rudi Keller ~ Southeast Missourian

Missouri's war dead will be honored with highway markers and have their unclaimed cremated remains taken into the care of veterans groups under two new laws signed Thursday by Gov. Jay Nixon.

And living career military retirees will begin getting a tax break next year that will, within a few years, make their pensions exempt from state income tax.

In an appearance at the Missouri Veterans Home in Cape Girardeau, Nixon said those measures, as well as two other bills he signed in a ceremonial event, are a small way to honor the service of Missouri's veterans.

"Words are insufficient to explain our debt of gratitude to the great soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines,"

Nixon said. "Our freedoms are possible only because of what veterans have done for the past 233 years."

The highway markers, known as the "Heroes Way Interstate Interchange Designation Program," will allow relatives of those who died in military service in Iraq or Afghanistan to ask that an interstate interchange be named in their honor. Sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Jason Crowell, R-Cape Girardeau, the bill began with a push by Ross Gartman of Delta to honor a comrade and friend, Sgt. Brad Skelton of Gordonville, killed in Iraq in February 2008.

He was seeking to have the Jackson armory named for Skelton when the issue came up of other area soldiers who have also died in the line of duty, Gartman said. That prompted the discussions that led to the veterans interchange program, he said.

"Just in Jason's district, from Perryville to Sikeston, there are six names that could be designated," Gartman said.

Jim Shank of Jackson, father of Jeremy Shank, who was the first area soldier killed in combat in Iraq, said he will seek to have the new East Main Street interchange named for his son. "Our family will never forget," Shank said. "Hopefully it will help others never forget."

The two other bills signed by Nixon on Thursday would set aside May 1 as a day to recognize the families of soldiers and sailors wounded or killed in action and one to give veterans with vehicle plates showing military distinctions such as POW status or Purple Heart awards parking privileges at metered spaces.

The tax break for military retirees would exempt 15 percent of their pension income from taxes in 2010, increasing each year until 100 percent is exempt in 2016. The annual cost in reduced revenue, \$29 million when fully implemented, is worth it even at a time of tough budget decisions, Nixon said.

"It is recognition of what has been done in a cost-effective way," Nixon said. "We can afford it."

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