
Committee Meeting

of

ASSEMBLY MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

*“The Committee will receive testimony
from State and national leaders from the veteran community
to discuss legislation that would broaden eligibility for certain veteran’s benefits”*

LOCATION: Wildwood Convention Center
Wildwood, New Jersey

DATE: June 13, 2018
1:00 p.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Cleopatra G. Tucker, Chair
Assemblyman Bob Andrzejczak
Assemblyman John P. Armato
Assemblyman Vincent Mazzeo
Assemblyman Ronald S. Dancer



ALSO PRESENT:

Tracey F. Pino Murphy
*Office of Legislative Services
Committee Aide*

Sherwood T. Goodenough
*Assembly Majority
Committee Aide*

Joe Glover
*Assembly Republican
Committee Aide*

***Meeting Recorded and Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey***



CLEOPATRA G. TUCKER
Chairwoman

WAYNE P. DEANGELO
Vice-Chairman

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COMMITTEE NOTICE

TO: MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

FROM: ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLEOPATRA G. TUCKER, CHAIRWOMAN

SUBJECT: COMMITTEE MEETING - JUNE 13, 2018

The public may address comments and questions to Tracey F. Pino Murphy, Committee Aide, or make bill status and scheduling inquiries to Sophia Love, Secretary, at (609)847-3890, fax (609)777-2998, or e-mail: OLSAideAMV@njleg.org. Written and electronic comments, questions and testimony submitted to the committee by the public, as well as recordings and transcripts, if any, of oral testimony, are government records and will be available to the public upon request.

The Assembly Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee will meet on Wednesday, June 13, 2018 at 1:00 PM at the Wildwood Convention Center, 4501 Boardwalk, Wildwood, New Jersey.

The committee will receive testimony from State and national leaders from the veteran community to discuss legislation that would broaden eligibility for certain veteran's benefits.

Issued 6/7/18

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
William Thomson Chair Eastern State Conference, and Director Legislative Committee Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey	2
Duane T. Sarmiento State Senior Vice Commander Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey, and Director Veterans Affairs Gloucester County	5
Robert E. McNulty, Sr. Legislative Chair Fleet Reserve Association Northeast/New England Region, and Government Affairs Committee New Jersey State Council Vietnam Veterans of America, and Consultant Legislative Committee Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey	8
John P. Dorrity Director Veterans Service Bureau Ocean County	12
Johnnie Walker Department Adjutant Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Department of New Jersey	14
Ken Hagemann State Adjutant Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey	15

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Barbara Kim-Hagemann State Junior Vice Commander Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey	16
George R. Schnepf, Jr. Commander Woodbridge Chapter, Chapter 56 Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Department of New Jersey	20
John Vollrath Commander District 17, Cape May County Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey	21
Carl P. Karmilowicz Private Citizen	22
George Lee Payne Department Commander Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Department of New Jersey	23
Hazel Radcliff Private Citizen	25
Luddie H. Austin Commander Trenton Post 12165 Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey	26
Robert Looby Adjutant Post 7857 Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey	31

TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Carey Pritchett State Commander Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of New Jersey	32
Assemblyman R. Bruce Land District 1	38
pnf: 1-41	

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CLEOPATRA G. TUCKER (Chair):

Good afternoon.

Thank you for coming out to our Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing today.

And before we get started, the first thing we're going to do -- we're going to have the Pledge.

So can we all rise for the Pledge?

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: (off mike) All rise, brothers and sisters all.

Please join me in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America.

Present arms.

(all recite Pledge of Allegiance)

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Order arms.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Can we have a roll call, please?

MS. MURPHY (Committee Aide): Assemblywoman Gove is absent.

Assemblyman Dancer.

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: Here.

MS. MURPHY: Assemblyman Mazzeo.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZZEO: Here.

MS. MURPHY: Assemblyman Armato.

ASSEMBLYMAN ARMATO: Here.

MS. MURPHY: Assemblyman Andrzejczak.

ASSEMBLYMAN ANDRZEJCZAK: Here.

MS. MURPHY: Chairwoman Tucker.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Here.

MS. MURPHY: We have a quorum.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: The purpose of us being here today -- we have a lot of issues concerning our veterans and how we should take care of some of the needs that you have.

And the purpose of this meeting was to come out and let us hear from, to tell us, some of the things that really -- the most important things, and how we can best deal with them, and how can we make legislation that is really going to work and really pass. Because we have several bills that have been floating around for years and years, and we can't seem to get them through, for various reasons; and one of them is money. We're just going to be straight upfront about the situation, and how some may be a little more expensive to do than others.

So today is a day for you to express what you feel, how you feel. And if there is anything that you have to say, we would appreciate it. And if anybody still wants to sign up, you can sign up.

So we'll get started.

And our first speaker is Bill Thomson, from the VFW Legislative District.

WILLIAM THOMSON: Madam Chairwoman, thank you.

Thank you for your leadership, thank you for your friendship, thank you for what you have done for veterans already, and your continued commitment to assist veterans as we move forward.

I want to thank your Committee -- including Mrs. Gove, who is not here today -- but Mr. Dancer, and Mr. Mazzeo, Mr. Andrzejczak, and

Mr. Armato. And I know of your service (indicates) on this side; I don't know if anyone else has served.

But to those in the audience, I would inform them that Mr. Andrzejczak and Mr. Armato are both members of the VFW -- life members of the VFW. Did I miss anybody? (no response) Okay.

Madam Chairwoman, again this is historic, in that we have never done this before here in Wildwood at our VFW convention. And I'd like to just take a little leave of absence and introduce my VFW Legislative Committee, which I'm sure that you're aware of most of them.

Our Legislative Committee is Ken Hagemann and Luddie Austin. And our State Junior Vice -- who will become our Senior Vice on Saturday -- is Barbara Kim-Hagemann; and -- am I missing anyone? -- Kevin Clancy and Brian Wiener.

Also in attendance with us this afternoon, Madam Chairwoman, is our State Commander, sitting to my left, Carey Pritchett; our Senior Vice Commander, Duane Sarmiento; Barbara Kim-Hagemann, who is our Junior Vice Commander; and Brian Wiener, who is our Department Judge Advocate.

Also with us is our special guest; and he is special indeed. He is our Past National Commander; he is also our Executive Director of our Legislative Office in Washington, D.C., Chief Bob Wallace. (applause)

Madam Chairwoman, I just -- I don't want to take a lot of time here, because you and I have had many conversations. And we will continue to have many conversations; and we have them here, there, and everywhere. But one of the issues that you and I have worked with, and

talked about, and tried to find a way to get it passed, is the *Vet is a Vet Bill*. And we hope to continue to do that.

