

**SB**

**278**

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

*Session*  
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Co-chair  
Joint Armed Services Committee

Member  
Resources Committee  
Judiciary Committee  
Transportation Committee

Senator\_Bill\_Wielechowski@legis.state.ak.us

## SENATOR BILL WIELECHOWSKI

### Senate Bill 278: Serving Alaska's Veterans

The intent of SB 278 is to help the state and veterans' organizations find and provide services to Alaska's veterans. The bill would require the Department of Revenue to ask Permanent Fund Dividend applicants whether they are an American military veteran. By offering veterans the option of identifying themselves as veterans, we can help them and their families to access programs and benefits they have earned.

With about 75,000 veterans and 35,000 National Guard members, Reserves and active duty personnel across our state, Alaska has the highest per capita number of veterans in the nation. SB 278 will enable the State of Alaska and Alaskan-based veteran service organizations to better inform these veterans about programs and policies that affect them and their families.

It is in Alaska's best interest to ensure that all resident veterans receive the federal benefits they have earned from the Veterans Administration, the Department of Defense, and other agencies. The retirement checks and benefits Alaska veterans receive contribute more than a billion dollars to our economy every year, yet only one in five veterans receive benefits. If we were to double the number of veterans receiving benefits, we could help many additional families and create a significant economic boost to communities throughout the state.

One unintended consequence of federal and state privacy laws is that it has become almost impossible to find and connect with our veterans. It is in the State's and these individuals' best interest to ensure all veterans are informed of their rights to VA healthcare, burial rights, disability compensation, survivor benefits, housing loans, spousal assistance, college assistance, and vocational assistance. SB 278 attempts to reach these veterans who, for whatever reason, are not currently receiving the benefits they have earned or may be unaware of changes in the status of these programs.

Only the state and congressionally-chartered and state-approved veteran service organizations will have access to this register.

Please join me in supporting SB 278.

# LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH REPORT

FEBRUARY 8, 2008



REPORT NUMBER 08.154

## ACTIVE MILITARY PERSONNEL AND VETERANS IN ALASKA

PREPARED FOR REPRESENTATIVE DAVID GUTTENBERG

BY PATRICIA YOUNG, MANAGER

You asked for information on the current military population and the number of veterans in Alaska. Specifically, you wished to know the number of active duty military personnel and the numbers of National Guard and Reserve forces currently in the state. You also wished to know the number of veterans in Alaska and how Alaska compares to other states in regard to the percent of the population who are veterans.

The Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs provided the following data on active, Guard, and Reserve forces in the state as of December 31, 2007.

<b>Active Military Population in Alaska</b> (December 31, 2007)		
Active Forces	Army	11,402
	Navy	27
	Air Force	8,000
	Marines	22
	Coast Guard	2,116
<b>Total Active Forces</b>		<b>21,567</b>
National Guard and Reserves	Army National Guard	1,972
	Air National Guard	1,920
	Army Reserves	399
	Air Force Reserves	164
	Navy Reserves	78
	Marine Reserves	46
<b>Total Guard and Reserves</b>		<b>4,579</b>
Canadian Forces		30
<b>Total Military Population in Alaska</b>		<b>26,176</b>

**SOURCE:** Alaska Command (US Department of Defense and Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs).

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)—using data from the VA, from the Department of Defense (DoD), and from the Bureau of the Census—provides official estimates and projections of the veteran population using a specifically designed model (VetPop2007) that is updated periodically for improved methodology, more recent data, and changing needs. Each year, the model generates the estimated number of veterans by certain selected characteristics at the state and national levels. According to the VA model, as of September 30, 2007, the number of veterans in Alaska was 74,557.

In order to arrive at an estimate of the percent of the Alaska population represented by veterans, and to compare that with the percentage in other states, we combined the VA model estimates of state veteran populations with Census Bureau estimates of state populations as of July 1, 2007. Using those figures, we calculate that veterans currently make up approximately 11 percent of the total Alaska population. Veterans make up more than ten percent of the overall population in only six states, with similar percentages in Maine, Alaska, and Montana, followed closely by percentages in Wyoming, Virginia, and New Hampshire.

Looking at the portion of the population that is 18 years or over, however, may provide a more realistic picture of how veterans fit into state demographics. Because the most current available estimates of population by age group are for July 1, 2006, we paired those data with VA model estimates for September 30, 2006. Using these data, we calculate that in 2006, veterans made up 15 percent of the adult population of Alaska, the highest percentage in the nation.<sup>1</sup>

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We hope you find this information to be useful. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or need additional information.

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<sup>1</sup> Montana and Wyoming followed Alaska, with 14.4 percent and 14.2 percent, respectively.



In Service to America®

March 4, 2008

Chairwoman Lesil McGuire and Members of the Committee  
Senate State Affairs Committee

**REF: SB278**

According to the latest statistics, Alaska now has almost 80,000 veterans which, as you know, is the highest per-capita in the United States. But under Federal and State privacy laws we are no longer able to find them and inform them of the rights and services they've earned through service and sacrifice.

