

State Senator Joe Scarnati

VETERANS Update



F a l l 2 0 0 7 • 2 5 t h S e n a t o r i a l D i s t r i c t

Dear Friend,

Pennsylvania is home to more than 1.5 million veterans – roughly 10 percent of the state's population. These are ordinary people who were called upon to do something greater than themselves and who answered that call.

Historically, Pennsylvanians have answered the call to defend freedom in astounding numbers. Our Commonwealth is home to one of the largest veteran populations in the nation.

I believe we have an obligation to all veterans to honor their service and contributions both in peace and war. That's why I have been a steadfast supporter of veterans' programs, benefits, and organizations.

With that in mind, I'd like to provide you with some information on the more recent state programs and initiatives available to veterans, especially those living with a disability.

Of all the matters that come before the General Assembly, few are as important as meeting the needs of veterans who risked their lives for their nation and returned, and preserving the memory of those who gave their lives and did not return.

I hope you find this information useful. And if I can ever be of assistance to you, please call or stop by my district office.


Senator Joe Scarnati

Scarnati Supports Expanded Property Tax Exemptions

Many times, the injuries our soldiers suffered on the battlefield created additional financial burdens that they would not have had to face if it were not for their sacrifice. That's why I was pleased to support a new law that will ensure that more of Pennsylvania's disabled veterans and their surviving spouses are now eligible for property tax exemptions.

Under Act 161, honorably discharged veterans who were disabled during wartime military service and their surviving spouses who have not remarried may be exempt from any property taxes as long as their income does not exceed \$75,000 annually.

Although applicants may be required to provide proof of income to claim the

exemption, the new law will not require the detailed financial information required under the current system.

In addition, the legislation extended the time to review exemptions from two years to five years.

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, more than 1,900 disabled veterans and surviving spouses received the real estate tax exemption last year. That figure is expected to increase under the new guidelines.

To be eligible for the Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption Program, a veteran must:

- Be a resident of the Commonwealth;
- Have been honorably discharged – or released under honorable conditions

– from the U.S. Armed Forces for service in a war or armed conflict in which the U.S. was engaged;

- Be blind or paraplegic; suffered the loss of two or more limbs; or be declared by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to have 100 percent, permanent service-related disability;
- Occupy the real estate property as a principal dwelling;
- Own the dwelling outright or through an estate either independently or with a spouse; and
- Prove that they have a need for the exemption. Under the new law, applicants with an annual income of \$75,000 or less are presumed to have such a need. Applicants with annual

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Scarnati Seeks to Promote Veteran-owned Small Businesses

The Senate recently approved legislation which is designed to encourage state agencies to contract with veteran-owned small businesses.

Senate Bill 87 would set an annual state contracting goal of not less than five percent for small businesses owned by veterans. Under the bill, the Department of General Services would provide staff and training to help veteran-owned businesses learn how to apply for state contracts. The department would also compile and make available lists of veteran-owned businesses to encourage procurement.

The legislation is an outgrowth of a successful program, VETWORK YOUR BUSINESS, which was launched in 2005. It provides service-disabled veterans and veteran-owned businesses with the training and contacts necessary to access

large private sector companies for contract opportunities.

Senate Bill 87 would take this concept and apply it to state contracting to ensure that veterans are aware of the business opportunities that are available to them with Commonwealth agencies.

It will help to ensure that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania gives our veterans, particularly those with service-related disabilities, proper consideration for contracting opportunities with the state government. It is

also a fitting demonstration of our country's ongoing commitment to assist those who have sacrificed so much to protect our nation and its citizens.



Senator Scarnati meets with two area veterans during an event being held to honor their service.

Legislation Will Improve Veterans' Outreach and Assistance

The Senate is currently considering a bill to improve veterans' outreach and assistance throughout Pennsylvania.

The legislation will provide financial assistance to the Veterans Administration accredited service officer programs offered by nationally chartered veteran service organizations including the American Legion, AMVETS, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, and the Disabled American Veterans. The program will be coordinated by the Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to enhance the availabil-

ity of veterans' assistance throughout the state, measure performance and program outcomes, and most importantly, ensure the continual improvement of services to Pennsylvania's veterans' community.

Senate Bill 915 is a tremendous starting point for improving veterans' outreach and services. In order to best meet the needs of our veterans' community, we will continue our work to enhance and better coordinate the continuum of services across state, county, and independent programs, so that the men and women who have given so much to our

country and Commonwealth can receive the support they need to regain their mental, physical and economic health, reconnect with themselves and their community and resume productive lives.



Expanded Property Tax

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income in excess of \$75,000 must show that they are eligible;

- Upon the death of a qualified disabled veteran, the tax exemption may pass to the unmarried surviving spouse so long as he/she can demonstrate need.

To apply for the tax exemption, individuals should contact the veterans' affairs office in their home county, which is typically located in the county courthouse. Proof of income for the calendar year prior to applying must be presented in order to qualify for the exemption.

For more information on the Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption or other programs and services available to the Commonwealth's service members and veterans, visit the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs website at

www.milvet.state.pa.us/DMVA.

New Law Offers Free Education for Families of Fallen Military

A law passed last year now provides tuition credits to spouses and children of Pennsylvania National Guard members who die while on active military duty.

Act 105 of 2006 benefits the spouses of deceased Pennsylvania National Guard members who are killed while serving on federal or state active duty. The law also increases the current benefit for children from a 50 percent tu-

ition credit to a 100 percent tuition credit, while creating a 100 percent tuition credit for surviving spouses to attend any Pennsylvania state-owned college or university, or approved trade school.

As a result, spouses and children of fallen military members can complete their education.



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