You know, one of the things, Madam Chairwoman, that we have found-- And we have passed this Bill out of your Committee; we have passed this Bill out of the Senate Committee. And the Bill always ends up at OMB; and OMB always tells us, "It's too expensive." We're not sure how their calculations are made; we are not sure what those costs are, because they've never shared them with us. I don't know if they've shared them with you, or the members of our Committee here. But it is something of interest to us because, you know, as I've said in the past -- that veterans are not free agents; we are patriots who, when we put the uniform of our country on, we follow orders. And if they tell us to go to a combat zone, we go to a combat zone. If they tell us to go someplace else in the world to serve our country, that's where we go. But we serve our country, and we serve it proudly.

And we believe that all the people who served their country proudly should be entitled to all of the benefits; and at least the benefits that the Federal government and 49 other states afford their veterans. We are the only state that does not broad-base their veteran benefits.

And I had an opportunity to speak, for a couple of hours, with Senator Diegnan, before he chose to go to another Committee. I hope it wasn't my conversation that encouraged him to go to another Committee (laughter). But he was shocked that we're the only state.

And so I look forward to continue working with you, and the members of your Committee. I thank you for everything that you do for us,

because you do a lot; especially some of the bills that just recently have been passed, and we're waiting for the Governor's signature on a few.

But I would like to introduce our State Senior Vice Commander, Duane Sarmiento; and he is the second card on the list, Tracey, okay?

Duane.

D U A N E T. S A R M I E N T O: Thank you; do I sit here (indicates)?

MR. THOMSON: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Could you state your name again for the record, please?

MR. SARMIENTO: Yes, ma'am.

Duane Sarmiento; I live in Gibbstown, New Jersey, in Gloucester County.

Not only am I the Senior Vice Commander for Department New Jersey, I'm Director of Veterans Affairs for Gloucester County. So I see this, very frequently, when my staff and I have to talk to veterans.

And we're talking-- And I understand this Vet is a Vet Bill, and that Bill mentioned the cost. And if the cost is the factor, maybe we don't take a broad stroke at this with a broadsword; maybe we pinpoint down.

And let me give you an example. Prior to 1975 -- New Jersey has war dates; I'm sure you're aware, or you may not be aware. New Jersey has what they call *war dates* of who is considered a veteran in this state. And if you served prior to 1975 -- the Vietnam war date is 1960 to 1975. If you served anywhere in the country or overseas, you're a veteran in the

State of New Jersey. You get all the benefits, Civil Service preference, the \$250 off property tax deduction, the whole nine.

After 1975, the law was changed to, “We’re going to establish our war dates;” and the next war date, after 1975, was Lebanon, then Panama, Desert Storm, and our current conflicts. Not only do you have to serve within the dates, but you need 14 days combat time.

So at least four times a week I have to explain to veterans, “Yes, in the VA, you’re a veteran; but in the State of New Jersey, you’re not.” They will (indiscernible) honorable service. But we’re talking about the Guard and Reserves; we’re talking about people who served active duty in their country.

So I try to use this analogy. If a father served at McGuire Air Force Base, from 1971 to 1975, he’s a veteran in the State of New Jersey; all benefits afforded to him. His son served at McGuire Air Force Base, 1991 to 1995; the exact same job, in the same building, sitting at the same desk. He is not a veteran in the eyes of the State of New Jersey.

And when you’re trying to tell a veteran that, it is pretty hard; because they, you know -- obviously they take their anger out on me. I say, “No, it’s the State law.” I say, “Gloucester County obviously doesn’t write this.”

And so I understand there’s a cost factor here; but there are some things that aren’t a cost factor. All right, it’s a minimal cost. Civil Service -- New Jersey is recognized as the -- if not *the* best in the country, one of the best Civil Service preferences for veterans. Because not only do you-- Like, the Federal government gives you 5 points or 10 points; other states give you points. New Jersey gives absolute preference. If I take-- I’m

a retired police officer; I take the Civil Service exam. I go above non-veterans; I pass the test. I must be-- Even though if I scored -- say I scored an 80, and a non-veteran score 100, I'm above them on the list; you must hire me first. And I thank the New Jersey -- your predecessors or those who keep it going -- thank you for that.

So I'm not sure, when we talk about cost factors, could that be even something as simple as Civil Service preference? But again, the gentleman who served at McGuire Air Force Base in the 1970s gets it, but his son who served at McGuire Air Force in the 1990s doesn't get it. And Bill -- Bill, I think you hit it right when we all-- Since 1973, we've had an all-volunteer military. We all volunteered, and you have no say where you go. I was in the Navy; if they sent me to Pensacola, and I stayed there for four years, I mean, it's no fault of mine. I mean, I did my time.

Or if, you know, you get sent in the Army -- you got sent over to Iraq. It's the luck of the draw, whatever unit you're in.

I know we have a lot of speakers, and I don't want to take up a lot of your time.

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain to, maybe, some of the new members -- I know the Committee has changed -- but understand the craziness of New Jersey's veterans dates, and who's a veteran, and who's not a veteran; some are, some aren't. But I tell you from personal experience, I have to explain that to, sometimes, parents; to the veteran; to, sometimes, surviving spouses, when they come in looking for State benefits. Obviously, they get Federal VA benefits; but when they come in looking for State benefits, and I have to tell them, "I'm sorry, ma'am, in the State of New Jersey's eyes, your husband, your spouse, was

not a veteran.” And they look at you and go, “How can that be?” You can understand; I don’t think I need to paint that picture.

So again, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak before you. And thank you for coming to our convention. I think that’s amazing; it shows good government, and I think that’s good leadership to come here and speak to us. I’m not sure; I mean, I’ve been in Trenton before, speaking; but have you ever been out of Trenton, doing this before; like on a roadshow? (laughter) I think this is great.

Thank you so much. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Okay, we’re going to have Robert McNulty, Sr.

Is he here? Yes, there he is.

R O B E R T E. M c N U L T Y, Sr.: This must be the hot seat, right? (indicates)

MR. THOMSON: Sure.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: He’s going to become a part of our Committee, because he shows up at everything. (laughter)

MR. McNULTY: I’m not going to repeat everything Bill said, but I do concur with his statements in regards to your presence here. Thank you for coming.

