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PUBLIC HEARING

before

ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

(Testimony from various local veterans' organizations
regarding their concerns and their recommendations
for future legislation)

May 28, 1986
Garfield City Hall
Council Chambers
Garfield, New Jersey

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Peter J. Genova, Chairman
Assemblyman Paul DiGaetano, Acting Chairman
Assemblyman Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Assemblyman D. Bennett Mazur
Assemblyman Thomas H. Paterniti

ALSO PRESENT:

Brian S. Volz
Office of Legislative Services
Aide, Assembly Select Committee
on Veterans' Affairs

New Jersey State Library

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Hearing Recorded and Transcribed by
Office of Legislative Services
Public Information Office
Hearing Unit
State House Annex
CN 068
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

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New Jersey State Legislature

ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE

ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

STATE HOUSE ANNEX, CN-068

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625

TELEPHONE: (609) 292-9106

TER J. GENOVA

Chairman

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Vice-Chairman

ROLD L. COLBURN, JR.

JL. DIGAETANO

DNEY P. FRELINGHUYSEN

BENNETT MAZUR

OMAS H. PATERNITI

May 21, 1986

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Assembly Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs will hold a public hearing on Wednesday, May 28, 1986, at 7:30 P.M. in the Garfield City Hall Council Chambers, Garfield, New Jersey.

The committee will hear testimony from various local veterans organizations regarding their concerns and their recommendations for future legislation.

Anyone wishing to testify should contact Brian Volz, Aide to the Committee, at (609) 292-9106.

DIRECTIONS:

Take the Garden State Parkway to Exit 157 and take Route 46 East to Outwater Lane South or the New Jersey Turnpike to Exit 18E and take Route 46 West to Outwater Lane South. Garfield City Hall is located on Outwater Lane.

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mjz: 1-31

ASSEMBLYMAN PAUL DiGAETANO (Acting Chairman): May I have your attention, please? (audience complies) Thank you. My name is Paul DiGaetano. I am the Assemblyman from this district -- District 36 -- which is the City of Passaic, and 12 communities in South Bergen, including this wonderful City of Garfield, which most of you are from.

I would like to thank our Committee Chairman, Assemblyman Peter Genova and the other Committee members -- Assemblyman Tom Paterniti, Assemblyman Ben Mazur, and Assemblyman Rod Frelinghuysen -- our Committee Aide, Brian Volz, and Donna Bahnck, for taking the time to come here to District 36 to hear the needs of the veterans of our area.

This hearing is one in a continuing series that the New Jersey Assembly Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs has held throughout the State to determine the needs of New Jersey's veterans. What we hope will come out of this hearing is a better understanding of veterans' concerns, so that we may chart the direction that this 202nd Legislature will take in this very important area.

District 36 is truly a cross section of New Jersey. That is why I felt it so important that we have this hearing here tonight to hear what you have to say to the Veterans' Affairs Committee, what you feel are the needs, not only of yourselves, but all veterans in the State of New Jersey.

All of us join in hoping that your trip here to the City of Garfield in District 36 was a very pleasant one, and that your trip home is also pleasant.

Would any of the Committee members like to address those present this evening before we proceed with the testimony?

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: You know, we have had several hearings, and I think they have been very, very fruitful. I think the input is needed, and we are very gratified that you are all here tonight to give us additional input.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: We are here tonight to listen to you. We did not come here with an agenda. We did not come

here to discuss any specific bills. We came here to hear what you have to say and what you feel are your needs and the needs of all the veterans of New Jersey.

So, on that note, I would ask that we begin with Mr. Irving Finver. Would you please come forward, sir?

I R V I N G F I N V E R: Good evening, gentlemen. I am Chairman of the Joint Veterans' Legislative Committee of Bergen County. We represent all of the major veteran organizations in the County. I think we are the only County that has such an organization. As such, we speak for a lot of the veterans, or for most of the veterans in the County.

I had the pleasure of speaking before, one member of the group anyway, last week, your Chairman. What I have to say will be a repeat of what I said last week. One of the items we support is the elimination of the 6% sales tax that the veterans are forced to pay when they buy combs, stationery, toiletry items, and all sorts of goodies -- things of that nature -- that we give out to the veterans at the hospitals. The 6% sales tax is unfair. We could use that money to buy additional items for these men. We are not talking about buying an automobile, where the sales tax is \$600, \$700, \$800. We are talking about small items that are used for everyday purposes for the veteran.

When we run a fund raiser, why should we have to pay 6% on a fund raiser thing, when the funds are going to be channeled right back to the veteran. We feel that is an unfair tax. We are one of the very few charitable organizations that is still taxed in the State of New Jersey. All of the others are tax free. Sometimes we have to use subterfuge. I hate to say it, but subterfuge is used. We use other people's numbers to get the sales tax done. We are not talking about big bucks, where you have to get a reading from the budget committee. There are not a lot of dollars involved here. We are talking about small peanuts.

Now, we continue to support the efforts of the permanent Agent Orange Commission, to determine the effects of Agent Orange and herbicides on New Jersey Vietnam era veterans and their families, especially in light of the inadequate court settlement in the Agent Orange case.

