



State Legislative Update for February 13 - 19, 2016

Veterans Day on the Hill

Mark your calendars, this year's Veterans Day on the Hill will be on Wednesday, March 16th. It will start with a rally at 10am at the Cedar Street Armory (600 Cedar St, St. Paul). There will be time to meet with legislators to discuss the 2016 Commanders' Task Force legislative agenda. The event is hosted by Minnesota Commanders' Task Force, United Veterans Legislative Council of Minnesota and the Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers.

Committee Hearings

House:

On Tuesday, the State Government Finance Committee held a meeting at the Coon Rapids VFW. Members in attendance were Tony Albright, Sarah Anderson, Lyndon Carlson, Bob Dettmer, Melissa Hortman, Sheldon Johnson, Michael Nelson, Cindy Pugh, Peggy Scott and Mark Ugem. Additionally, former state representative and current Anoka County Veteran Service Officer John Kriesel was in attendance and shared his thoughts. The committee reviewed the general fund appropriations for the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs over the past six bienniums. Rep. Dettmer reviewed a list of 2015 legislative accomplishments that will benefit Veterans. Chair Anderson then opened the meeting to questions and comments from the audience. Topics discussed included counseling services (PTSD & suicide prevention) for Veterans, Drivers Licenses with a 'Veteran' endorsement, pension taxation & information about guard & reserve as compared to active pensions, Tricare & other healthcare available to Veterans, services offered by CVSO's and ways the state can connect with recently separated Veterans and further promote or highlight the programs and services offered by the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs and partners.

Thursday brought the committee to Pine City. The members that attended this meeting included Sarah Anderson, Bob Dettmer, Jeff Howe, Sheldon Johnson, Mike Nelson, Cindy Pugh, Jason Rarick and Linda Runbeck. The hearing took on the same structure as the last two meetings. The discussion topics were very similar to the last two meetings. There were some new topics that stood out, including the differences between the state and federal Veteran Affairs departments, the need for more state Veteran homes because of the long lengths that Veterans and their families are on a waiting list for housing. Rick Olseen from Congressman Nolan's office talked about the frustration the office is having with the Veterans Choice program and what his office is doing to ensure Vets get the treatment they need.

The State Government Finance committee has scheduled two additional meetings next week. On Tuesday, February 23rd the committee will be at the Willmar American Legion (220 19th Ave SW, Willmar, MN 56201) at 1pm. The second meeting will be on Thursday, February 25th in Brainerd (326 Laurel St, Brainerd, MN 56401) at 12pm.

Senate:

The Capital Investment committee met on Wednesday. The bulk of the hearing was an overview of Debt Capacity Guidelines from Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB). Myron Frans, the MMB

commissioner and Margaret Kelly, the department's budget director, gave an overview of the governor's bonding proposals. There was a mention of the project to rebuild the bridge at the Minneapolis Veterans Home. They cited public safety concerns with the being bridge out of service because ambulances and other emergency vehicles have to take a longer route in and out of the campus.

Legislation

The 2016 session is scheduled to begin at noon on Tuesday, March 8.