We’ve been pushing this *Vet is a Vet* -- we, the veteran community -- since the previous century, over the last millennium, or however you want to address it. And, of course, one of the key factors has always been money. We’re aware of the fact that it’s not inexpensive.

If we take a fast trip back to the year 2000, there was a work-up done to see how much it would cost. And we should have done it back then

because it was only \$27 million; by the year 2005, the estimate was a \$104 million.

Now, the price goes up; it goes down. We have fewer veterans now than we had previously, obviously. And, of course, there are others parts of the program -- property taxes for the 100 percenters -- they've since gone up substantially in the last 20-plus years. I have no idea what current figure is available. And we're talking about the \$250 exemption for veterans; the 100 percent exemption for those who were fully disabled; we're talking about Civil Service hiring preferences; we're talking about purchase of service credit; and the calculation of retirement benefits for the Public Employees Retirement System, the Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund, and Civil Service credit for Police and Firemen Retirement System recipients.

So there's a whole number of factors that have to be evaluated to arrive at some sort of arrangement, or figuring what the current price of doing this would do.

We know, in the past, even though the Committees have given approval to doing something, it has always gone before the Pension and Health Benefits Review Commission; and the outcome was always they recommended against it, and it never went any further.

Now, I don't know who these people are; I don't know who appoints them, and I'm not sure how many are actively serving at this point. I know there are some vacancies. But they seem to be the problem; we cannot convince these people to move ahead on this.

And part of that might be they meet; they don't meet with us, they don't hear from here from us. They just merely meet whenever they meet, and they decide, "No, gee, we're not going to do this."

So that whole process is going to have to change. We need to be able to look at the hard numbers that get put together on this thing, and to also meet with these people and tell them some of this is apparently doable.

One part that really needs to be done, and can be done, is how we address disabled vets. In New Jersey, you're a disabled vet if you have a disability that occurs in a combat zone, in war service. But if you're training in Kuwait, or if you're training at Fort Dix, or you're training in Germany, or you're just serving routine duty and you get injured, in New Jersey you are not a disabled vet.

Now, you still have some major ailments; you may be in a wheelchair; who knows the extent? But somebody's going to say, "Gee, you're not disabled? That's utter nonsense." You've decided to serve your country; and as a result of that, you've been injured -- in some cases, severely -- and this State decides that you're not a disabled vet, and you're not entitled to benefits of a disabled vet because it didn't happen during war service in a combat zone. That we need to fix.

Anybody who puts on a uniform to serve this country is a veteran, in my opinion; and I think everybody here kind of shares that. But here in New Jersey they look at it a little differently. But to think that we're going to cheat a disabled veteran out of some entitlement that he's earned, and he's been injured and entitled to, and say "We'd like to do that,

but it didn't happen in war service in a war zone, so it doesn't count." There's something wrong with that principle.

They are never going to be 100 percent. They're never going to be what they were able to be; they're never going to have the potential to be what they wanted to be. They're going to be disabled, and not be recognized in New Jersey as a veteran who is disabled. That needs to change; and it needs to change in every aspect of any benefit that's accrued by veterans who are considered disabled veterans, but not by their counterparts who are disabled, but not considered disabled, because of our archaic system in New Jersey.

It's a simple thing of changing the wording in the Constitution to say, "You're a disabled veteran if you get disabled while serving your nation; whether you're a National Guard member, a member in the Reserve component, or on active duty. You were in uniform, you were injured, and we will take care of you, and we will afford you some benefits." That ought to be the ground rule right from the get-go, if you will. And why we haven't been able to achieve that, that escapes me.

And whether we're talking about getting a break for your property tax if you're 100 percent rated, but not considered by New Jersey as disabled; or whether it's Civil Service points; whether it's retirement benefits -- it doesn't much matter. What matters is, you're disabled, but you're not considered disabled in New Jersey. We have to change that. That's the most important thing that we can do without breaking the bank.

It will cost some money here and there; but it is the right thing to do for the right reasons; and I, for one, think we ought to do that without any further delay. Because I can't see any viable excuse for not

recognizing somebody who, while in service to their country, got injured. The fact that you weren't injured in a war zone, or the injury didn't occur from an enemy action or whatever, does not make your injury any less severe, and it is time to get that right.

I think that needs to be a priority, because that's something we can do, and we can do it without a whole lot of dragging our feet. That would recognize these people who have gone through a whole lot, and don't quite have the quality of life because of the injury they sustained. We owe them that much; they served their country and, as a result of that, they've been injured. And it ought not be said that it has to happen in a certain place, or a certain time, or whatever. That has to go.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Thank you so much for your comments.

John P. Dorrity, MSW, EVA; all New Jersey veterans.

UNIDENTIFIED MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE:

(Indiscernible).

J O H N P. D O R R I T Y: He just knocked his computer out of his hands (referring to off-mike disturbance) (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Okay.

MR. DORRITY: I am not a technocrat.

Anyway, ladies and gentlemen--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Okay; could you restate your name for the record, please?

MR. DORRITY: Yes, I will. My name is John Paul Dorrity; I live on Kettle Creek Road in Toms River, New Jersey, 08753.

I'm a combat disabled Vietnam vet. I'm also the Director of Veteran Services for Ocean County, New Jersey; I'm a life member of the VFW, the American Legion, the DAV, AMVETS, and a past National Commander of the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers, and the National Service Director for nine years.

Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for allowing me the opportunity to speak.

We have been battling a *Vet is a Vet is a Vet (sic)* Bill for more than a generation. I have had the opportunity, in the last 37 years, of advocating and representing us; of dealing with, probably, 100,000 cases; winning 96 percent of them. I'm not a nice guy. We have been battling this thing around for over a generation. Do any of you people realize how many people, who are New Jersey residents -- veterans -- have died in that timeframe? It is time -- it is time; because I know there were previous Committees that argued this same point. But it is time today for us to stop talking and start acting.

There are many New Jersey residents who served in the military who can't call themselves *veterans*. I don't care about the money; I don't. The money is a factor. When you roll it back on us, you fail to consider that most of those World War II and Korea -- and now my era -- vets are dying on a daily basis. If it's only about money, ladies and gentlemen, you failed; the entire Legislature has failed. We need to get this Bill out of Committee and voted. So let's see who walks the walk and who just talks, because talk is cheap.

