
Public Hearing

before

ASSEMBLY MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Assembly Concurrent Resolution No. 98

*(Proposes constitutional amendment to permit disabled veterans
who served in U.S. Armed Forces at any time to receive civil service preference)*

LOCATION: Committee Room 13
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: June 12, 2008
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Jack Conners, Chair
Assemblywoman Cleopatra G. Tucker, Vice Chair
Assemblywoman Nilsa Cruz-Perez
Assemblyman Declan J. O'Scanlon Jr.
Assemblyman Daniel M. Van Pelt



ALSO PRESENT:

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

Douglas S. White
*Assembly Majority
Committee Aide*

Natalie A. Collins
*Assembly Republican
Committee Aide*

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

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ASSEMBLYMAN JACK CONNERS (Chair): Ladies and gentlemen, if you'd please rise, Assemblywoman Cruz-Perez will lead us in the Pledge to the Flag. (audience recites Pledge of Allegiance)

Thank you.

Ladies and gentlemen, we're going to have a public hearing on Assembly Concurrent Resolution 98.

Tracey, would you take a roll call, please?

MS. PINO MURPHY (Committee Aide): Assemblyman Van Pelt.

ASSEMBLYMAN VAN PELT: Here.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Assemblyman O'Scanlon.

ASSEMBLYMAN O'SCANLON: Here.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Assemblywoman Cruz-Perez.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CRUZ-PEREZ: Present.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Vice Chair Tucker.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN TUCKER: Here.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Chairman Connors.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Here.

MS. PINO MURPHY: Assembly Concurrent Resolution 98: This concurrent resolution proposes a constitutional amendment to permit certain disabled veterans to receive civil service preference. Currently, only disabled veterans who served in the United States Armed Forces during the time of war may receive civil service hiring preference.

This amendment would permit all disabled veterans, including those who did not serve during a time of war, to also receive such preference. To qualify, the veteran must have become disabled while

performing active service in the military. Wartime service would still be required for veterans who are not disabled.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Ladies and gentlemen, before we take some testimony, this is actually the second time that we've had a public hearing on this resolution. And the reason we must do this is that originally when I wanted to-- When I was introducing legislation that would give all veterans -- across all veterans -- five points on a civil service exam, and if they were disabled, 10 points on a civil service exam, I found out that I did not give 10 points to a disabled veteran unless their disabling injury came about while they were in battle. And that's what the Constitution says.

So in order to do that, I was told that I have to change the Constitution, and hence the requirement that if you want to put something on the ballot, you must have a public hearing before you can introduce a concurrent resolution like that. And that is the reason for us to have a public hearing today.

And I have-- I only have one person who has indicated that they want to speak, and that's Al Bucchi, who is the Legislative Director for the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Al, welcome. The floor is yours.

A L B E R T B U C C H I: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members.

This is a long time coming. This bill -- I guess it's about eight years, 10 years.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Ten.

MR. BUCCHI: Ten years.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Well, in different forms.

MR. BUCCHI: In different forms.

And about, I guess, six years ago, the so-called *Vet is a Vet* bill-- We decided we had to go at it piecemeal because of the total cost of the bill.

This one here will just make it a fair playing field for veterans to get a civil service job in the State of New Jersey. Presently, only certain veterans can. New Jersey is one of the unique states that only recognizes certain veterans, where the Federal government has a broader sense of who a veteran is. So this basically tells a veteran, "You're recognized by the Federal government. You're also recognized by the State of New Jersey."

But back in 1947, when they made the State Constitution, I figure those lawmakers and people figured World War II would probably be the last war that this country would ever see. They were wrong. So those who go off to battle need to be supported by those either in the states, or in Germany, or all over the world -- supplying the bullets, and blankets, and beans in order to win, especially right now, the war on terrorism.

We came really close last year. We got it through with great bipartisan support -- got it through the Assembly. Unfortunately, it got stuck in the Senate, and we missed the deadline to get it on the November ballot.

We're early now in this legislative session. I urge that we get this out. I urge that we get it passed in the Assembly so we can start working a little harder on the Senate side.

So that is basically my testimony, Mr. Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Al, if you would be kind enough, spell your name.

MR. BUCCHI: Yes, it's B-U-C-C-H-I; Albert, A-L-B-E-R-T.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Thank you.

Are there any questions?

I just have a couple of comments.

Mr. Bucchi is absolutely right. We've been working on this subject matter for many years now -- I guess at least the eleventh year of discussing the subject of what we call a *Vet is a Vet*, and that is recognizing every single -- that a person who has put on a uniform in the State of New Jersey -- recognizing them as a veteran.

