

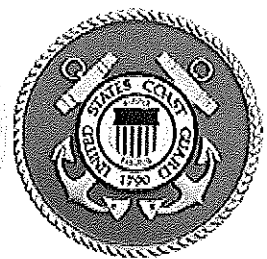
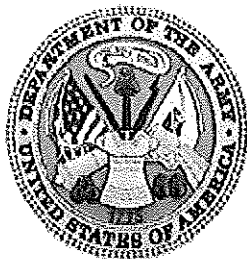
“RALLY FOR OUR VETERANS”

April 21, 2010, 11AM-2PM

State House, Capital North-end steps

Come out, bring a chair!

**This is an invitation for all
Veterans in South Carolina.
It is time for us to come
together and show our
Legislators who we are and
advocate for veterans’
benefits and services.**



Organized by the South Carolina Veterans' Advocacy Council

The American Legion, The Disabled American Veterans, The Military Order of Purple Hearts, the Military Officers Association of America
The Retired Enlisted Association, South Carolina Association of County Veterans Affairs Officers, the Vietnam Veterans of America,
and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

SOUTH CAROLINA VETERANS' ADVOCACY COUNCIL



Veterans and Families First



Founding Organizations:

The American Legion, The Disabled American Veterans, The Military Order of Purple Hearts, Military Officers Association of America, The Retired Enlisted Association, South Carolina Association of County Veterans Affairs Officers, The Vietnam Veterans of America, and The Veterans of Foreign Wars.

February 11, 2010

OPEN LETTER TO MEMBERS OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA LEGISLATURE

Dear Senator and Representative:

The Veterans Advocacy Council was formed in 1998 to promote, recommend, foster, and ensure legislative issues concerning the four hundred twenty thousand veterans (420,000) of South Carolina would be for the betterment of veterans, their families and children.

The core veteran's organizations consisting of: The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of Purple Heart, Military Retired Officers Association, Military Retired Enlisted Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and The Vietnam Veterans of America are the original member organizations. These organizations represent over seventy thousand (70,000) active members along with their spouses or significant other and would conceivably exceed into the one hundred forty thousand (140,000) voters. We as a whole are very concerned about what is happening to our voice and state.

It is our intent to bring to your attention the most recent budget cuts affecting the Governor's Office of Veterans' Affairs and the various positions within that office and the current laws that are affected by these budget cuts.

First of all, we understand the crisis in our state concerning the financial situation, but we must ask each one of you, why are veterans grouped in a cross-the-board budget? We didn't fight, defend, die, or remain missing because of party affiliations. We fought, defended, died, and remain missing because our country asked us to, not because we were Democrats or Republicans. We're asking that you give the 420,000 veterans and their dependents of this great state an equal (serving) of sacrifice that they so unselfishly gave to this state and the nation. Veterans are just that, veterans of this great nation and state.

As you already know, the Governor's Office of Veterans Affairs is directly under the Governor and his/her budget. Therefore, when cutbacks arise this office feels the pinch as well. Why? Let's look at the hard facts! The Veteran's Affairs Office has a total of 28.6 positions. This breaks down as follows; 20 are what they refer to as the Veterans Affairs Office administration and 8.63 are located at the State Cemetery. **Due to the budget cuts the Veterans Affairs**

administration is currently down 7 positions (Director, Program Director, 3 Veteran Service Organizations representatives, and 2 war roster admins.

How does this impact the veterans? Well let's see how!

Lack of funding has reduced the War Roster: with lack of continued resources this has impeded the Office of Veteran Affairs's ability to complete this important task. Updating of the War Roster will not be accomplished. This will result in our inability to establish veterans' health, financial and burial benefits eligibility for a large percentage of veterans and family members, primarily from the WWII, Korean, and Vietnam Wars mandated by state law.

Lack of funding has reduced the ability of not being able to fill the unclassified position of Director that is vacant. Impact on Services and accountability has and will continue to weaken the advocacy of and for veterans. This will send and has sent a negative signal to our veteran population.

Lack of funding has caused the reduction in overall operation: This has reduced the cooperation between the Office of Veteran's Affairs and the County Veterans Affairs Offices, Veterans Service Organizations, and Veterans Administration Regional Office, and the South Carolina Legislature. How? Lack of training, USDVA correspondence/updates concerning laws and regulation previously mailed to County Veterans Affairs Officers has been discontinued and just plain everyday hands on veteran assistance has become non existent.

Lack of funding has reduced Veterans Counseling, which is used for State mandated training of County Veterans Affairs Officers and our staff. This impacts on Services, as well as, non-compliance with SC Code and increased error rates in claims processed, thus reducing payments to veterans.

Lack of funding has caused the loss of seasoned, trained, versed, and competent employees which can never be replaced at this time.

Lack of funding for the continuous operating of the state's only operating veterans' cemetery. Without sufficient funds our state veterans cemetery cannot maintain the level of care and respect our fallen heroes not only need, but what they so richly deserve.

Ladies and Gentleman of the South Carolina Legislature, our intent is to alert you to a bad situation concerning our nation and state veterans. We ask you to reconsider the cross-the-board budget cuts and remember veterans should never be held hostage or pawns in this arena. All we did was defend the same flag that flies over our State House when called upon. All we are asking is to reconsider the cuts to the Office of Veteran's Affairs and restore that trust that you have for our nation's veterans.

In closing, we know that you will do what you think is right, but if we can't voice our concerns then who will? If we can't explain our situation, then who will? If we can't fight for our veterans and the office that supports our needs, then who can? If the veterans can't have a voice that resides under one roof for all veterans' issues and concerns, then who will? If we can't

separate or address these issues of being non political, then who will?

Thanking you in advance for your time in reading our concerns and for your consideration in restoring the Office of Veteran's Affairs back to its full capacity and strength. Remember, "Freedom Isn't Free!"

For God and Country, We remain in service to our nation's veterans.

Jim Hawk

President

South Carolina Veterans

Advocacy Council