Thank you for your time. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Thank you so much for your emotional comments. I'm sure we are all taking it to heart, because this is something that-- A lot us weren't there before; and we're here now, and we are really going to try to do the best we can in order to remedy some of the situations that occurred in the past.

Johnnie Walker, Department of Adjunct, DAV.

Could you state your name for the record, please?

J O H N N I E W A L K E R: My name is Johnnie Walker; I'm the DAV Adjutant for the Department of New Jersey.

I reside on West Pacific Avenue, Villas, New Jersey.

Madam Chairman, members, I thank you for the opportunity, and I appreciate having a chance to speak on behalf of my fellow veterans.

But the first thing I would like to do, if you don't mind, is I would like to recognize our newly elected Department Commander, who was just voted in minutes ago, Mr. Gordon Lee Payne.

Would you please stand up? (applause)

Thank you.

Disabled American veterans -- we've been fighting the fight for a long time. This fight for a *Vet is a Vet* has been going on -- probably some of you in this room were that old (indicates).

When we joined the service, or were drafted -- however we got to where we were -- it wasn't our decision. We had no decision. We just signed the paper, put our name on the line, and we went wherever we were told to go. We were soldiers; we did what we had to do.

I have a problem when we keep telling -- they tell us about the money; when we get a newly appointed Governor who wants to split the

military; he wants to split DMAVA; start a new system, one for the National Guard, one for the regular Army -- for the regular military. You know, wasted money. We know how to waste money, and you have wasted money for many, many years. I think this is one time we ask you to have a backbone; stand up. Stand up and support us and be the people you told us who you were, when you were out getting votes -- that you were going to do what you said you were going to do; that you were going to support us.

It's time to bring this Bill to the end. It's time is here; we can't go on any longer. I agree exactly with what Bill said, and what John said.

You know, we just read a list of deceased members in our Department at a memorial service Sunday night. And it was over 2,000 veterans; 2,000 veterans in the Department of New Jersey -- disabled American veterans passed away. An example: 2000 and -- excuse me; I just lost the date -- seven years ago, from this date, we had 44,000 members of the Disabled American Veterans in the State of New Jersey; seven years ago. This year, we're down to 19,000. How much longer do we have to wait for these guys to die before they get what's entitled to them?

Once again, I thank you for giving me the opportunity. But I beg -- I beg you, please, let's do something about it.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Ken Hagemann and Barbara Hagemann, could you please come up? We'll take you together.

Could you state your name for the record, please?

K E N H A G E M A N N: Ken Hagemann, a resident of Tuckerton, Ocean County; and the State Adjutant for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

BARBARA KIM - HAGEMANN: Barbara Hagemann; same address (laughter).

MR. HAGEMANN: Thank you for being here today. We greatly appreciate it.

I served in the Marine Corps as a scout sniper, with deployments to Asia, Africa, Europe, Middle East, Southwest Asia, and north of the Arctic Circle. In 1987 and 1988, I was sent to the Persian Gulf region, where a number of naval ships, along with a small task force of Marines and Navy SEALs, served in operations which kept the world's oil shipping lanes open.

And later I was involved in several combat operations against the Iranian Armed Forces, and others, which resulted in 39 U.S. sailors and Marines killed in action, and 31 wounded in action. The operations have been described in books as "an era of guerilla warfare," "war at sea," and "a time of burning ships, air strikes, and secret missions," which evolved into a quasi-war with Iran, and culminated with the largest sea and air battle since World War II.

While there I was awarded the Marine Corps Combat Action Ribbon, Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal, Joint Meritorious Unit Award, and Meritorious Unit Award.

The United States Veterans Administration later classified me as a *disabled veteran*, due to injuries I received related to the combat operations.

Upon my return to New Jersey, I was shocked to learn my State did not consider me a veteran for any Civil Service preference, pension benefits, tax relief.

More shocking was that the spouses and parents of my 39 brothers in arms, who gave their lives in defense of this nation, were also denied any veteran status.

Alter my discharge from the Marine Corps I continued to serve my country and community as a police officer, retiring as a Lieutenant. Had I been granted Civil Service preference, I most certainly would have attained the rank of Captain.

The VFW, and other veteran organizations, have been advocating the Vet is a Vet Bill for over 20 years, for the sacrifices of our veterans deserve recognition. For our military personnel, there is no such thing as a peacetime service. As I described in my experience, 39 servicemen died in a war/conflict/action/peacekeeping mission -- whatever you want to call it. Our citizens knew nothing about what was going on out there at the time.

As we recently learned in the news, four Green Berets were killed in Africa a month or two ago. And just a few days ago, another Green Beret was killed in Somalia.

Unfortunately, the death of many of our military personnel in far-off lands occurs far too often and goes unreported in the media.

There are tens of thousands of American personnel now in the Pacific Rim -- in Korea, Guam -- minutes away from possibly being vaporized by nuclear weapons from North Korea. American troops are deployed to every corner of the world and are engaged in combat operations in over 30 countries as we speak. They, too, will be denied veteran status when they come home to New Jersey.

Prior to 1975 -- as everybody talked about -- veterans who served 90 days of active duty during specified periods were granted veterans' status, whether they served their entire time at Fort Dix; some people went to boot camp at Fort Dix, and spent their whole four years there and they're considered a veteran. But subsequent to 1975, all military service required boots on the ground; and only a time of war emergency, specified by the legislators-- The State was able to pick and choose who they wanted to make a veteran; which conflict they wanted to pick. Obviously mine wasn't.

Article IX of the New Jersey Constitution was amended in 1999 to grant tax relief to any veteran so defined by the State Legislature. We often hear the argument that including more veterans into the New Jersey definition of *veteran* will cost money. It will; but not as much as the cost was in 1999, when the constitutional change was made. The 2000 U.S. Census reported 672,217 veterans residing in New Jersey at the time, most of them serving in World War II, or the Korean War, or Vietnam, and eligible for the \$250 tax deduction.

According to the Veterans Administration, in 2003, New Jersey had the highest percentage of World War II veterans in the nation, with 23 percent of all New Jersey veterans serving during that era, all eligible for the tax deduction.

Today, there are 340,561 veterans residing in New Jersey. Ten years from now that number is estimated, by the VA, to be 223,567; and in 2045, down to 124,437 veterans. If you granted a tax break today to every veterans alive in the State of New Jersey, it would still be less than funds that were allotted in 1999.

And veterans' preference to veterans wouldn't cost you a dime.

