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Honoring Our Veterans

From early in this country's history, U.S. service men and women have bravely answered the call to defend our freedom, aid our allies and stand strong against aggressors. While we can never fully repay the debt of gratitude we owe our veterans, we can humbly honor their unimaginable sacrifices. As we approach Nov. 11, which we recognize as Veterans Day, I urge us all to take a moment to truly comprehend the depth of sacrifice that has been required to make this country so great.

The cost of freedom was paid for by the blood, sweat and tears of America's veterans and their families, the often forgotten element in the story of the nation's struggle against tyranny. When we, as lawmakers, can repay them in any way, however small, it is an honor. During the 2009 legislative session, we were able to make some changes to Missouri law that will have a positive impact on our veterans, active military members and their families, and I was privileged to play a key role in the passage of these bills by handling them in the Senate. First, we passed [House Bill 427](#), a multi-faceted military measure that, among other things:

- Adds four lawmakers to the Missouri Veterans Commission, increasing membership on the commission from five to nine (previously lawmakers did not serve on the commission). I am fortunate to be one of the senators appointed to serve on the commission.
- Allows a dependent of a military member who resides in Missouri and whose parent is assigned to permanent duty in Missouri to be eligible for in-state tuition at state colleges and universities.
- Allows veterans displaying Congressional Medal of Honor, Prisoner of War, Purple Heart or Silver Star special license plates, or Bronze Star placards, to park for free in metered parking spaces upon the approval of the city.
- Designates May 1st of each year as Silver Star Families of America Day. Silver Star Families supports and assists wounded or ill service members and their families.

We also continue to acknowledge the service of our veterans by allowing them to keep

more of their hard-earned income. [House Bill 82](#), which I also handled in the Senate, allows for an eventual complete state income tax exemption for any military retirement benefits. The exemption would increase by 15 percent annually beginning in 2010 until it is fully implemented at 100 percent in 2016.

Our state also offers several services to the approximately 543,000 veterans who call Missouri home. One program designed to assist veterans and their dependents, particularly with veterans' benefits, is the Veterans Service Program (VSP). Accredited Veterans Service officers and assistants provide counseling and assistance to thousands of veterans and their dependents throughout the state, informing them of available VA and state veterans' benefits and completing and submitting claims applications with all necessary documentation. Officers and assistants are thoroughly trained and knowledgeable in all areas of veterans' benefits, including service-connected compensation, non-service connected disability pension, education and training, vocational rehabilitation, burial, and survivor benefits. They will also assist veterans with health care eligibility, VA Home Loan Guaranty and other benefits.

Veterans Service offices are conveniently located in almost every county across the state so they are easily accessible to all veterans. In the 31st Senatorial District, main offices are located in Warrensburg (Missouri Veterans Home, 1300 Veterans Rd., call 660-543-7930) and Nevada (621 E. Highland Ave., Ste. #3, call 417-448-1133). The Nevada office also travels to Harrisonville (National Guard Armory, 1503 Jefferson Pkwy, call 816-887-5710) and Belton (VA Outpatient Clinic, 17140 Bel Ray Place, call 816-922-2161) in Cass County and Butler (Driver's Examination Office, 2-4 West Ohio St., call 417-448-1133) in Bates County at scheduled times during the month (call for more detailed information). You may also contact the main office at 573-751-3779, or find out more by going online at www.mvc.dps.mo.gov/STV/Info/info.html.

On November 11 we will say "thank you" to all of America's veterans, letting them know that we appreciate them for their service and honor them for their sacrifices. As we dedicate one day to serve them, let us remember they spent their lives—and for some, gave their lives—serving us.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senatorial District.

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