And, of course, the absolute preference granted to veterans must be continued. There can be no erosion of that fact.

We ask that the real estate tax exemption be increased from \$50 to \$150, and that this right be passed on to the widows or widowers upon the demise of the veteran.

We support legislation that would provide veterans' preference for student loans administered under the Higher Education Assistance Authority Law.

We support legislation that would define the Vietnam, Korean, and Lebanon conflicts as wars, and would, therefore, allow these veterans to deduct their periods of service to qualify for positions involving age limits.

And, of course, we welcome the speedy opening of Phase 1 of the third veterans' nursing care facility in Paramus, which I understand, this afternoon, is scheduled to open up July 1, hopefully. We urge that Phases 2 and 3 be expedited.

In addition, we ask that the Assembly investigate the current problem of the roof. What caused it? Where was there laxity? What happened? We, the veterans, would like to know the details, and I am sure you would also.

In addition, we support legislation which would allow veterans with 50% or more disability to receive disabled veteran license plates without charge. I understand that there is only a \$15 charge, it's a one-time deal, so that wouldn't have too great an impact on the budgetary process.

In addition, we also ask for legislation which would provide for free automobile registration for those veterans with a disability of 50% or more.

We urge the Legislature to fund a home health care program for the veteran, and we strongly support legislation which would clarify and coordinate Federal and State dates for wartime service. I understand there is a little problem there; however, I don't really understand the problem. But, the veteran community would like to have the Federal and State dates coincide.

We support legislation that would exempt military retirement pay from the State income tax for those military retirees who are permanent residents of New Jersey. In addition to that, there is one more thing which I am sure will have little effect on the budget, because I am sure most people are not paying it at the present time anyway. We support legislation that would exempt military pay for those on active duty.

I want to thank you gentlemen for having us here tonight. We welcome the opportunity to speak before this Committee, and we hope that many more years of good work will come from this Committee. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Irving.

For the benefit of the Committee members, OLS will have a transcript of this hearing available, if you wish to read it, rather than having to take notes. It makes it a little simpler.

Walter Furca, from the American Ex-Prisoners of War, past Department Commander?

W A L T E R F U R C A: Members of the Assembly, fellow veterans: You mentioned something about bills. We have a peculiar situation. We have a bill pending in the Federal government. Quite a few states in the United States have set up a joint resolution calling on the House of Representatives to enact this bill. It is Bill HRH-64. This particular bill affects the prisoners of war. It is a bill-- We are seeking presumptive illnesses. There are, I think, about six

presumptive illnesses that are listed, which would help us to get disabilities. Until today, American ex-prisoners of war have had problems. There are no records. When we go to the VA looking for disability -- making a claim for it -- we can't show any military records. There were no records in prison camps. So, this is the bill that would help us.

Incidentally, we have 14 Congressmen in the State of New Jersey who have co-sponsored it. So, we are urging the State Legislature to prepare a joint resolution calling upon the House of Representatives to act on this bill in our behalf. We would appreciate this very much, if it would be possible. There are other states that have come through and done that. If needed, I can get a copy of how the resolution reads. I can have it sent to either you or Mr. Genova.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: What do you call a presumptive illness -- if you want to define it?

MR. FURCA: Well, arthritis is one of them; arteriosclerosis is one of them. The presumption would be that if you spent "X" amount of time in a prison, it is possible that because of that you are suffering from that today. It is the presumptive end. It is not something that says you will get it. It is presumptive.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: It is a presumption that you could get it.

MR. FURCA: Yeah, right. That's HRH-64. I thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Mr. Furca. Frank Giammarella, past Commander, Catholic War Vets. Would you come forward, please?

F R A N K G I A M M A R E L L A (speaking from audience): There isn't anything I want to say. I did want to speak about the item of the hospital at Bergen Pines, but he already spoke about that. I am just wondering if anything is being done to repair the roof.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: I can answer about that.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Good.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: I was up there today -- this afternoon -- and I spoke to-- I have forgotten his name. He was just sitting here before, the manager.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON FROM AUDIENCE: Joe Loudermilk.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: Right, Mr. Loudermilk. There was also somebody there from Buildings and Grounds. Perhaps Mr. Loudermilk could give the explanation better than I.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Mr. Loudermilk, did you fill out a card to testify? Would you be prepared to do so at this time -- to come forward and make some comments with regard to that facility?

J O S E P H D. L O U D E R M I L K: I am not really prepared to make any definitive statement about the facility. I am newly appointed, as it were. However, I might answer any question you may care to ask.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Okay. Mr. Loudermilk has just stated that he is not prepared to make any definitive statement at this time. He is newly appointed, but he can answer questions. There is a question concerning the roof and what action has been taken to abate that problem.

MR. LOUDERMILK: It is my understanding that a solution has been agreed to by the builder and by the Department of Building and Construction, whereby they will do some type of repair to the roof that will satisfy the requirements that were put to them.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: Can you speak a little more specifically and perhaps spare, you know, the problems of his making a statement, and somehow or other embarrassing the Department of Health's services?