We're tired of the "we don't have the money" excuse, quite frankly. The State had the funds in 1999; and if the savings, caused by the declining veteran population were squandered by the bureaucrats, the money needs to be found again and redirected back to our veterans.

Veterans are getting the short end of the stick here in New Jersey. The Governor has recently proposed a budget giving money away to everyone except veterans. He has even proposed to reduce \$1 million from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs transportation program, which is desperately needed by our aging veteran population.

As we all know, on his campaign trail, he repeatedly declared DMAVA as broken and in need of an overhaul. It is unbelievable that his first act is to reduce the budget of that agency, and put the health and well-being of our most vulnerable veterans at risk. His claim of a stronger and fairer New Jersey doesn't appear to include veterans.

It's time to put America's veterans first; it's time for the New Jersey legislators to grant preference to all veterans by legislation and an amendment to the State Constitution. It's time to get the Vet is a Vet Bill passed and enacted into law.

Thank you. (applause)

MS. KIM-HAGEMANN: Assemblywoman, Committee, after listening to my husband, Duane Sarmiento, John P. Dorrity -- who I also volunteered to work in -- I've heard very often the same thing. They are not a vet, and we have to tell them they do not qualify for the \$250 deduction at the time.

It's very hard. As Duane and everybody else has stated, that they *are* a veteran. We did volunteer; we were not drafted, we raised our right hand not once, but twice.

We kept our end of the bargain, and New Jersey's stated laws say we are not veterans, or they do not qualify as veterans.

I'm tired of hearing about the money. I've been listening to the news. If we can give out free education to non-citizens, we can take care of our citizen veterans who are residents of the State of New Jersey.

Thank you. (applause)

MR. HAGEMANN: Nice.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: George Schnepf, from the Disabled Veterans.

Could you state your name for the record, please?

G E O R G E R. S C H N E P F, Jr.: George R. Schnepf, Jr., Winding Road, Islin, New Jersey, 08830.

Madam Chairwoman, members of the Committee, I consider it an honor and a privilege to be able to speak before you today.

New Jersey is not in favor of their veterans. I can only reiterate what my former comrades have stated to you.

I'd like to just bring a couple of facts that maybe you are not aware of, especially the people who have never served in the service. We've had people serve overseas in areas like Turkey, the Arctic, Antarctica during the cold war, defending this country against a possible attack from Russia. None of those people are considered veterans.

Our State has certain dates where we are considered veterans, especially in the Vietnam Conflict. New Jersey says if you were in the

service before May of 1975, you're a veteran. The Federal government says if you were in before October of 1976, you're a veteran. Why can't we even get our dates to agree with those of the Federal government?

We have a hard time explaining this to veterans when they come to us looking for help. I realize there is a money factor. I come from the Disabled American Veterans; that's who I'm here to represent. Try telling that to a veteran who doesn't have his leg; he's missing an arm; suffering from ischemic heart disease; has lost his mind. We're losing 22 veterans a day to suicide because of the effects their minds are going through. A lot of these people are not considered veterans.

We need you people to stand up; fight for the people of our state and our country. We need to defend our homeland first, before we start worrying about foreign people. It's important; everyone here raise their hand whether they were drafted, volunteered, or maybe even volunteered after having a draft card, like some of us did. We made a commitment to the country; the country made a commitment to us, and we don't feel that that commitment is being lived up to.

I thank you for your time. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Our next speaker is John Vollrath, the VFW District--

J O H N V O L L R A T H: : (off mike) Excuse me; I want to abstain speaking.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Yes; can you come up front?

MR. VOLLRATH: (off mike) What I have to say is that--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Can you come up front and state your name, please?

MR. VOLLRATH: Yes, John Vollrath, District 17 Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars here in Cape May County.

I reside on Route 9 North, in Cape May Court House, New Jersey.

I was going to speak about something relevant to this Committee. It may come up at another time; but so many people are familiar with what I was going to discuss, I want to leave it go.

I won't take up any more of your time, but I would like to thank everybody who spoke before me. They all spoke very well, and I think you should heed their words of advice: Hey, a vet is a vet. I don't see how you can see it any other way.

But change it; thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: That completes our list of people who signed up, but I'm going to open the floor to anybody who feels that they have something to say. Since you've been sitting here and would like to say something, I would love to hear.

So could you please come up and state your name.

CARL P. KARMILOWICZ: Hello, my--

I'm with the DAV.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Can you state your name, please?

MR. KARMILOWICZ: My name is Carl P. Karmilowicz; I live at -- I have a property in Avalon Manor; I also have property in Pennsylvania, California, New Hampshire, and some other states. I lived throughout the United States in my career with the Marine Corps and with the Federal government.

I have property in Pennsylvania, which is my legal address. And Pennsylvania, and the other states-- I didn't realize this or find this out until I retired. They give veteran benefits-- A person who served in the military is a veteran; Pennsylvania, Texas, New Hampshire, and the other states. I did not realize how bad New Jersey was until I started to come and live in New Jersey temporarily.

Pennsylvania -- since I'm a Korean veteran, you do have a pretty good idea how old I am -- has always been given veteran benefits, tax free; Social Security, tax free; retirement benefits, tax free. New Jersey seems -- wants more and more money, and they will not give benefits to people who perform and have contributed to the State.

It seems that New Jersey is more interested in giving benefits to the people who do not contribute. I expect that, very soon, this Administration in New Jersey, and this Governor, is going to give free education to the illegals in the United States and people who are not contributing to New Jersey.

I didn't prepare for this; this is what I -- I just happened to be here, and I heard these other people talking, and I completely agree with them. New Jersey -- you're not doing your job. Help the people who need the help.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Is there anybody else who would like to come up?

State your name, please, for the record.

GEORGE LEE PAYNE: Yes, Madam Chairman.

My name is Gordon Lee Payne; I'm the recently elected Commander of the Disabled American Veterans, State of New Jersey.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today.

I'm a 20-year retiree from the Navy; I'm 100 percent disabled. I am recognized as a vet, because I was in Desert Storm.

I have a personal acquaintance with the man who was our past National Commander of the DAV, who was a Coast Guard rescue swimmer, who saved lives out in the water. The man developed sepsis because of his actions, and woke up and had no arms or legs. This man, in New Jersey, would not be considered a veteran. I can't see how any man, woman, or legislator, or Governor would consider that right.

I really have nothing further to say; I had nothing prepared, other than I wanted to speak from my heart.

