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November 11, 2021

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## Hesselbein Introduces ‘Honor Our Veterans’ Legislation

MADISON – On Veterans Day, Representative Dianne Hesselbein (D-Middleton), along with members of the Assembly Committee on Veterans and Military Affairs, introduced a package of bills honoring Wisconsin veterans and their families.

One of the bills, LRB 1674, addresses membership on the Council on Veterans Programs. Under current law, the Council on Veterans Programs advises the Board of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs on solutions and policy alternatives relating to the problems facing veterans. The council consists of representatives from various veterans organizations who are appointed by those organizations for one-year terms. The bill adds two members to the council, selected by the member's peers, to serve one-year terms. These additional members will include a veteran services coordinator who is employed at a Wisconsin technical college and another employed at a University of Wisconsin System institution.

“I am excited to see the legislature bring advocates for student veterans to the table. The important work of the Council on Veterans Programs affects all veterans in Wisconsin and I know the UW and Technical College Veteran Services Coordinators will bring a perspective that focuses on the student veteran population, which tends to be younger – the average UW-Madison student veteran is 26 – and closer to, or still going through, transition from active duty to veteran status. These two new voices will complement the range of experiences already represented on the Council,” said Joe Rasmussen, Director of University Veterans Services at UW-Madison.

Another bill in Hesselbein’s agenda is LRB 1682, relating to free state park admission for Gold Star Families. This bill provides that a vehicle admission receipt is not required for any vehicle occupied by a person who qualifies under federal law for a gold star lapel button (commonly used to identify Gold Star family members), which signifies that the recipient is the immediate family member of a member of the U.S. armed forces who died while serving during a time of conflict.

“Wisconsin Gold Star families paid the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country,” said Kermit Hugo, father of Army Reservist Specialist Rachael Hugo, 24, of Madison who was killed in Bayji, Iraq. “Allowing Gold Star families to enjoy their natural surroundings helps to properly recognize the unimaginable price they pay every day without their loved one.”

Additional bills included in the package are LRB 1672, relating to considering post-traumatic stress disorder as a mitigating factor in sentencing certain criminal offenders; and LRB 1668, relating to “Veterans Education Week.”

LRB 1672 creates a new mitigating factor of post-traumatic stress disorder in sentencing decisions. Under current law, when a court makes a sentencing decision concerning a person convicted of a criminal offense, the court must consider the protection of the public, the gravity of the offense, the rehabilitative needs of the defendant, and any applicable mitigating factors or aggravating factors to the crime. This bill creates a new mitigating factor. Under this bill, when a court makes a sentencing decision concerning a person who is a military veteran and has been diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from the person's military service, the court may consider that diagnosis as a mitigating factor.

LRB 1668 designates the second week of November as “Veterans Education Week.” The purpose is to inform veterans about the benefits to which they are entitled and assist veterans in maximizing their use of such benefits. The bill requires the governor to issue an annual proclamation for the observance of “Veterans Education Week” that highlights the benefits to which veterans are entitled.

“This legislation includes small but important steps that we can take as Wisconsinites to honor the service of our veterans and the sacrifice their families have made,” said Representative Hesselbein.

“It feels strange to write a press release about veteran bills and legislation knowing news reporter Meg Jones will not be reporting the details,” said Representative Hesselbein. “Meg was a fine correspondent for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, honest and fair in her writing, who succumbed to pancreatic cancer eleven months ago. Her knowledge and passion for reporting veteran issues, her ability to ask the right questions, and her resulting clarity in reporting the details was without equal; she was a gifted, true professional, and she is missed.”

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