As was explained to me by the representative of the Department of Buildings, the problem was a matter of ripples in the roof that appeared underneath the shingles. The shingles were pushed up into ripples. The ripples appeared where the

seams existed, and were caused by moisture trapped in the roof. They were going to work on that. It turned out that as the heat of the hot days affected the roof, the ripples disappeared. They settled down because the moisture, I guess, was finding a way to get out, or evaporate. That was the problem that made this unsightly appearance of the roof. The roof itself was waterproof all the time. But, because it was waterproof, it had trapped that moisture inside.

We had some report of litigation which, of course, could have tied up occupancy there for years. There is no more talk of litigation, so I guess that is free. The date for occupancy is the beginning of July -- the estimated date. There was also some slight problem with the heating/air conditioning system, which they were working out. It was no major problem at all. So, it looks like July 1 is our date.

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: Talking about roofs, as I recall, we passed a bonding ordinance about two years ago to repair a lot of facilities. One was the Veterans' Home in Menlo Park. They were supposed to do some repairs to the roof. As of now, if I recall, that roof has not been touched. I remember going down there with the head of the Department of Community Affairs to push the bond ordinance. I think it was passed. Moneys have been appropriated to repair a lot of these structures. As far as the roof there, it hasn't been taken care of as of yet.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: That's in Menlo Park?

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: Menlo Park -- the Old Soldiers' Home.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Mr. Loudermilk. Alexander Filenbaum, past Commander, JWV.

A L E X A N D E R F I L E N B A U M (speaking from audience): My subject has been touched upon. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Okay, thank you. Mr. Al Thomas, past District 2 Commander, VFW.

A L T H O M A S (speaking from audience): Yes, I feel the same way. Everything has been covered so well. I will just save my remarks and questions until later.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Are you getting their statements? (addressing hearing reporter)

HEARING REPORTER: It is going to be tough if they speak from the audience. We can't pick it up.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Mr. Sam Tenner, Service Officer, Veterans' Administrator, VFW Post 2867.

S A M T E N N E R: Gentlemen, my gripe is hospital work. For years and years, I have been attending to the East Orange Hospital, Menlo Park, and Lyons. The biggest gripe we have had for many, many years -- and we seem to have a big problem there-- Number one is the prescriptions. When they are made out, and you go to the window, there are five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten people behind there preparing prescriptions, and you still have to wait three or four hours for your prescription -- just sitting around there waiting. Many times, when they flash your number on the wall-- They give you a ticket and the number comes out. When your number is there, your prescription is ready. Many times, I have taken many of our members and veterans down there, and I had to ask for the number. The number would be laying there, and it was not flashed. I brought this up with several people. This has been going on for years. They said they were going to correct it; they were going to look into it, and nothing has been done.

I was there last week, and it is still the same. Now, as far as the service of the hospital is concerned, they have more excuses now. We don't have enough American doctors there to take care of us, and some of us should be taken care of. We are not being taken care of the way it should be handled. They are all foreign doctors. The majority of them are foreign, and we have problems with most of the veterans who are trying to get some help. We are up there in the age where we need it

now. We didn't need it 20 years ago. We didn't need it 10 years ago, or five years. We need it now. Now is the time when we need it the most. And now is the time when they are giving it to us -- but good. We are not getting the help we should be getting, which should be available to all veterans. There is discrimination there, and it's terrible. Look into it.

That is my report. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Mr. Tenner. Mr. Joe Taormina, State Junior Vice Commander, VFW.

J O S E P H T A O R M I N A: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To my colleagues and members of the other veterans' organizations, including my own -- the VFW -- and to the members of the Assembly Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the State of New Jersey, I might say this: What you see before you here tonight is perhaps the cream of hard-working individuals of their respective organizations. They are here because they are interested in our veterans' affairs. I think that before they leave here tonight, they are going to be satisfied with the manner in which this Committee has been conducted so far under Governor Kean.

But, before I mention anything about our legislative goals for the State of New Jersey, may I say that I am certainly proud of you, Paul, for introducing a resolution on May 15 in the New Jersey Assembly. I want my colleagues to know that I was present -- and I think Stanley Wides was there also -- when you introduced the resolution pertaining to Armed Forces Day. This is what it takes, for our legislators to keep a keen eye on the activities that occur in our country, as well as our State, and take care of the needs of our veterans.

I also want to say that I have gotten to know Peter Genova. I might add that under the leadership of Chuck Hardwick, the Speaker of the Assembly-- Again, the VFW was honored when we awarded Chuck Hardwick the Legislative Man of the Year Award back on January 18 in New Brunswick. I think I

made that statement at the Veterans' Council Meeting in Elizabeth at that time.

So, we are particularly proud of all of you for doing your job. I want you to know that we have a keen eye on our legislators. We watch all of you very carefully. Of course, we get the record. We get the record on how you vote on legislation pertaining to the needs of our veterans.

Let me just quote some of the things-- This, by the way, is the "Legislative Goals for the Year 1986 for the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the State of New Jersey." Some of the items have already been touched upon, such as Agent Orange and veterans' employment and veterans' preference, so I will not discuss anything about those. But, there are some other items that you might be interested in.