I thank you for your time. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: The floor is still open to anybody else who would like to come and say something. Because we're here to understand and to listen to you. So if anybody wants to, feel free to just come on up, you know; we're here to listen to you.

Can you state your name, please?

MR. VOLLRATH: It's John Vollrath again.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Okay.

MR. VOLLRATH: District 17 Commander.

I would like to remind this Committee that, not too long ago, the Governor-elect of this State stood in this very same room and acted like he was a true friend of all veterans. And then he turns around and takes

money away from the veterans; splits DMAVA. It makes things more difficult for veterans to get treatment in this state.

So remind that Governor of his promise, with his grin up here on that podium, when he pretty much was friends to all the veterans. I hope he changes his opinion quickly.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Yes, please, come on up.

Can you state your name for the record, please?

H A Z E L R A D C L I F F: Good afternoon.

I'm Hazel Radcliff; I'm a past State President for the Auxillary to the VFW.

And I was President in 2007-2008; and I went to Trenton with the Legislative Committee back then to testify for a *Vet is a Vet*.

My feeling is, they don't ask; they don't tell you where they want to go. They go; they do their job. They help everybody who they are asked to help.

We, as a country, are considered the best country in the world. We help everybody. They want to come here for a better life. What's wrong with our veterans having a better life? (applause)

Our veterans (indiscernible), they need it, whether they served in a conflict, or whether they served at home, or whether they served in a peaceful environment. They served; they put on the uniform, they did what they were supposed to do. We're finding money to help all these other people come to our country. And don't get me wrong; I'm not prejudiced, I don't deny that. But we have to honor our people here at home also. And

our veterans -- if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't have this country for them to come to, to have a better life. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Anyone else?

Come on. (laughter)

Okay; state your name, and you can fill out the form after you've finished.

L U D D I E H. A U S T I N: Yes; good afternoon.

Luddie Austin; VFW -- Trenton VFW Post 12165 Commander, and as a member of the Legislative Committee.

Thank you for coming today.

And the issue -- I'm for sure that you heard it -- but one thing you also have to take into consideration. Those residents from New Jersey, who were born and raised here, who do enter the military -- by not giving us the proper benefits, sometimes you're stopping veterans from returning home. I have a daughter now who is in the military, okay? She's stationed in Tennessee. But she changed her residency to Tennessee, because Tennessee allows her more benefits than the State of New Jersey does. Then what you have to realize -- that's cutting down on the veteran population in the state, which is not fair to us.

And I know that you have asked many of us to come forward, just because you want to hear from us. But what I would like to hear, from each and every one of you, is your commitment that we can get this moving forward.

So instead of hearing from us, I would like to hear that from you -- your commitment. Where do we start to get this moving forward?

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Okay; at this time, does anybody else, just before we ask the Committee to--

MR. McNULTY: Sure; I'll make a return visit. (laughter)

I'm always known for being quiet and demure.

Two questions: The first being, do you have any questions of us? We have a lot of people who I would indicate are experts in the field of being a veteran. Now, if you have a question, this is the time to air that out.

And the second part is, I'd like a show of hands, a commitment from you people to help us to improve the status of veterans in New Jersey.

So who's with me on this? Okay? (applause)

Do you have any questions, while we have our veteran community here in full force?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Okay; at this time, we're going to give our Committee a chance to speak. And we're going to start with--

MR. McNULTY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN ARMATO: First I want to say thank you for allowing us to come here.

I enlisted in high school, in 1967, and went in the United States Air Force. I served in the Phillipine Islands and in Korea.

And sometimes I'm ashamed to say that I'm a VFW member; VFW Post 158. I never served in combat; but because of what we did in the Phillipines to aid our military in Vietnam, and because I was in Korea -- which, at the time, was still considered *at war* for more than -- I was there for six months.

But it's difficult to stand here, or sit here, and listen to the people who are truly veterans. But because of their time and where they served, the State of New Jersey does not recognize them.

The way I look at it is, I signed the same contract that you signed. And when we signed that contract, we told the United States that we would do anything they asked of us, including die for our country.

I'm an Assemblyman from District 2, which is Atlantic County. I'm an Assemblyman for all of six months; outstanding career so far. (laughter) And I am quite fortunate to be on the Veterans' Committee. We have an excellent Chair, who truly understands what a veteran is.

Now, it's all well and good for us to raise our hand and say we commit to doing things. But if you know anything at all about how Trenton operates, it's not just us. Yes, we can make a bill, and we can get it out of Committee. And we even might get it to the Assembly. But then it takes off into another branch; it goes to the Senate, and then the Governor has to sign it. And believe me, I've come to realize that this is a very tedious process.

I can sit here and tell you that I will do what I can do to move these bills. Assemblyman Bruce Land has an excellent Bill; that's a Vet is a Vet. We know that the Federal government says a vet is a vet. We also know -- and this is surprising to me -- that 49 other states say a vet is a vet. That alone should embarrass us enough to be able to do something. (applause)

So what I can tell you is, I will do what I can do. I have a couple of bills now; one of interest is the burn pits. We want to fund full medical if that disease came from burn pits. And I don't think the public

understands that the armed forces burns everything; we leave nothing behind.

So we're working on that; and I will make that pledge.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN ANDRZEJCZAK: Thank you, everybody, for coming out today.

Madam Chair, thank you for holding the Committee here in Wildwood, in the 1st District. Welcome to the 1st District.

Everybody who is here for the convention -- I know all of you are from all over the state. Welcome to Wildwood; welcome to South Jersey, the best part of New Jersey. (laughter)

But I am going to to piggyback off of what John said. And I am also a veteran; I served two tours in Iraq. I went through what many of you went through. Unfortunately, I ended up on the wrong end of a grenade; many of you know my story. I had my left leg blown off, and it ended up being amputated. And coming home to New Jersey -- it was not easy; it still is not easy. So hearing your concerns -- I'm reliving it all over again, because it's something that I live every single day.

We're not doing enough for our veterans; we could absolutely be doing more. Not only federally, but here in the State of New Jersey. And one of the main reasons why I even decided to run and get into the Legislature was to do everything that I possible could for our veterans. I knew that, through the process, I may receive help and I may end up getting what I deserve -- which I still did not, and I'm still working on that.

But at the same time, it's not about me. How many other veterans are going through the same thing that I'm going through, who do not have that voice here in the State of New Jersey?

