

Week of April 26, 2010



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Working for Missouri's Veterans and Active Military

The courageous individuals who defend our freedom and lay their lives on the line to protect this country deserve our highest respect and gratitude. We may never be able to truly repay them for the sacrifices both they and their families make on our behalf, but we can do our part to improve their quality of life when they come back home. One of the ways the Legislature can do its part is by creating laws that will have a meaningful impact on the lives of Missouri's service men and women.

This session, I'm handling a handful of bills relating to the military and veterans. One such bill is [HB 2147](#), which changes the state's A+ Schools Program to better serve our veterans and their families (A+ allows qualified students to receive financial assistance for attending a Missouri community college, vocational or technical school). It allows students who are dependents of retired military who relocate to Missouri within one year of the retirement date to be exempt from the A+ Schools Program's three-year attendance requirement. We want military families who want to return to Missouri to have the same educational opportunities as everyone else, and not be disadvantaged because of their service.

Another bill I'm handling in the Senate is [HB 2114](#), which would recognize "prisoner of war" and "missing in action" as valid descriptions of casualty status and category classification for military personnel. It's important that the opportunity for closure be there for the families of these individuals.

In addition, I'm handling [HB 1524](#) (sponsored in the House by Rep. Scott Largent of Clinton), a general military bill that contains several provisions designed to improve the quality of life of both current and retired military members. These include making it easier for overseas military members to vote in elections by allowing them to request and send voter registration applications and absentee ballot applications electronically; requiring the state and local government entities to give a measured preference to service-disabled veteran businesses when selecting contractors for any job or service; and establishing the Missouri Youth

Challenge Academy to be overseen by the Missouri National Guard, which will provide residential, military-based training and supervised work experience to at-risk high school age youth.

This week, the House Veterans Committee passed a bill I sponsored, [SB 940](#) (similar to a bill sponsored by Rep. Denny Hoskins of Warrensburg), which relaxes bingo regulations in the state in an effort to maintain the number of bingo halls—which have decreased significantly in recent years. The goal is to allow bingo licensees to be able to compete with riverboat gambling and other entertainment by expanding the hours during which bingo halls can operate, the number of games they are able to hold, and the amount of money they are allowed to spend on advertising. Many of the not-for-profit organizations—including veterans groups—that conduct bingo games (which are run by volunteers from the organization) serve their communities in various capacities, and we should remove some of the burdensome and unnecessary regulations that prevent them from competing with for-profit casinos.

Also this week, we were witness to an inspiring event here in the Capitol. Nearly 200 veterans who have participated in the Central Missouri Honor Flight program gathered in the Capitol for a “Day of Heroes.” The program’s mission is to transport America’s veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit the memorials dedicated to their service and sacrifices. It was amazing to see so many veterans gathered together who have taken part in this admirable effort to connect veterans to their legacy.

We cannot truly know the profound sacrifices made on the part of many of our veterans and active military members. From those currently serving at Whiteman Air Force Base right here in the 31st District to the valiant veterans of World War II, and the many who serve in the Guard and Reserve, these heroic individuals have protected our way of life and fought for our freedom. We should make an effort any time we can to recognize and honor their service.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact my office with your 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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