

## JOINT LEGISLATIVE ISSUES FOR 2009 SESSION

### **The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Disabled American Veterans**

#### ***Support Statements***

1. ***State Veterans' Service Officers Grant:*** For over 50 years, Alaska service organizations have been assisting our state veterans with much needed assistance in receiving state and federal benefits to which they are entitled. Each year, through the assisted representation of these State Service Officers, our veterans have received over 25 million dollars in federal benefits. VA statistics have shown that veterans representing themselves receive some \$7,000 less in annual benefits than those represented by a State Service Officer. This coming year, we are budgeted the same grant amount as last year, \$651,000, which is part of the Governor's budget under the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. These dollars will provide salaries and travel for the Joint Venture for the coming year. Our Service Officers cover the entire state, working closely with our members, the Alaska Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans Affairs, providing services to our State's veterans. This coming year will be exceptionally important as we provide for our returning Gulf veterans, assisting them with the complex laws and paperwork necessary to receive all of the benefits to which they are entitled. ***Therefore, we ask the full support of our Legislature in approving the Governor's budget proposed grant of \$651,000.***
2. ***Property Tax exemption:*** Currently, veterans rated by the Department of Veterans Affairs at 50% or more disabled and senior citizens 65 and older receive a tax exemption on the first \$150,000.00 of their annual property tax. Our concern is the loss of this exemption. This could be devastating to both the seniors and veterans who, in many cases, receive the lowest of incomes, with many living on fixed incomes and concerned about losing their existing home mortgages. ***Therefore, we request the tax exemption for the Disabled Veterans and Seniors remains.***
3. ***Flag Amendment:*** The flag amendment is an issue unresolved. Over 80% of Americans polled believe that our flag should be protected by amending our Constitution. We do not expect this issue to go unresolved forever; however, should it pass the United States Congress to constitutionally protect our flag, we request that Alaska be the first State to ratify the amendment to the Constitution. ***Therefore, we ask our Legislature that, if Congress passes the amendment, our Alaska Legislature be the first to ratify that amendment.***
4. ***State Veterans Cemetery:*** If the issue of establishing a State Veterans Cemetery comes before legislature we request the legislature to consider supporting such legislation.