



REP. KARL VAN ROY • 90TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

VAN ROY'S VIEWS

LEGISLATIVE E-UPDATE

Friday, November 16, 2007

State Budget Supports Our Veterans

Many years ago, I served in the U.S. Army as a peace time soldier. I have always respected people who are willing to answer the patriotic call to serve in our armed forces, but I have a special regard for those we are willing to do so in times of war. It is of great importance to me that our veterans are treated better than those who served in the Vietnam War. This past week, I made the time to take part in several Veterans Day events to honor our veterans for their service and sacrifice.

As a state legislator, I am in a unique position to do more than just recognize someone at a ceremony; I can make laws that have a positive difference in the life of a veteran. I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the things we accomplished in the 2007-2009 state budget that builds upon our ongoing commitment to our veterans and their families.

The transition for service-members returning from active duty to everyday civilian life is filled with change and unique challenges. *Mission: Welcome Home* is an initiative to assist veterans in discovering what state and federal benefits, programs, or services they might be eligible for due to their service. This successful program was slated to end, but the budget agreement extended the program through June 2009.

Last year, we created a Wisconsin G.I. Bill that is separate and distinct from the G.I. Bill provided by the federal government. Under this program, eligible Wisconsin veterans and their dependents receive full remission of tuition and fees for up to 8 full-time semesters or 128 credits at any school within the UW or Wisconsin Technical College system. The budget agreement provides full funding for the Wisconsin G.I. Bill to ensure that veterans and their dependents have the opportunity to further their education. It lengthens the time a surviving unmarried spouse of an eligible veteran may use the benefit, and it expands program eligibility for the children of certain veterans.

Those who serve in combat zones have unique experiences and stresses that civilians can never understand. Our budget creates a new assistance program and sets aside \$125,000 for the Wisconsin Dept. of Veterans Affairs to help veterans suffering from the debilitating effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We also created a

voluntary system for Wisconsin veterans to access valuable information on other combat-related illnesses such as Agent Orange Exposure and Gulf War Syndrome. For those veterans living at the Veterans Homes at King and Union Grove, the budget agreement provides new funding for more staff, supplies, and state-of-the-art medical equipment.

Owning a home is a universal American dream, and our state has a very successful loan program to help veterans achieve that dream. Our budget provides an \$85 million increase to the program to assure that veterans have access to homeownership. Without this increase, the state's ability to seek federal funds to expand this program would have been jeopardized.

Last year, we created the Veterans and Surviving Spouse Tax Credit to reduce the property tax burden on disabled veterans who are over the age of 65. Our budget agreement expanded the eligibility of this tax credit by removing the age requirement, lowering the residency requirement to five continuous years, and making veterans eligible who are determined to be unemployable by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs.

Many veterans feel it is a great honor to be buried in a veterans cemetery. Unfortunately, the availability of burial spots at those cemeteries in Wisconsin is dwindling. Veterans groups are asking for another cemetery to be built, but the federal government requires the state to do a feasibility study first. Our budget sets aside the necessary money to study the feasibility of developing a new veterans cemetery nearby in Outagamie County.

As you can see from these significant accomplishments, Republicans and Democrats were able to work together to pass a new state budget that looks out for the changing needs of Wisconsin veterans. They deserve nothing less from us since our soldiers sacrifice a lot personally, financially, and emotionally to serve and defend us and our country.

Honoring Our Veterans Here In Brown County

This past week I was able to participate in four Veterans Day ceremonies in Brown County at Duck Creek VFW Post 7534, Brown County Veterans Memorial Arena, UW-Green Bay, and the Oneida Nation Veterans Monument.

I'd like to take a few moments to tell you about the the Oneida Nation Veterans Monument. It is a new monument located at the corner of Hwy. 54 (West Mason St.) and Pleasant Lane, approximately 1/2 mile west of Cty. FF in Green Bay. I was very impressed by it, and if you haven't yet seen it, it's well worth your time to stop by and visit. The monument was designed by Oneida tribal member Chris Cornelius, and I think he did a first-rate job. I was glad that I could take part in the unveiling and dedication of this special monument.

The monument was built as a tribute to all Oneida Nation Veterans who have served in all areas of the military. Men and women from the Oneida nation have fought in every conflict in United States history. The monument itself is six feet high, 180 feet long, and had 3 granite slabs representing each major military conflict. The grounds area also

features a brass eagle with a wingspan of nearly ten feet.

Below is a picture of me at a reception honoring UW-Green Bay men and women who are serving or have served in the armed forces, and to especially honor those returning to school after active duty.



From left to right: UW-Green Bay Chancellor Bruce Shepard, Rep. Karl Van Roy, Lt. Commander Mark Stewart (Commander of the Green Bay Navy Operational Support Center), Ken Bull (President of the UWGB campus Vets for Vets organization).

Budget Protects Our Natural Resources & Sporting Heritage

Whether you want to hike, camp, hunt, fish, ATV or snowmobile, Wisconsin is by far one of the best and most beautiful places to enjoy the outdoors. That's why Wisconsin has such a strong sporting heritage and tradition. However, in order to protect that sporting heritage, we must also preserve the forests, rivers and other natural resources on which these activities are based. We owe it to our children and all future generations.

The financial impact of recreational activity in the state is tremendous and should not be overlooked. Deer hunting alone puts more than \$1 billion into our local economies

including about \$535 million in retail activity. There are many communities, especially in northern Wisconsin, that rely heavily on recreation-based tourism.

The Stewardship program is the cornerstone of the conservation efforts we passed in the most recent budget. We re-authorized the program providing \$86 million per year until the year 2020 for the state to purchase land for permanent public recreational use and environmental protection. I fought for the inclusion of a number of much-needed reforms to improve the program. First, land purchases are now subject to legislative oversight so that taxpayers can have a say in how the money is spent. Second, we included an open access requirement to ensure that state-owned land is open to hunting and fishing. Last, we responded to requests from the hunting community to improve signage on Stewardship land.

You should also be aware that Green Bay is a direct beneficiary of the Stewardship program. In this budget I included an earmark for the purchase of 24.6 acres of Wisconsin Central Railroad property on Green Bay's west side. This land will be used by the City of Green Bay to construct an off-street multi-use bicycle and pedestrian trail which should be completed in October 2008.

Other highlights of the 2007-2009 state budget include:

- New penalties and increased funding to fight invasive species such as the emerald ash borer, gypsy moth, zebra mussel, and Eurasian water milfoil
- \$17 million to remove contaminated sediments from the Great Lakes
- \$13 million in recycling grants to local governments
- \$15 million in renewable energy grants
- \$2.5 million in ATV and snowmobile trail improvements

Gun Deer Season Opens Tomorrow

Tomorrow is the opening day of the regular gun deer season, an event many Wisconsin hunters have been anxiously awaiting since the end of the season last year. The DNR estimates that the size of this year's herd is between 1.6 and 1.8 million deer. Over the past 10 years, hunters have taken an average of 460,000 deer in each season.

When out there in the woods, please remember to obey all hunting regulations and keep safety first. All hunters born after 1972 are required to complete a hunter safety course. Please be mindful of Earn-a-Buck zones and CWD control efforts. Help keep the sport safe for everyone and call the DNR toll-free at 1-888-WDNR-INFO (1-888-936-7463) to report a violation you have witnessed or to get answers to your hunting questions.

Deer Hunting in Wisconsin: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/HUNT/deer/>

Deer Hunting Regulations: www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/regs/deer07.pdf

Deer Hunt Tagging FAQ: www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/hunt/deer/taggingfaq.pdf

Deer Management Unit Map: www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/regs/deer07dmu.pdf

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