The first one is a satellite VA facility in South Jersey. Now, this is one of our top priority goals for the year 1986 in the VFW; that is, a demand that the Veterans' Administration construct and adequately staff and maintain a Veterans' Administration medical facility in southern New Jersey. Well, I don't have to remind all of you that the average age of the World War II veteran today is 64 years of age. The Paramus facility will open very shortly, and we are certainly proud of that. But, let's not forget the other veterans in the southern area of the State, as well as the central area. We are very happy about the almost completed Bergen County facility, but we are going to watch very carefully your moves as far as introducing any legislation in the future pertaining to the southern area of the State. After all, we veterans residing in New Jersey are interested in -- no, not only veterans here in the northern area -- veterans in the entire State of New Jersey.

I might add that there are some 914,000 veterans residing in the State of New Jersey. So we, being a small State, so to speak, carry a big load as far as the veterans are

concerned, and we want to protect every interest that is so justly due them.

I want to talk about the aging veterans, to explore the need for a fourth State nursing home care facility for veterans in the State of New Jersey, to include location, funding, and so forth, and to continue our oversight of the facilities at Menlo Park, Vineland, and Bergen Pines. Home health care. Now here is a very, very touchy subject. Of course, most of us know from newspaper articles that some of our veterans now in the Veterans' Administration facility in East Orange are being so-called "chucked out to the wayside." I have witnessed some of those incidents happening even today.

What we in the VFW urge is legislation to fund a home health care program for veterans. That means that veterans, if the VA facility cannot afford to take care of them any more, so to speak, they can be taken care of in their own private homes, or the home of a son, daughter, and so forth. This should be looked into -- home health care.

And, of course, we are speaking now of legislative reorganization. We urge the New Jersey Senate and the New Jersey General Assembly to give veterans' affairs a higher priority. Veterans comprise nearly one million men and women in our State, and their legislation deserves -- repeat, deserves -- top priority attention, which may mean legislative reorganization.

May I add here now that I am very, very proud that Governor Kean saw fit to select a Committee such as you Assemblymen, who are doing your job. I think that once this Committee starts to roll and there are more and more meetings, such as the one we are having here tonight-- I think that between the two factions -- the State Assembly and the veterans' organizations -- we are going to find harmonious cooperation from both sides. I am quite sure of that.

Just a couple more items, and then I will sit down. Now, the sorest problem that seems to be occurring right now is our club licenses. I am not speaking now of the VFW; I am speaking of the American Legion, the DAV, the Catholic War Veterans, the Jewish War Veterans, the POWs, and any other veterans' organization that has a club. A club is a building -- a building that we see fit to not only take care of our needs, but to take care of the needs of our respective communities. By that I mean, many of them are used as polling places. So, we perform our patriotic duties within our abilities.

Now, to get to monitoring all insurance and drunk driving legislation in concerned efforts to prevent posts with club licenses from facing potential fiasco disaster. I might add that this is occurring right today. We have some posts that are closing their facilities because of the high rate of insurance for liquor liability. I think it behooves all of us to say to you, as our legislators, "Watch out for this legislation which perhaps may come about, to protect us in this event so that we can get a fair shake."

I'm sure many people have read about this insurance in the local newspapers. If this is going to drive every veterans' organization out of business, I can't see for the love of money why something can't be done in the Legislature to see to it that they have a private meeting with the insurance corporations that handle this, and say to them, "Well look, fellows, take it easy on our veterans' organizations." We are not big corporations. We live from week to week, just like a peasant family does.

Military retirees: We support legislation exempting military retirement pay from State income tax for those military retirees permanently residing in our State. We feel this is another one of our priority goals. If a man served his country and is a military career man, when he returns to

civilian life why should he pay a New Jersey State income tax? We in the State of New Jersey feel that since they served their time to protect our country, that they most rightly deserve exemption from State income tax. I think this is another priority goal that you should look into.

I think that about wraps up all I have to say. Some of the other topics -- as I said -- were touched upon. Again, I am proud of your Committee, Mr. DiGaetano, and all of you, Mr. Genova. Please extend my best wishes to Chuck Hardwick. We will be looking forward to working very closely with him and your Committee not only for the balance of this year, but for years to come.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Joe. Mr. Andrew Skurna, past Commander, VFW Post 2867. Did I say your name correctly?

A N D R E W S K U R N A: You certainly did, sir. I would like to thank you for inviting us to this meeting -- this caucus, whatever it is. I feel honored to be in front of you Assemblymen of the State of New Jersey.

My question is, rehabilitation. I have a brother who was stricken with a stroke. He has been paralyzed on the right side for two or three years. He lives with his daughter. Unfortunately, his wife passed away a few years ago. He only gets therapy 15 minutes, maybe twice a week. The therapist comes down twice a week.

Now, I feel that this will never get him out of that wheelchair. I don't know; I'm not God; I can't say when he is going to get out of the wheelchair. His daughter has to go to work to bring the bacon home, so to speak, to take care of the bills, because he is retired and, unfortunately, he has had this stroke. He was at the veterans' facility in East Orange. They kept him there for one week. They said, "We can't keep you here." He said, "What do you mean you can't keep me here?"

