

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE - STATE

At the state level it looks like it will be another very tough year for veterans and military legislation. Recent newspaper articles are claiming that state revenue shortfalls this year could reach \$1.7 billion, with no federal bailout money in sight. State agencies, including the Department of Veterans Services, are being asked to look at taking budget cuts of 5, 10, and even 15%. Since these projected cuts are on top of cuts already taken, the **overall funding for veterans services is not a pretty picture**. Some key programs, such as the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, are subject to facing reductions in services.

The **Joint Leadership Council (JLC) met on 12 August** to determine the agenda for priority legislative objectives for this coming session of the General Assembly. The result was pretty close to what was anticipated and reported in the June edition of *The Crier*. The top legislative objectives are listed below. (Note these are **not in numerical priority order**. Priority will be established after the Governor's budget is released in December.)

- Real Estate Tax Relief for 100% Disabled Veterans: This is a continuation of last year's effort which will need to be passed by the General Assembly after this fall's election of the House of Delegates as required by the Virginia constitution. JLC sponsor: Disabled American Vets.
- Burial Vaults for Virginia State Veterans Cemeteries: Because this effort failed last year, it was amended to authorize the Department of Veterans Services to do a bulk buy of burial vaults and then sell them to veterans' families at cost. This will save veterans' families \$400 - \$800 and will not cost the state anything. JLC sponsor: Veterans of Foreign Wars.
- Military Family Relief Fund Nontaxable: This is also a continuation of the bill which never even got introduced in the House of Delegates due to a rule to not hear any bill proposing any tax relief whatsoever. This year we will be looking for a patron in the Senate. JLC sponsor: National Guard Association.
- Establish Special Veterans Courts: This will be proposed to be done on a pilot basis in those localities so willing. JLC sponsor: Military Order of World Wars.
- Fund War Memorial Operating Budget and FFE: To fund the necessary furniture, fixtures, and equipment (FFE) and a higher operating budget after the Galanti Education Center is completed. JLC sponsor: American Legion.
- DVS Base Budget: The objective is to restore anticipated cuts to the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, the Automated Disability Claims System, and funding for the SW Virginia cemetery. VCOC MOAA agreed to work with other Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) as the JLC sponsor for this.

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ON LINE

MOAA's Virginia Council of Chapters (VCOC) state legislative priorities are available on the VCOC website, along with links to the Virginia General Assembly and the JLC.

<http://VirginiaMoaa.com/stateLegislative.html>



Col Wilder
is pictured at
VCOC Meeting
10 July 2009