And I still have the drive and dedication to fight for our veterans and make sure that we get what we deserve. And the money that was brought up -- about the \$1 million. I was here that day when the Governor came down; and I was up on the stage. And I remember the speech, I mean, to a *T*, as far as what he was saying and the message that he was putting out. And in my opinion, he's not living up to that. We need to hold him accountable.

It was our legislation, here in the 1st, that we put forward that dedicated the \$1 million for transportation to our veterans in the veteran homes. We went through, and that was a whole long process that we battled and fought for. And in the very end, DMAVA ended up holding that money up; and it was due to our current Governor who said not to move forward with spending it.

Well, the whole purpose of getting that funding and having that money dedicated was to make sure that we were taking care of our veterans. And now he's saying not to spend it? And I forget who spoke about it earlier, but that seems the exact opposite of what we should be doing and what he preached about when he was here in Wildwood.

It was actually John; thank you, John.

So we can be, and we should absolutely be, doing more. And we fought for this country; and when we came home, we were promised to be taken care of. And we did our end; we lived up to our contract. It is

time that not only nationally and federally they live up to their end of the contract; but also for the State of New Jersey to live up to their end.

And I will continue to fight and advocate for all of you, because I am one of you. And if there's anything that you ever need from me, feel free. I don't care if you're in my District, out of my District -- come to me, let me know, let me know what I can do. And I will -- I'll give you my word, I promise I will do everything that I possibly can to help out.

Beyond that, I don't know what else I can do, other than just to continue to fight.

Again, thank you all for coming out today. I hope you have a great day and a great convention. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Yes.

R O B E R T L O O B Y: Yes; may I approach and speak? Because the Assemblyman just prompted an idea, or thought, in this gray hair. (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Sure.

MR. LOOBY: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Please state your name.

MR. LOOBY: Yes, ma'am.

My name is Bob Looby; I am the Post Adjutant of VFW Post 7857. I live on County Road 519 in Alexandria Township.

Assemblyman, thank you very much for bringing up, again -- even though I heard it before -- that \$1 million has been frozen from the DMAVA account.

The only reason I'm here-- Of course, I echo everybody else's comments; but I am also a member of the Atlantic City Regional Stand

Down, as well as the VFW, the DAV, the American Legion, Red Cross, Catholic Charities, etc., etc.

And we applied for a DMAVA grant, to help with that stand down, in the amount of \$2,000. And as you probably can imagine -- or maybe not -- \$2,000 will go a long, long way with clothing, food, resources for our homeless veterans, in seven South Jersey counties. I asked the status right before the stand down, and they said it was frozen.

So now I understand why; it's a disgrace. Our most at-risk veterans and families; there were mothers with children at our stand down. It's not that we committed resources to these folks; but how could we look at the 137 who came that day -- again, from seven South Jersey counties -- how can we look them in the face and say, "Eh, sorry; DMAVA promised the money, your grant was approved, but you ain't going to get it."

Thank you very much. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Carey Prichett.

CAREY PRITCHETT: Madam Assemblywoman, Assemblymen, Council, we really appreciate you taking your time to come here.

Some of the things that I got out of this is there are things that we can do that cost no money, so there should be no delay in seeing action on some of those things: job preference, a number of different things.

Where there is an issue of money we would like some transparency to see where that -- so that we have the opportunity to either rebut those numbers, or maybe offer another solution to get the numbers to come out right. If we're fighting against something we can't see, we have our hands tied behind our backs.

And at the end of the day, we're not here to be adversaries with our government; we're here to protect our veterans. And we want our government to help us do that.

So with all these people here, we want you to just get that point. And we would like to see some things come to the -- through the legislation in Trenton, and get some action on some stuff. Let's see what we can get through the Assembly and the Senate and get passed; and we will do the things that we have to do to get the Governor to sign on the dotted line. We all signed on the dotted line; this is his chance to sign on the dotted line.

So we thank you for your time. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZZEO: Thank you.

I'm Assemblyman Vince Mazzeo from District 2. This is my partner over here (indicates), John Armato.

I've been in the Legislature for five years; and I have put through some bills that actually helped the veterans and veteran families.

Some of you might not know me, but I have a business up in Northfield; it's a fruit and produce business, and it's very busy this time of year. But, you know, having the opportunity to come and talk in front of veterans and listen to their concerns, I make it a priority. And I thought it was important enough to come down here for those who served.

I want to thank you; and thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come here.

In public life, you know -- a legislator, or councilman, or a mayor -- shame on you if you don't understand, being an elected official, what's it all about. I've been-- This is my 15th year serving the public; I

started as a Councilman in Northfield, then Mayor. And one of my first duties as Mayor was to Chair the Memorial Day services for my community. And I learned, real quick, that being a chairman of Memorial Day -- you talk to veterans and you understand what it's all about. And one of the priorities that I had, as an elected official, that I realized is that I couldn't serve as a mayor or a councilman if it wasn't for people who served our country. And I understand that.

And my father served, 1950 to 1953, in the Navy in the Korean Conflict; my uncle served in the Navy as well, from 1952 to 1955. So I do understand what people who served -- what it represents.

One of the areas that I saw problems, too, is -- we talked about disabilities. You know, people have disabilities today; you know, they come back with these, I guess, from (indiscernible) post-9/11, the families suffer a lot because the technology -- medicine, people who get shot and lose their arms or legs -- the family, really, is stressful.

One of the bills that I put together was Caregivers. And, you know, a lot of things in Trenton take a long time. The Caregiver's Act -- it took two sessions to get all those bills passed. But the Governor finally signed all of them in; it gave respite care to the caregivers. It gave some financial education, and things of that nature.

But I guess coming here today -- what I've really got myself educated on was that, first of all, we don't have any right, as legislators, right now, I don't think, to add new programs that cost money without fixing this. (applause) For whatever reason, we have new Governor and a new Administration; and we have to get him what the priorities are in New Jersey.

And I'll just leave it with this. If -- we're the only state in the whole country that represents, saying that, you know, if you haven't served in war time or overseas, for 14 days or more, then I think there's a problem if we stand out in Jersey, and we're the only ones that do this. We have to fix that.

So I'm here to tell you that we're going to work on it, and make it better. And I certainly appreciate this opportunity, hearing from all of you, because it definitely needs to be fixed.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYMAN DANCER: Well, thank you, first of all, for being here.

Assemblyman Ron Dancer; I represent the 12th Legislative District. That's parts of four counties; but to give you an idea, it's all of Central Jersey area, to let you know.