You have all these other veterans here and you can keep them as long as you want, and you're telling me that I have to get out of this facility?" And they did send him out of that facility.

Do you know where he ended up? He ended up in a private hospital. And you know what? He got bills from that hospital. I can substantiate the bills. I feel that something has to be done. There is not enough help for disabled veterans -- the handicapped veteran. I feel that you legislators should look into this. I am talking about the whole State of New Jersey -- all the veterans' facilities in the State of New Jersey.

Number two, this radon deal that has been going on. I don't know how detrimental it is to any veteran, but what is the cost for a veteran to have an inspection for the radon gas? I feel it could be detrimental in the future, maybe to the family, or the dependents. Does anybody here know about the radon -- the, what do you call it? -- the situation that persists in Bergen, Passaic, Mercer, Morris Counties? Does anybody have any information on the radon gas deal?

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: It is my understanding -- and anybody with any further information can correct me-- My understanding is that there are many different companies -- independent companies -- that will come in and test your home for the presence of radon. There are a couple of different methods that are used, and they produce different results. However, the figures I have heard are that those tests range anywhere from \$100 to \$300 per home. There are a couple of different abatement procedures to lessen the radon gas in your home. Most of the time it is contained in your basement. Those procedures range anywhere from \$1000 to \$2000 per, and in some cases they may recommend two procedures. I have heard of people spending \$2000 to \$3000 to reduce the radon within their homes.

It is my understanding that the test itself is around a couple hundred dollars -- \$100 to \$300 -- to have it conducted. Yes? (addressed to Assemblyman Frelinghuysen)

ASSEMBLYMAN FRELINGHUYSEN: The State Department of Environmental Protection has an 800 number, where you can call and they will supply interested parties with a list of firms. They are not recommending anybody. Obviously, that is a personal decision. I'm sure that, through the Chair, we can send a list to your town clerk, and he can make that available to anyone who is interested. But, there is an 800 number, and there is a list of reputable firms.

MR. SKURNA: Gentlemen, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Mr. Skurna. Is there anyone else who has not filled out one of these forms who wishes to testify? I know our Passaic contingent came in after we had begun. Joe, do you have anything to present to the Committee tonight?

J O S E P H P. L A Z U R: I'm sorry I was a little late, but we had a very important session. I am a member of the Board of Freeholders.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: I was there. Please come to the mike, Joe, and just for the record spell your name and tell us the organization you represent, and your title.

MR. LOUDERMILK: My name is Joseph P. Lazur -- L-a-z-u-r. I live at 506 Paulison Avenue, Passaic. I am the Legislative Chairman of the Passaic County American Legion.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Joe.

MR. LAZUR: Good morning, Mr. Mazur.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: How are you, Mr. Lazur?

MR. LAZUR: I say hello to Mr. Mazur because I am familiar with him. He got up before the Assembly Appropriations Committee on some of the veterans' legislation which referred to schoolteachers.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: Yes.

New Jersey State Library

MR. LAZUR: I am sorry to say that the Governor has signed that bill, but he has excluded the veteran portion of the public employee sector. I hope that this Committee will see fit to restore that sector of the bill, and have it reintroduced in its proper form and for its proper action at your next session. I am sure Mr. Mazur is familiar with that part of that piece of legislation.

Of course, it hasn't been spoken of here, but we, in our leadership and among our veterans' people, hear much about the veteran legislation, although there aren't too many veterans here, until they are confronted with the problems themselves personally.

Well, members of the Assembly, I want to thank you for this opportunity. I do want to relate somewhat to Civil Service reform. I have two bills here. I have Assembly Bill 2194 and I also have Senate Bill 512. If I may, it reads -- Assembly Bill 2194, on page 30: "The director of the division shall ensure that the affirmative action and equal employment goals of State agencies for minorities, women, handicapped persons shall be reasonably related to their population and relative surrounding labor market area. The director, in accordance with absolute Federal and State guidelines--" There it goes on.

Now, gentlemen, it was stated long before I got up to this microphone, including by the President of our land -- Ronald Reagan -- that he was opposed to quotas. This is nothing more than the quota system being invoked in this program. Now, I bring that to your attention for this reason: Veterans' preference is not touched upon in this piece of legislation. However, I am sure you are familiar with Superior Court Judge Sarokin and his decision on a consent decree, whereby there were a number of veterans who were entitled to promotion, and in some of the localities they are being held up for this promotion because of the quota system. Therefore,

that is why we in the American Legion, and our State organization-- As I got it-- Assemblyman DiGaetano was present there on Sunday, May 4. He heard some of the views that Sunday morning.

So, we would like to see this bill not voted upon in the negative. We realize it has been passed in the Assembly. The sponsors of the bill were Assemblyman Villane, Assemblyman Rafferty, and our Assemblywoman from Passaic County, Assemblywoman Donovan. I spoke to her at some length that Sunday morning. She disagreed with us, stating it was not quotas. However, most of us in the audience feel that it certainly is quotas -- if you read the bill. It is not only me, but we have had some people who are in the legal profession also discuss that as quotas. The other people are Assemblywoman Ogden, Assemblyman Singer, and Assemblyman Randall. The other bill--

ASSEMBLYMAN DIGAETANO: Joe, just on that one-- That question was brought up in caucus. We were assured -- and it is still my understanding -- that that bill retained absolute veterans' preference.

