



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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## **Showing Gratitude to Our Veterans**

*By State Rep. Don Vruwink*

Veterans Day is November 11, a day we honor the men and women who made the courageous decision to join the full-time military, National Guard and Reserves, knowing they are putting themselves in harm's way.

I have heard harrowing stories from veterans about their time in the military. I have also heard disheartening stories about the poor treatment some of them received at the hands of the government after their service ended.

As much as we pay tribute to our military sons and daughters on Veterans Day, there clearly are failings in the support and services we provide to them in civilian life.

This week my colleagues and I introduced six bills that in their own limited ways will benefit veterans. I am the lead author of two of the bills. The first bill allows a judge to consider post-traumatic stress disorder a mitigating factor when determining an appropriate sentence in a criminal case. This option would be available only when the defendant is a military veteran who was diagnosed as suffering from PTSD as a result of the person's military service.

Under current law, when a judge determines a sentence, he or she must consider the protection of the public, the gravity of the offense, the rehabilitative needs of the defendant, and any mitigating or aggravating factors to the crime. My bill creates the new mitigating factor of PTSD.

I am also the lead author of a bill that gives a break on driver license fees to veterans with a service-connected disability. Under this bill, fees for both issuance and renewal of a driver's license would be waived.

The other bills we rolled out this week follow:

- Any attempt to move money in or out of the Veteran's Trust Fund would require review by the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee. Recently funds were diverted from the State Veterans Home at King and put in the Veteran's Trust Fund. This bill requires legislative approval of such diversions.

- Currently National Guard members must have lived in the state for six months to qualify for in-state tuition at UW System campuses. This bill removes the six-month residency requirement.
- When a serviceman or servicewoman earns credits from the Defense Language Institute and then the person enrolls in a UW System school, the credits would transfer to the new school.
- When a National Guard member is stationed in Wisconsin, he or she can enter a state park at the state resident rate as opposed to non-resident.

The other authors of these bills and I are currently gathering co-sponsors. The bills will then be formally introduced in the Legislature and referred to committee. We will then request public hearings.

You can track these bills and any legislation by going to the Legislature's home page, [www.legis.wi.gov](http://www.legis.wi.gov). Click on "Notification Service" and type in a key word such as "veteran." You will be notified by email of the progress of the bills.

These bills, in their limited ways, show our gratitude to veterans who sometimes are short-changed of our gratitude. If you have comments or questions on any of the bills, please let me know.

*Rep. Don Vruwink represents the 43<sup>rd</sup> Assembly District, which includes parts of Rock, Walworth, Jefferson and Dane counties. He can be reached at [Rep.Vruwink@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Rep.Vruwink@legis.wi.gov) and at 608-266-3790. The mailing address is P.O. Box 8953, Madison, WI 53708.*

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