

The 2015 Indiana General Assembly has ended. The Governor and the Legislators clearly did NOT make veterans a priority again this year per The Military / Veterans Coalition of Indiana (TMVCI). The evidence is this:

HB1615 Veterans Recovery Program authored by Rep. Zent and HB1489 Veterans Matters authored by Rep. Mayfield were TMVCI priority number one. HB1615 was heard by Medical Provider Committee and passed 12-0. Rep. Zent even got fifty-four co-authors (bipartisan support). HB1615 died in Ways and Means when Rep. T. Brown MD refused to hear the bill. During the second half of the general assembly, TMVCI tried to get an amendment to SB166 Spinal Cord and Traumatic Brain Fund. Rep. T. Brown only permitted one TMVCI member to speak and cut off that person and effectively killed any chance to amend SB166. The TMVCI sent testimony and supporting documents to all twenty-four members of Ways and Means asking for help to address this issue. Rep. Porter tried on the House Floor during second reading and Rep T. Brown attacked him verbally on the amendment. The proposed amendment failed on voice vote. It is also noteworthy that TMVCI identified this as the number one priority to the Senate Appropriation Committee; they did nothing.

TMVCI priority two full state income tax exemption for all military income was authored as HB 1057 and SB 132 and partly addressed in HB 1078 Military income tax deductions, SB 257 Taxation of active duty pay, and SB 262 Taxation of military retirement income. Neither the House of Senate heard any of them. TMVCI identified this funding item to Appropriation at the beginning of the second session; nothing happened.

Active, Guard, and Reserve Support matters was priority three. Senator Merritt authored SB472 Various AC / RC Veteran matters as TMVCI requested. The bill passed 9-0 in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and was recommitted to Appropriation where it died. TMVCI identified this funding item to Appropriation at the beginning of the second session; NOTHING happened. The final budget (HB1001) did not even increase the National Guard. Senator Kenley said that was an error and that they intended to fully fund the \$6 million we requested for the NG and \$1 Million requested for the Reserve. He says it will have to be addressed later this summer. A few sections of TMVCI requested bill were authored by other senators/ representatives (TMVCI did NOT know they were being authored but supported) and passed; they were: HB 1456 Serviceman Civil Relief Act, SB434 NG financial aid and Tuition, HB1131 Exempt RC from Jury duty, and HB 1333 College tuition assistance. The lending protections bill was gutted of ALL Reserve and Guard protection language and now has nothing to do with the military; this in spite of the fact that this was legislation lead by the Attorney General and MG Umbarger the Adjutant General for the Indiana National Guard.

Veterans Matters (priority 4) and Disabled Veterans matters (priority 5) was authored in a slightly amended version by Sen. Grooms as SB533. SB533 passed 9-0 in the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee and was recommitted to Appropriation where it died. TMVCI identified this funding item to Appropriation at the beginning of the second session; nothing happened. A few sections of TMVCI requested bill were authored by other legislators and passed. S298 Veteran

Employment Preference and S280 Military Designation on Driver's License were part of these initiatives.

SB 475 (TMVCI *priority 6*) authored by Senator Zakas was amended into the budget bill and modified from "shall" requiring judicial districts to have at least one Veterans Treatment Court to "may" language between counties.

HB 1557 Department of Veterans Affairs (TMVCI *priority 7*) authored by Representative Judy was never heard and the Governor's legislative agenda called for additional funding to implement the findings of a study done by the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs (IDVA). The Governor's budget submission doubled the IDVA budget. The study was never published or submitted to Ways and Means or Appropriations; yet the funding happened. Director Jim Brown and Deputy Director Russ Eaglin indicated the study was terrible and none of the recommendations made sense. Why did the Legislators give additional funding? TMVCI believes IDVA needs to be significantly overhauled/expanded and provided details to support HB 1557.

How many more Hoosier Veterans will commit suicide in the next two years because of their TBI/PTSI? How many more Hoosier Veterans will end up in jail for crimes they commit due to drug abuse or alcohol abuse addictions caused by VA multi-prescription treatments they provide to treat the symptoms of TBI/PTSI? How many more divorces will occur because spouses and their children can't cope with the crisis anymore? How many caregivers will become victims or have their own medical problems because of Hoosier Veterans with TBI/PTSI? How many veterans will be moving from Indiana because of this lack of concern by legislators? How many Reserve Units will be inactivated because they cannot maintain unit strengths required by DOD? How many MILLIONS of dollars will Indiana miss out on because Indiana ranks 47th in veterans benefits paid to Hoosiers who have earned them? How many defense businesses will miss out on hiring highly qualified, uniquely skilled in military matters because they took jobs with other defense industry businesses?