MR. LAZUR: As I stated before, it does retain absolute veterans' preference, but you have to bear in mind-- Let's say there is a gentleman who has lived in a community for "X" number of years, and in comes an influx of whatever is happening in our relative communities. Did you know that he has priority over that citizen, or that young man who is going to qualify for that same examination? This is the problem. I know it is not touching on the veterans right now, but it is going to touch upon the veteran -- as I said. I relate it to Judge Sarokin's decree -- his consent decree. This is where it is going to affect the veterans. That's those two pieces of legislation. That is where the quota system is going to come into effect.

There are some other pieces of legislation which were brought up that Sunday morning in Passaic County, but I am not going to go into them, outside of the fact that some of the propositions which we have spoken about -- Assembly Bill 534, sponsored by Assemblyman Shusted, who happens to be in the majority in your Assembly-- It is a property tax deduction of \$50-plus for any combat zone veteran. However, it eliminates the words "during wartime." This is something that we in the veterans' organizations are confronted with, but, nevertheless, so be it as it may. It is a piece of legislation which will benefit many of the veterans.

The property tax deduction -- Assembly Bill 539, also sponsored by Assemblyman Shusted -- also states 181 days of active service. Page 3, line 76, states: "need not be at a time of service." Now we, as people from a veterans' organization, are here sponsoring veterans' legislation. This is what we ask you people to look at with good favor. We are looking to you people to see that we, as veterans from time immemorial-- This country has always taken care of its patriots in some shape or form. So, this is another piece of legislation which many of our citizens will benefit from, such as the senior citizens, and so on.

Assembly Bill 859, which is sponsored by Assemblyman Zecker, who is just across the river here from the City of Clifton. He is also in your majority leadership. It is a property tax deduction increase from \$50 to \$100. Now, that bill has been languishing in the Assembly for, not only this year, but I would venture to say for the last couple of years. Perhaps in your wisdom you will see fit to see that this bill sees the light of day, and maybe into the Senate and to the Governor's desk.

ASSEMBLYMAN GENOVA: That seems to be about the most prominent bill for what you're looking for -- Zecker's bill. That is one of the few that we are going to be looking at and considering quite favorably.

MR. LAZUR: Very good. This has been alluded to -- the Veterans' Facilities Council-- We in the American Legion are somewhat opposed to changing the nursing facilities, the names and so on in those facilities.

Now, you have Assembly Bill 2235. This is something to be considered by us, as veterans. It includes an "honorably discharged National Guardsman who has served for at least 12 years and has qualified--" Now, this is the clincher, he qualifies for getting veteran status after 12 years of National Guard service. Now, some people may feel that this is justified. We feel that those who have served in a time of war should be getting the veterans' status, not those who served in peacetime. A peacetime soldier is a peacetime soldier, and a wartime soldier is a wartime soldier. It may sound like a selfish attitude, but this is the consideration.

Again, Assembly Bill 2801 -- sponsors Assemblyman Cuprowski, who is a Democrat, Assemblyman Dario, Democrat, and Assemblyman Felice from your own Bergen County -- Nick Felice-- I don't see him here. As a matter of fact, he is the gentleman who is passing out the flags -- not the flags, but the State pins. I was proud to receive one. I appeared before the Committee on the widow's pension just two weeks ago.

Now, this one reads: "Veterans of World War II to receive bonuses program." It states: "Veterans of World War I receive \$10 per month up to \$100." This bill includes World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Lebanon -- to raise \$200 million. This is a money appropriation bill. The other one, of course, is the property tax reduction.

That is the end of my Assembly problems thus far.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Joe.

MR. LAZUR: Thank you for your kind attention.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: You had quite an active day today.

MR. LAZUR: Good to see you. You, too, Mr. Mazur. Incidentally, I see Mr. Mazur at the library trustee session, too. He speaks very well.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Joe.

Does anyone else wish to speak to the Committee this evening? Yes, sir? (addressed to gentleman in the audience). Please come to the mike, spell your last name, and tell us in what capacity you are speaking tonight.

S A L M I O N E: My name is Sal Mione. I am from the Vietnam Veterans of America. I reside as State Council Representative of North Jersey. I am also the Government Affairs Chairperson for the State Council, and a member of the Board of Directors for the Vietnam Veterans.

I am here, not to testify, but I am here to thank Peter Genova for inviting me, and to thank the Assembly for starting this Select Committee. We are here to listen to our brother veterans. We are here because we want to know what the Assembly of the State of New Jersey is doing for the veterans. We just want to tell you to keep up the good work, and not only have a Select Committee, but a Standing Committee which will go a step further in the State of New Jersey. We need it. Our State gave a lot, and we are looking for a lot back, too. We are only starting. We are listening to the other veterans' groups, and we are learning from our mistakes, as well as theirs. We all make mistakes. We want to know what the State Assembly and the Senate are doing for all veterans.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Anyone else? (affirmative response from audience) Mr. Wides, I was going to call on you anyway.

