



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruth Hassell-Thompson

## Veterans First: Majority Supports New Programs to Benefit New York's Servicemen and Women

RUTH HASSELL-THOMPSON June 3, 2010

| ISSUE: **VETERANS**

(Albany, NY) The State Senate Democratic Majority passed eleven pieces of legislation which will expand or launch new benefits programs for the brave New Yorkers who have fought for our nation's freedom.

The Majority's legislation package will offer veterans and current Soldiers greater access to state programs, including:

- Audit courses, without charge, at SUNY and CUNY for veterans seeking to advance their academic careers.
- New timeframes for the receipt of absentee ballots by deployed service members to ensure their votes are counted.
- Access to property tax exemptions, to help the many service members who have found it difficult to afford remaining in their community as a result of service.
- Sporting opportunities for veterans and service members as a way of maintaining physical and mental health.
- Participation in housing assistance programs which help disabled veterans remain in their homes.
- Ending barriers which currently make it difficult for active duty military personnel to marry as a result of deployment, which can often come without notice for adequate planning purposes.

Since becoming the Majority last year, Senate Democrats have passed several significant bills and measures in support of veterans, including legislation which enacts new protections for members of the armed services facing foreclosure during deployment. The Majority also opened up the Senate's Veterans Hall of Fame honors program so all 62 members, regardless of party, can recognize veterans from their district. In the past, only the former Majority was allowed to participate in this program.

### **Tax Relief**

**S103-A / SAMPSON:** Authorizes localities to grant a property tax exemption for reservists who are on active duty for at least 90 consecutive days within the immediately preceding calendar year. The exemption would apply to the primary residence of the reservist.

**S4876-A / FOLEY:** Permits a veteran to transfer the property tax exemption on his or her primary residence to a new primary residence when moving within the same city, town or village. With this legislation, veterans would be assured that they could move anywhere within the same county without risk of losing their exemption.

**S5370 / HASSELL-THOMPSON:** Allows for an additional property tax exemption when two qualified veterans reside in the same household. Currently, the exemption is available to one such veteran only. This legislation would properly recognize and reward all veterans who have served their country. Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D-Mt. Vernon) said, "We have a duty to properly recognize and reward all veterans who have served our country. By extending the property tax relief to include two veterans who share the same household, New York State acknowledges that its veterans also face financial burdens and this legislation is the least that we can do for the individuals who have fought to guarantee our freedoms."

### **Benefits to Improve Health & Well Being**

**S7021 / ADAMS:** Extends until June 16, 2012 revival of time barred actions for an injury or death caused by exposure to phenoxy herbicides for persons serving in the armed forces in Indo China from February 28, 1961 through May 7, 1975. This bill provides veterans who were exposed to these substances access to the courts.

**S7112 / ADAMS:** Establishes the New York State Interagency Coordinating Council for Service-Disabled Veterans to promote the implementation of a comprehensive statewide program of coordinated services for service disabled veterans. Services would include educational training, health, employment, housing options, transportation options, personal care and family outreach.

**S7041 / VALESKY:** Authorizes the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to designate organized fishing events to provide physical and emotional rehabilitation for current and former members of the armed forces. A fishing license would not be required to participate.

### **Housing Assistance**

**S3539 / KRUEGER:** Establishes an income limit for the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) program for disabled veterans that are similar to the income limit currently used by the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program. By doing so, more disabled veterans will qualify for the DRIE program.

**S6279-A / ADAMS:** Ensures that any veteran who served in the armed forces during a time of war would receive a preference for Mitchell Lama housing. Under current law, only veterans who served between February 28, 1961 and May 7, 1975 receive such a preference. Locating affordable housing is a major concern for many veterans.

### **Helping Soldiers Being Deployed with Matrimonial Services**

**S7570 / AUBERTINE:** Allows military personnel scheduled for deployment in less than 60 days, while deployed, or during a mobilization period to marry within twenty-four hours of receiving a marriage license. In recent years, the number of military deployments has increased, with less notice, thereby making it difficult for members of the military to get their personal affairs in order before leaving. This bill would address one of those concerns.

### **Voting Protections**

**S7466-B / SAMPSON:** Contains a series of provisions designed to promote the timely receipt of military and special federal ballots, including adoption of provisions required by federal law related to absentee ballots. This bill would ensure that members of the military are able to have their votes counted.

### **Educational Opportunity**

**S3171 / GRIFFO:** Allows those with military service and an honorable discharge to audit courses without charge at the State University of New York (SUNY) and City University of New York (CUNY). By

doing so, veterans would be encouraged to pursue additional education.

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