Since the introduction last year of HB44 by Rep Guttenberg, Dahlstrom, Kerttula, & Lynn requiring the Permanent Fund Board include the question: "Are you an American Veteran?" on the PFD Dividend Application we have worked closely with the sponsor and the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs. We now are fully supportive of the bill as amended by the committee and ask you to consider their changes. We are also delighted with the number of new cosponsors who have decided to stand with us in finding our veterans.

We have met with the Governor's Advisory Council, staff of the AK Dept of Mil and Vet Affairs, and a number of Members of the House and Senate to examine the few concerns that have been raised. We believe that with a committee's changes, we have resolved these issues. We do object to the new fiscal note attached to this bill by the Dept of Revenue. These costs are clearly inflated and beyond belief. All that is required is 1) tweak the PFD software to pull off this list, 2) run the list/digitally to AK Dept of Mil & Vet Affairs. But, even if it does cost the state a few thousand a year to collect and process this list, the return of this small investment will be in the tens of millions to our veterans, their families, and the economy of our state.

That's right; this is not just an act that will benefit our veterans and their families. This act is in the economic best interest of Alaska. Veterans now annually generate over \$1 Billion in funds and services to our state's economy - that with the VA serving less than 20% of our veterans. This small act enables our Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and our Congressionally Chartered Veteran Service Organizations to locate and communicate with our veterans and their families. Every year Congress scolds the VA for its failure in "outreach" but this is honestly unfair, given all the restrictions now. In Alaska we have a unique means to accomplish this, by putting this simple question on the annual PFD Dividend Application. Then we can inform our veterans and their families of their rights to access services they earned.

### **VETERAN ECONOMIC IMPACT TO ALASKA**

- VA home loans represent **over half a billion** to our economy every year. (FY05 \$584M/3,500 homes)
- Military retirement payments account for over **\$165 Million** in direct cash to Alaskan families each year.
- Compensation for disabled veterans adds **\$97.2 Million** every year to our economy. (FY05 = 12,000 AK veterans w/in-service connected disabilities, FY06 it will be well over \$100 Million; 300 AK veterans received non-service connected pensions \$2.2 Million)
- VA medical services, provided in Alaska represent over **\$103 Million** in FY05.

- VA Education benefits 1,300 Alaska veterans totaling **\$11 Million**.
- VA Survivor/dependent benefits **\$6.2 Million** in FY05

As you can see, an increase of just 20% in the level of service provided Alaska's veterans would have a significant positive economic impact on our state and these deserving families.

On behalf of thousands of our veterans, thank you for your consideration of this important legislation.

It is an honor:

**Ric Davidge**  
State Council President

**Vietnam Veterans of America  
IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 6, 2008**

**Contact:  
Bernard Edelman  
301-996-8451  
Rick Weidman  
301-996-8557**

**VVA Calls for \$5 Billion More for Health Care  
and Better Outreach**

(WASHINGTON, DC) – In testimony before a joint session of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs, VVA National President John Rowan both praised and damned Congress for actions taken and not taken, and hit on legislation that, if enacted, could make a huge difference in the lives of veterans and their families.

"Congress deserves our thanks for the significant increases in appropriations for veterans health care in the current fiscal year, although you must exercise stringent oversight to ensure that the funding goes to where it's supposed to go," Rowan said. "And we hope you will be firm in adding the \$5.24 billion that VVA believes is needed for FY'09, part of which would enable so-called 'higher income' veterans to enroll in the VA healthcare system.

"Still, we remain staunch in our advocacy for the passage of an assured funding bill that would end the annual wrangling over veterans healthcare funding," Rowan said. "We have endorsed H.R. 2514 and companion legislation in the Senate, S. 331, and we again urge you to give these your consideration particularly now, at a time when the VA should be anticipating an influx of 100,000 new veterans during the next fiscal year."

Rowan also noted legislation introduced recently by freshman Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) to help returning veterans transition into colleges and universities and provide support to help them succeed in higher education. His "Supporting Education for Returning Veterans Act" would provide grants to institutions of higher learning to establish one-stop centers to provide services and support to veterans on campus.

Rowan reiterated VVA's support for S. 1314, which would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to have line items in its budget for outreach, a significant failing of that department. "There are tens of thousands of veterans who remain ignorant of the services and benefits available to them because of their service to our country," Rowan said. "And most of them don't get their health care at VA facilities."

Regarding an unacceptable situation faced by veterans who do get their health care at the VA medical center in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Rowan urged funding for an off-site parking facility and shuttle-bus service to transport VA workers to the VAMC, freeing up precious parking spaces for their patients. "This is no solution to the problems of infrastructure at that VAMC," Rowan said, "but it can alleviate a persistent problem."