S T A N L E Y J. W I D E S: My name is Stanley Wides. I come from Teaneck, and I chair the Governor's Veterans' Service Council. It is so good to see a Select Committee on Veterans'

Affairs after 25 years of trying. We are grateful that this has happened.

The two announcements I have to make are: One, on Friday, at two o'clock, the Governor will dedicate the first New Jersey veterans' cemetery at Arnytown. We urge your leadership and yourselves to attend. There will be a fly-over. General Gerard has arranged for a fly-over between 2:30 and 3:00, depending on the situation there.

The other thing is, on Saturday, the 31st, the Division of Veterans' Services is sponsoring its first Supermarket of Services for this year. It will be held in Pomona, New Jersey, at Stockton College. If you all remember last year, we had three highly successful Supermarkets of Services. We include in that Agent Orange, and we have a seminar on that. We include all of the State organizations that have a delivery service to veterans, including the VA Lyons Medical Center, the East Orange Medical Center, the three nursing care facilities, and the job employment. We will have a very good job employment opportunity with the Division of Employment, led by Bill Tracy.

I urge you all to come on Friday to Arnytown at two o'clock, and I urge you all -- if you can -- to get down to Stockton College on Saturday. The next Supermarket of Services will be held in the Trenton area, and the third Supermarket of Services will be held in the Morristown area. We hope, that way, to be able to cover the entire State.

I took notes while my fellow veterans were speaking, and I can't understand why HRH-64 was never passed. I think our Council should suggest to the -- our people here should suggest that a memorialization type resolution would be in order for that. I think that would help the cause.

Now, on the Menlo Park roof, I didn't know about that, Assemblyman Paterniti. I will be down there in Trenton

tomorrow, and I will talk on it. I will find out what is going on on that. I think if something has to be done, here we go.

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: When I was there with the Commissioner of Community Affairs, we were pushing for the bond issue. That was one of the points that was brought out, that there was a need to repair the roof. I checked with-- Is Dr. Friedman here? (negative response) He told me that they hadn't fixed the roof as of yet, and I know that was a primary concern. I am hoping that they will take care of that roof.

MR. WIDES: I would suggest to you that the old building, the one on the right-hand side as you walk up the path, could stand some renovation on the outside. The paint is starting to peel and some of the wood on the building looks as if it has seen better days. It might be something you could look into.

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: Well, we did pass a bonding ordinance in this State for that specific reason, to fix those buildings up. We should be spending that money.

MR. WIDES: It would improve its looks.

ASSEMBLYMAN FRELINGHUYSEN: The problem is, the public voted for the bond issue, and in order to draw down on those funds, bills have to be put into the appropriations process. Quite honestly, in one of the houses of government, those appropriations bills languished there for eight or nine months without action. The Assembly took quite prompt action to see that those dollars were moved out, so we could get the money in the pipe line to get these projects done.

Another such appropriation -- to the best of my knowledge -- has been put in in the Assembly, or shall be done quite soon, in order to use up the rest of the bond issue moneys. This is Human Services bond issues for everything -- for the mentally ill, the retarded, as well as veterans' programs.

MR. WIDES: That will be an issue that tomorrow when I get down there I will look into.

One of the VFW men spoke on the VA wait for prescriptions at the medical centers. I concur. I have to wait for mine, too. But, I spoke to Peter Baglio (phonetic spelling) about it, and he promised that he would do everything he could to improve that. There are some people down there who don't like to work.

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON FROM AUDIENCE: Eighty percent of them.

MR. WIDES: I advised the Commander-- I gave him a list of the VFW points of interest and the things they are concerned about, and I think they meet with all of our areas of concern. Our concerns are exactly the same as yours.

A satellite VA medical center in South Jersey-- I was under the impression that the VA had okayed a medical center in the Toms River area. I say that because I had met with VA Director Walters, and he told me that the VA had okayed it. So, I am a little surprised that no action has been taken. But if we start writing letters-- I know you have heard this before, but if you start writing letters to your Congress people in Washington, they will listen. Not a form letter. A personal letter from each one here, and their buddies, will make a heck of a difference.

Now, home health care-- Two weeks ago, I was in Washington. I had a meeting with Major General Torbridge (phonetic spelling), the new VA Director. That is one of his pets -- home care for veterans. He is going to really go after that. He feels that is the way to go for the future. As far as your brother is concerned (addressing Mr. Skurna, a previous witness), that might be the answer -- home care -- where they will furnish, through Human Services-- People will come in to help, better than 55 minutes twice a week.

MR. SKURNA (from audience): Fifteen minutes, sir; 15 minutes.

MR. WIDES: Fifty?

MR. SKURNA: Fifteen minutes.

MR. WIDES: What can they do in 15 minutes? (many audience members speaking at once)

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON FROM AUDIENCE: They can wash their hands and leave.

MR. WIDES: I am not going to speak on anything else, except to say that I have found in your young life here being a Select Committee, that you listen. That is important to our people here and myself, and to all of the veterans of the State. We finally have someone -- a Committee which will listen. In the Senate, we are on the tail end of a committee that has more bills that it will ever look at in a year, and we need a similar committee in the Senate.

