



Representative McLawhorn's News from Raleigh

July 5, 2007

North Carolina has one of the nation's largest populations of active military members and veterans. I am fortunate to serve in the state House alongside several veterans, including six paratroopers, who have helped us develop a strong plan for improving the lives of our service members. We are also home to a number of military bases, including two of the world's premiere military installations – Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune. Our military bases in North Carolina help keep our state's economy healthy and our nation strong.

Community support

>> North Carolina has the fourth-largest military presence in the country and many military families experience significant hardship and stress related to the ongoing fight against terrorists in the Middle East. The Homeland Security, Military and Veterans Affairs committee is considering a bill (H1192) that would award \$26 million in grants to relieve these hardships within North Carolina's military communities.

>> The House Committee on Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House is considering a bill (H1721) that would establish a joint study committee on military and veteran's affairs. The committee would study ways to better the lives of the state's veterans, service members and their families.

Consumer Protection

>> A bill to protect servicemen from financial scams has passed the House and was sent to the Senate Committee on Small Business, Commerce, and Entrepreneurship. The bill (H773) helps protect members of the military from financial fraud such as predatory life insurance policies that may not cover death in combat. A separate bill (H981) proposes setting aside money to hire a consumer protection specialist position in the Department of Justice. The specialist would work largely with service members who may have been defrauded.

Business

>> Small businesses and service members would benefit from a bill introduced in the House that would award tax credits for employing reservists or National Guardsmen who are called to active duty. The tax credits would help employers pay the costs of training replacements for deployed service members and reintegrating returned soldiers into the workforce. The proposal would cost an estimated \$4 million and was part of the House's recommended budget. Negotiations about the credit continue as part of the budget process.

Family

>> A bill to protect the parental custody and visitation rights of deployed and active members of the military was ratified and will become law after the governor signs it. The bill (H1634) permits expedited custody hearings for service members called into duty and hearings via telephone for service members deployed on short notice. It also prevents a parent from citing deployment and a reason to modify or change custody arrangements. Under the new law, any custody order issued because of deployment expires within 10 days of the soldier's return.

Employment

>> The House passed a bill that grants leaves of absence for elected or appointed state officials who are called to active military duty, and it permits temporary officials to be appointed during their absences. The bill (H671) was sent to the Senate Committee on State and Local Government.

>> A bill to clarify hiring preferences for veterans in state government has also cleared the House. The bill (H1412) grants veterans and their surviving spouses or dependents preference with state departments, agencies, and institution. It is currently in the Senate Committee on State and Local Government.

>> A bill to add a veteran to the State Personnel Commission (H1413) passed the House and is now in the Senate Committee on State and Local Government. The commission sets policies and practices for hiring in the state.

>> The Senate approved two House bills on Tuesday regarding military service. One (H1414) provides that teachers and state employees called into active duty receive credit for time spent in the military for retirement purposes. That bill is on its way to Gov. Mike Easley for his signature. The other bill (H1415) protects teachers and state employees from being denied short-term benefits because of absences for military service. It must return to the House for concurrence on changes made in the Senate.

Notes

>> Members of the state House have met several times with veterans and active duty service members this session to honor their sacrifices at home and in wars overseas. One resolution (H1720) honored the 11 National Guard members who died in the line of duty and six who were killed in action since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Nearly 11,000 members of the Guard have been deployed overseas since that time and 135 have been wounded in action. Guidons from the 72 North Carolina National Guard units that were deployed since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were displayed for several weeks in the Legislative rotunda between the main entrances to the House and Senate chambers. A resolution honoring Tuskegee Airmen, the black soldiers who were the first in the United States trained as fighter pilots, is expected later this month.

>> The House passed a resolution (H1929) asking the Department of Defense to return the remains of a Marine killed in Cambodia to Duplin County. Lance Cpl. Joseph Nelson Hargrove was captured by Khmer Rouge forces on Koh Tang Island in 1975 while trying to free kidnapped crew members of the SS Mayaguez. Hargrove's grave site was identified on the island in 2001 but his body was not recovered and returned to his family.

###