However, we have a situation out there where, unless you were -- I guess post-Vietnam. You may not be considered a veteran if you did not serve during very, very specific dates, that we indicate, for a minimum of two weeks in different battles, and conflicts, and things like that. And as a result, there are actually some people -- soldiers out there who actually wore a uniform for 20 years. They've retired. They're not considered a veteran. There are even some people out there who are 100 percent disabled, and we don't consider them a veteran in the State of New Jersey -- or at least consider them a veteran in terms of certain benefits.

So for years now we've been discussing it in different ways. And even before, I think, we knew that we were -- budget wise, the mess that we were in quite frankly-- Before we even knew that, we looked at the cost of the *Vet is a Vet* bill, and that property tax deduction that is now up to \$250. Back at the time, it was \$50.

So we had many conversations with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, with the American Legion, with the Disabled Veterans, Purple Hearts. It just -- every organization you could think of, we've had discussions. So finally we narrowed it down to: Why can't we do what the

Federal government does, and actually give -- in terms of veterans-- They give them five points or 10 points, depending on whether they're disabled or not disabled. And it gives them a leg up on the-- They still have to pass the exam, but it gives them a leg up on the exam.

So when we all talked about this, the reality is: Would everybody like the \$250 tax credit? Yes. And maybe somewhere, ladies and gentlemen, in the future that will happen. But it isn't going to happen now. It can't happen now. And Mr. Bucchi indicated at the beginning of his comments, if we have to get -- do it piecemeal, and get a little bit at a time, then that's what we're going to do. But this is an opportunity for the State of New Jersey to say to everyone who put a uniform on -- at least in terms of the civil service -- that we acknowledge that, we honor that, and we want to do something for you.

So that's kind of the genesis, or how this all began.

And Mr. Bucchi's right. We've been talking about this for 10 years. And I would imagine for many, many years, even before I ever was involved, or any of us were involved in this, it's been discussed.

So that's where we are. That was the reason for this the second time. Al did a pretty good job of giving a little history of the previous meeting and where we are now.

Are there any questions?

ASSEMBLYMAN O'SCANLON: If I may.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN O'SCANLON: Real quick, I just wanted to mention that in our discussion of this previously, I had asked questions about cost. I promised you, Al, directly that I was going to do my

homework, and the Chairman, as well. And we have. In fact, we sent our own computer people in. Because the question is the State's computer system's ability to add the five points or the 10 points. And we found that there will be a cost. We don't think it's as high as some of the estimates. And I think it's one worth paying.

The alternative being to give an absolute preference to folks. And you've got to have a balance in there. And I think that the five or 10 points is a good balance, as far as the impact on the workforce and the competitive folks for these positions.

So we've done our homework. And I'm ready to back this.

MR. BUCCHI: Good.

ASSEMBLYMAN O'SCANLON: So thank you.

MR. BUCCHI: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Thanks, Assemblyman.

Anyone else?

MR. BUCCHI: If I can make one comment.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Yes.

MR. BUCCHI: The American Legion is on their convention this week. And they asked me if I would say -- give their support of this Assembly Concurrent Resolution, also, for the record.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: That's great.

Thanks very much.

MR. BUCCHI: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Any--

Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CRUZ-PEREZ: I just want to say thank you to Al Bucchi and all the people who have been so diligent in pushing this issue.

As a veteran myself, who doesn't have that preference, thank you.

Let's keep working on this. And hopefully we will pass -- we will put it on the referendum for people to amend the Constitution and do it.

I'm so happy that you're aboard.

MR. BUCCHI: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Just before you go--

MR. BUCCHI: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: And we've talked about this many times -- just raising the level of consciousness by everyone, particularly in the State. And that's why I've told Mr. Bucchi and every veteran that you must be seen in the hallways of Trenton. And you are. You are, I think, at least over the past couple of years.

Am I right?

MR. BUCCHI: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: The level of awareness of veterans has increased. And you've been having-- I guess over the past two years, you've actually had meetings in the Annex here. And you've invited all the legislators to come and talk. And that's the way the process works. I mean, we have our public hearings. But you also have to corner the other legislators, get their ear, talk to them, and tell them how important this is.

So I as Chair here, I certainly-- I think all of us on this Committee appreciate everything that you do.

Thanks.

MR. BUCCHI: And we appreciate the bipartisan effort in the Assembly. As I said, once we get this through, then we will teach the State Senate how to work a little bit better in their deliberations. And maybe one day they may have a military and veterans affairs committee also.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CONNERS: Thank you very much.

If there are no other questions, that's going to conclude this public meeting regarding ACR-98.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)