



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

## Helping Our Returning Veterans

JAMES L. SEWARD

New York State is home to about 1.2 million veterans. That's why we should give soldiers, marines, sailors and airmen the support they should have from a state that is grateful for all they have sacrificed.

The senate has just unveiled a package of legislation that would provide greater benefits and protections to New York's military personnel.

The package of bills includes measures to provide better access to education, health and mental health services, employment opportunities, support for the families of New York's service members and ways to commemorate and honor those who serve our state and nation.

The legislation builds on the senate's ongoing efforts to provide assistance and benefits to New York's veterans and active military members, including the innovative Patriot Plan which provided numerous benefits to our service men and women fighting the war on terrorism.

Education.

This year's state budget included \$4.5 million to provide tuition assistance for veterans enrolled in an approved graduate, undergraduate and vocational program. Veterans' tuition assistance was increased from \$2,000 per year to \$4,350, allowing veterans to attend a SUNY school tuition-free. If a veteran chooses to attend a private school, he will receive the equivalent toward his

education costs.

The program is a Senate Majority initiative that originally passed unanimously in the Senate last year (S.6288, Senator Bruno). The senate Republican majority's education plan also includes S.5644, which extends the National Guard Scholarship Awards program to cover graduate education programs; and S.8264, which creates a task force to study the implementation of a program to allow SUNY accept military courses for college credit.

**Health.** The senate will act on legislation (S.5603-A) that would provide for state assumption of single or family co-pays for all active national guard members enrolled in the TRI-CARE military health plan.

The 2008-09 state budget includes \$250,000 to train mental health providers in veteran-specific mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and substance abuse issues (S.6799-A).

**Taxes and employment.** Included in the senate's veterans' package is legislation that would give preference to service disabled veteran-owned small businesses with respect to state contracts (S.4218); provide a tax credit to businesses that hire disabled veterans and veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (S.3068); allow members of the armed forces to take special military make up civil service exams (S.7792).  
Support for military families.

Several bills offer support to military families whose loved ones are serving in the armed forces, including legislation to authorize state and municipal employees to be paid for up to 45 days of military deployment each year, up from 30 days (S.7830A); establish the a military family relief fund to provide grants to military members who are called to active duty for more than 90 days and are stationed more than 300 miles from their primary residences (S.7643-A); require the Division of Military and Naval Affairs and the Office of Children and Family Services to develop a day care assistance program when one or both parents who are members of the military are mobilized for active duty (S.4429).

Honoring our veterans.

In addition, the senate plan includes components to honor our active military members, veterans, and their families. The bills would: authorize the use of state funds for the operation and maintenance of state veterans' cemeteries (S.8010); establish the Veterans' Memorial Preservation Act (S.7879-A); and establish May 11 as military spouses' day in New York State (S.6844).

The senate also passed three bills that would exempt military personnel serving in a combat zone from income tax on compensation for their service (S.3574-A); provide a United States burial flag for veterans of the New York Guard (S.7515); and allow the Defense Department 214 as proof of service for Cold War veterans applying for a real property tax exemption (S.6697).