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Subject: Government Affairs Report for VVA TSC Meeting 15 April 2017

Attached and following is the Executive Summary of my Government Affairs Report for the April 15, 2017 VVA TSC meeting. Please distribute to TSC Chapters. Please advise me if you have any questions.

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Government Affairs Report for 15 April 2017 VVA TSC Meeting

85th Texas Legislature: Executive Summary:

- 68 bills have been reviewed by the House Defense and Veterans Affairs Committee. Those considered top priorities are summarized below.
- 50 bills have been reviewed by the Senate Veterans Affairs and Border Security Committee. Those considered top priorities are summarized below.

Hazlewood Education Act: HB 3766 Lozano (District 43 including Beeville) promotes the agenda of the Institutes of Higher Learning (IHL) who are targeting to significantly change the eligibility for access to Hazlewood, limit the time that the benefits can be used, significantly reduce the credit hours for degree completion, and reduce benefits received by Veterans, their spouses, and dependents currently available under the terms and conditions of the Hazlewood Act. Grassroots opposition to changing Hazlewood education benefits have come from the [Lone Star Veterans Association \(post 9/11 veteran service organization headquartered in Houston\)](#) with an online petition to keep Hazlewood as it is. Cameron County Commissioners have signed and forwarded a Resolution in opposition to HB3766, and have send a formal letter to all 254 County Judges and County Commissioners urging them to pass similar resolutions from their respective counties. [Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations \(TCVO\)](#): 36 VSOs plus 8 affiliate VSOs representing 650,000+ Texas Veterans at the TX Legislature) has sent a Call To Action to its member VSOs to have their grassroots members attend hearings at the State Capitol in "overwhelming" numbers wearing their "Colors" and signing a card stating their position on HB3766. Updates will be provided to VVA TSC as hearings on HB3766 are held.

Note: At this time TCVO doesn't have an official position on any legislation pro or con regarding any potential changes to the Hazlewood Act.

Property Tax Relief for Veterans Disabled Less Than 100%: proposes to change the set dollar amounts for four levels of VA disability ratings to a percentage figure. The proposed % figures would be used to determine the annual property tax exemption dollar reduction when compared to the average appraised value of a principal residence in Texas.

Summary: any proposed tax relief for Veterans disabled less than 100% faces an uphill battle due to the shortfall of revenue to the State. The shortfall is due to diminished oil and gas revenues concomitant with the significant reduction in consumer gas prices. Any tax relief comes as an *unfunded mandate* from the State to the county appraisal districts. This means that the appraisal districts must absorb any tax relief to Veterans disabled less than 100% without any financial support from the State. Expect to see the appraisal districts fight any significant tax relief.

Military absentee voting: If military absentee ballots go out late by any time frame (e.g.: hours or days), the grace period will increase to eight (8) days to allow military absentee voters extra time to return the absentee ballot to the local clerk's office to compensate for the late shipment and subsequent receipt from local election offices.

Summary: a simple, straightforward solution has been worked out between TCVO and the State Affairs Department whereby the number of days allowed in the grace period will be changed from the originally proposed ten days to a compromised eight days. This is a Win/Win arrangement for all parties.

TCVO Priorities for 115th US Congress:

Exposure to Toxins: Agent Orange and Burn Pits:

- Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans: HR 299 introduced 1/5/2017. Author: Rep Valado (R-CA) Cosponsors: Walz (D-MN), Stefanik (R-NY), Courtney (D-CT), Ross (R-FL), LoBiondo (R-NJ). A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes. HR 299 is the reincarnation of HR 969 and S 681 from the 114th US Congress. HR299 has been referred to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs by the House Veterans Affairs Committee on 1/19/2017. HR299 has 252 Co-sponsors, 16 of whom are from Texas.
- Senate Companion Bill S422 was introduced by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) and referred to the Committee on Veterans Affairs on 2/16/2017. S422 has 40 Cosponsors, none from Texas. Text: A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes
- Helping Veterans Exposed to Burn Pits Act. A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans to establish within the Department of Veterans Affairs a center of excellence in the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of health conditions relating to exposure to burn pits. Senate Bill S319 authored by Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) was introduced 6 Feb 2017 and referred to the Committee on Veterans Affairs. S319 has 7 Cosponsors, none from Texas.
- S305: Vietnam Veterans Recognition Act of 2017. Signed into public law 115-15 by President Trump on 29 March 2017. The Act encourages display of the flag of the United States on National Vietnam War Veterans Day, designated as March 29th.

RELATED WEB LINKS:

Click link below to learn about the TCVO, "The Voice of Veterans in Texas" organization:

<http://www.texascoalitionofveteransorganizations.org/>

Click link below to learn more about John Miterko's Austin VVA Chapter 915:

<https://www.texvet.org/VVA915>

Click link below to learn all about the Hazlewood Act:

<https://www.texvet.org/resources/hazlewood-act-tvc>

Click link below to visit the VVA TSC homepage:

http://www.vvaft.org/Index_TSC.html

Click link below to visit the Lone Star Veterans Association (Houston) website:

<http://www.lonestarveterans.org/>