To read the VVA's testimony go to <http://www.vva.org/testimony.html>

*Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the nation's only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated to the needs of Vietnam-era veterans and their families. VVA's founding principle is "Never again will one generation of veterans abandon another."*

**From:** George J. Bennett Sr. [mailto:huna44@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 02, 2008 2:13 PM  
**To:** Rep. John Harris; benno cleveland  
**Cc:** nangapak@nativefederation.org; ronakph@gci.net; jerrybeale@alaska.gov  
**Subject:** RE: HB44

I am supporting this bill because of all of the Vietnam Veterans and the Irag returnees, and my last communication with Ric Davidage, who is the State wide President of Vietnam Veterans of America, and he says that the Bill where we wanted to attach a question to the PDF application asking if the applicant is an American Veteran, and now it is being send to the Finance Committee, and Ric says that this would cost \$18,000 per year to do this. There is billions in Veteran funding involved here, that would benefit the Veterans who we can reach so that they can also benefit from this information. At \$18,000 should be no question, to about veterans who earned this right to be taken care of.

George J. Bennett Sr.

**From:** Ron Siebels [mailto:ronakph@gci.net]  
**Sent:** Sunday, March 02, 2008 4:05 PM  
**Subject:** RE: HB44

Great comments George, and spoken with a good heart. Thanks for supporting veterans, we need more good Patriots like you.

George, I maintain that from the major communities we are better prepared to reach the remote Alaska areas than they are to reach us. HB44 will enable us to reach out to those remote veterans so they can receive the benefits that they earned. It is important to note that this will be a voluntary item for veterans, it forces no one to do anything they don't want to do. There is not a single bad aspect to HB44, its intent is a good and honorable thing to do for our Brave men and women who need some help. HB44 only asks the question, "ARE YOU A VETERAN" and nothing more.

I still believe that our House and Senate Speakers will stand with us on this inexpensive yet very important issue. I also believe that the other good and caring members of our Juneau delegation will step up to give all of our veterans the assistance we need to achieve this legislative need. I still believe that they will lend their support and the powers of their elected position to get this done during this legislative session. I do not think they want to fail us.

I think our elected officials will see the federal financial gain that seems hidden in this issue. If our Alaska veterans can obtain the benefits they already earned but have so far been denied due to a zip code, then those incoming funds will add to the monetary gain of the Alaska economy.

It is important to note that HB44 provides the necessary tool in obtaining the fair return of a mutual contract. These brave men and women willingly put on the uniform and served and were promised certain benefits. Now it is time for our nation and Alaska to honor their part of that contract. This is indeed an issue of contractual fairness. To deny this bill is nothing more than building a wall between remote veterans and the benefits they honorably earned.

Many of our Alaska veterans are coming forth to assist both the new and old veterans. We who have the knowledge and ability must now lend our skills and conviction on behalf of those who carried the American sword so that others could sleep in peaceful beds and dream butterfly dreams.

George please know that our cause is a good cause and I think I stand with other vets when I say that I will not allow our honorable vets to suffer at the lazy hands of certain politicians who talk but do nothing.

It is quickly becoming apparent that we have some very caring and committed elected officials in Juneau and those who truly care are showing it

with their positive involvement. However, those who speak well but act without conviction are being exposed. In the last year or so Alaska veterans have finally started to come together with a united front. We are not asking for any favoritism, we are just standing up for our earned rights. Yes we are asking for the return of earned recognition that has somehow been forgotten by the growing complacency of American society. I continue to have hope that Alaska can and will do it better than the American locations who have taken the past hard days of veterans lives for granted. The time is right for the silent voices of our trusting veterans to be heard, and it is time for our elected officials to listen attentively.

Thank you George for helping veterans. I am proud to stand with you.

Ron Siebels  
Military Order of the Purple Heart  
SR-Vice, Dept of Alaska  
Commander Chpt 593, Anchorage

# FISCAL NOTE

**STATE OF ALASKA**  
**2008 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Fiscal Note Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bill Version: SB278 (S) STA  
 ( ) Publish Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Identifier (file name): SB278-DMVA-NGMHQ-3-06-08 Dept. Affected: DMVA  
 Title An Act relating to information from veterans on the permanent RDU Military and Veterans Affairs  
fund dividend application form Component NGMHQ  
 Sponsor Senator Wielechowski  
 Requester Senate State Affairs Component Number 2135

**Expenditures/Revenues** (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

	Appropriation Required	Information						
		FY 2009	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
<b>OPERATING EXPENDITURES</b>								
Personal Services	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Travel	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Contractual	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Supplies	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Equipment	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Land & Structures	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Grants & Claims	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Miscellaneous	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

<b>CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>								
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<b>CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )</b>								
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**FUND SOURCE** (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1003 GF Match	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1004 GF	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1005 GF/Program Receipts	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1037 GF/Mental Health	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other Interagency Receipts	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Estimate of any current year (FY2008) cost: \_\_\_\_\_

**POSITIONS**

Full-time							
Part-time							
Temporary							

**ANALYSIS:** (Attach a separate page if necessary)

No expected fiscal impact to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

Prepared by: McHugh Pierre, Legislative Liaison/Director of Communications  
 Division: National Guard Military Headquarters/Commissioner's Office  
 Approved by: Commissioner Craig Campbell  
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

Phone 465-4402  
 Date/Time 3/6/08 @ 9:00 am  
 Date 3/6/2008