You know, we can all say it comes down to the money. It really comes down to priorities. In every budget, every budget year, there's approximately, in the State budget, \$37 billion; 2,600, give or take, line items. And every one of those line items in a budget has a constituency. You all are a constituency.

There are competing demands in a budget, any budget; competing demands. But there are limited resources. So what does it come down to? Priorities -- priorities.

This is not as much about money as it is about priorities. We all just sat in the legislature last week; in seven days -- less than seven days, sports wagering in the State of New Jersey went through committees, the

Senate, the Assembly, and was signed Monday on the Governor's desk. It can be done if it's a priority.

Which raises an issue -- there's now new revenues. Now, I know that in that legislation there are priorities -- good priorities; there are a lot of good priorities in our budget, all with good cause. When you have competing demands and limited resources, you need to prioritize and you come up with a priority short list. Veterans should be number one on the short priority list. (applause)

When you can have a budget of \$37 billion; and we've all sat here today about-- And you spoke (indicates) eloquently about it -- about the fact that we can start new programs -- as we've said here today -- and not yet take care of our veterans.

Now, this \$37 billion budget -- and I'll finish up here, Chairwoman -- there's an amount of money in this proposed budget; it's not a lot of money, relatively speaking; but it's \$2.1 million. You may say, "What's \$2.1 million; what is it getting out of this \$37 billion budget?" Again, priorities; and you've all identified it here today. That \$2.1 million is being proposed -- it's a proposal; you don't know whether the Legislature is going to pass it, but it's a proposal right now -- \$2.1 million can be found to create a legal defense fund, not for our veterans, but for illegal immigrants.

You said it best; you said it best -- is that we need to provide a better life for our veterans who provided life to those who are here making the decisions today.

Thank you for your help. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Okay, if anybody still has their write-in slips who spoke, could you please turn them in?

You want to speak again?

MR. THOMSON: No, I want to speak after you speak.
(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Okay.

Well, I want to thank you for having us today, and I want to thank everybody for attending. I want to thank all my colleagues for being here today, because this is an important issue for all of us.

As the Assemblywoman in the 28th District in Newark -- and I represent Newark, Bloomfield, Irvington, Belleville, and Glen Ridge. And I also-- My husband was in the Air Force, and I'm also a member of the Auxiliary Post 152 out of Newark.

I came to this Committee 10 years ago; and for the last 10 years, I've been trying to pass a bill saying-- We changed the title of it a couple of times, trying to move it. And we changed it from the *Border Eligibility* to *a Vet is a Vet*; and then you change it back to this and that.

But the main purpose here is that we need to -- I think we need to work a little harder, in our Assembly and in our Senate, to make sure that we get this Bill right so we can service our veterans. It's not enough for us to come and say, "Thank you for your service," if we're not serving you. And I think that's something that we are all going to have to stand up and do, as Legislators in the State of New Jersey. We don't want to-- That makes our state behind everybody else's. If everybody else is represented as being servicing their veterans and doing the right thing to identify what a

veteran is, I think we need to step up to the plate regardless of the costs. Sometimes we may have to bite the bullet and just do it.

And I hope, through this hearing that we had today -- and we're going to continue to have these hearings throughout the state. We're here in Wildwood today, but we're going to take this show on the road; and we're going to ask for permission to take it all over the State of New Jersey so everybody can be heard so they can understand the true responsibility, as the State of New Jersey, we have to our veterans.

So I appreciate you being here; I also have to recognize Senator Lance (*sic*) is here today.

Yes; Senator Lance. I'm sorry. (laughter)

He's here; would he--

ASSEMBLYMAN R. BRUCE LAND: (off mike) Did you give me a promotion? (laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Well, so, I'm just really concerned that we haven't -- that we failed you. And that's something that we should never do -- fail the people who served us, and who were committed -- that you signed up to be a veteran; and you signed up for this job, sometimes not knowing where you were going to be, how long you were going to be there. And not only did you sign up, your family signed up as well when you were deployed to different areas. So I'm very concerned about the Bill.

I really do appreciate you coming; I appreciate my colleagues for being here. And I'm sure-- We're going to try to work hard to see if we can get it passed, how we can get something passed that will be -- that could

be acceptable for you. Even -- we might not get everything you want, but I'm hoping that we'll get most of the things that you need.

And I want to say, again, thank you for having us here; and I do really appreciate what you are doing for our country.

And I am going to make sure we try to get something done for you; it's not just talk. But we have to walk the walk that we talk about, every day, so we can't go around and be saying one thing and not standing up to do the right thing.

MR. THOMSON: Madam Chairwoman, again, on behalf of the Veterans of the Foreign Wars, the DAV, and all veterans who are here today, I want to thank you and your Committee for coming here.

I want everyone who is sitting here to recognize that these legislators represent 6 legislators out of 120; and that their fight is our fight. And that when you go home -- because these legislators here don't represent you in your own communities in your legislative districts where you live -- you need to take this conversation to your own State Senator and your own State Assemblyman. Let them know that you were here; let them know that you spoke before the Assembly Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee. Let them know that we have the commitment of this Committee, and now we want their commitment to work with this Committee. And that's what you need to do when you go home.

Secondly, Madam Chairwoman, the incoming Commander for the VFW, for this year, has asked me to be the Convention Director for next year. So even before my official title begins on Saturday, let me extend an invitation, to you and your Committee, to come back and join us again next June in 2019.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: We have-- Assemblyman Land, could you please come up?

ASSEMBLYMAN LAND: Sure.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Assemblyman Bruce Land, from the 1st District, here in South Jersey.

I had the privilege of serving on this Committee for a few years. I am no longer on it, but these guys do a great job. I know how concerned they are for veterans and our issues.

We need to get this stuff done, and we need to get it done soon. I retired from State law enforcement as a Captain. When I first got into law enforcement, I became very good friends with seven other individuals. We all served in Vietnam -- different eras, different times -- but we became very close. We used to go down to the Wall together on Veterans Day, Memorial Day.

Number seven died this weekend. We're losing our veterans very-- Excuse me for my--

We can't paddle foot around; we need to get this done. A vet is a vet, no matter where they served, what they did. We need to get this done, and I know these guys (indicates) will try to do it.

Thank you. (applause)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Once again, I'd like to thank you for the invitation.

I'd like to thank everybody who participated today; I thank all

my colleagues for being here.

And this hearing is adjourned.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)