Now, Senator Feldman offered to volunteer for it. He said that they would need four other volunteers. If we can get those--

UNIDENTIFIED PERSON FROM AUDIENCE: I got two others, Stanley; I got two more.

MR. WIDES: Good.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: Yeah, but they have to be from two parties.

MR. WIDES: Well, yeah. No problem there with it. I like that; I like the bipartisan approach. I think it gives us an opportunity to listen to both sides. It gives us an opportunity to pick on both sides.

I just want to make one announcement. Assemblyman Rodney P. Frelinghuysen has been chosen by the Jewish War Veterans to be their Citizen of the Year at their 1986 convention at Browns Hotel in New York, June 11 through the 15. That was a commercial.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: You brought up the point about the VA having a satellite hospital in South Jersey. We are

talking about the need for additional homes for the senior citizen veterans, because I believe within the next few years you will have another half a million in New Jersey. I mean, from having these meetings, I did introduce a piece of legislation where the State had taken upon itself-- Under the DRG, we have a lot of hospitals that are operating at 50%, 60%, 70% capacity. Some are even closing up. It will be incumbent upon the State to actually purchase, or lease space in these hospitals, and start opening up additional old soldiers' homes. If a facility is there, they could probably buy it at a nominal amount because the physical structure is there. You have everything you need. Some are even in large cities, where it is easy for people to travel back and forth to see their loved ones.

So, I've got the legislation. I have it in the hopper. I hope that maybe this will be one of the bills that this Committee will push, and maybe in time it will become law. It will make it that much easier for the State. To start something from scratch, it costs a fortune. But, if a facility is there, they can either lease it, or just go out and outright buy it -- the State -- it would be very easy to open up additional old soldiers' homes in the State of New Jersey, whether it is in the southern, northern, eastern -- any part of the State.

MR. WIDES: Assemblyman Paterniti, it might interest you to know that the home in Lyons will be ready to go with 240 beds, I think, in about another eight or ten months. Now, in Baltimore, the VA did buy a hospital, or is negotiating to buy a hospital to use as a VA medical center. So, you know, it's happening. It's innovative, and I think it is something that our State could really put a handle on and use. I think it's great. DRG I hate. I just want you to know that.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Stanley. Is there anyone else who wishes to present anything to the Committee this evening?

Gentlemen, there was something that was just mentioned that I think is worth enlightening you upon. That was the business of volunteering for a committee. I just want to let you know that this Committee -- seven members of the General Assembly -- is totally voluntary. Every member of this Committee volunteered to serve on it. There was no obligation, and there was no one assigned by the Speaker to this Committee who didn't previously volunteer.

There are two members who were not able to be with us tonight. One is Assemblyman Colburn, who said earlier that he was not going to be able to make it, and the other is Assemblywoman Cooper, who is involved in a very heated runoff in the City of Atlantic City for Mayor, and was not able to drive up tonight. But, it is a Committee of very hard-working, very dedicated members that I think all of you should be proud of. Again, as we heard earlier, I think this 202nd Legislature has certainly demonstrated its commitment by, at least, the establishment of this Committee.

Are there any Committee members who wish to make any comments?

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: Yes. I would like to call to the Committee's attention a newspaper article which appeared in the Philadelphia papers on Monday -- Memorial Day. It said: "New Jersey vets rank last in aid. New Jersey's one million veterans get less in Federal benefits than those of any other state, and State officials are trying to find ways to improve services, according to Acting Human Services Commissioner Geoffrey Perselay. 'New Jersey ranks ninth in the number of veterans, but fiftieth in the amount of Federal benefits received by them,' he said. 'A reorganization of the State's Division of Veterans' Programs and Special Services, which has been unchanged for more than 25 years, is being developed to make it more productive, and to make it a more productive and visible representative of New Jersey's veterans,' said Perselay."

I think, Mr. Chairman, that this would be a good subject of inquiry for this Committee. I think we ought to find out why New Jersey veterans are fiftieth. I mean, ninth of 50 states. We have more veterans per population -- per 100 of population -- than 41 other states. If this is a case of discrimination on the part of the Federal government, or inaction on the part of our representatives in Washington, or what, we should try to, you know, make our representatives and make our Administration more aware of this; make them understand that we are entitled to more, and we want to get more.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Assemblyman Paterniti?

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: Through you, Mr. Chairman, if I recall, about two and a half years ago, I got into a battle with the Administration. They were going to take the pensions of the veterans of the Old Soldiers' Home. I did save their pensions. They wanted to take 80%. They wanted to use some of that money for regional offices.

Through my legislation, I did get them a half a million dollars for regional offices. It is on record that we really wanted a million. The Governor said he would look into it, but as of this date-- I mean, maybe we should try to get that additional money. But the point was brought up at the meeting when we were down in Atlantic City, that the money was put in place, but I don't think they were dispensing it properly. They were supposed to open regional offices all over the State. If there were programs available -- these Federal programs -- we would have the personnel to reach out and get those moneys into the State of New Jersey. I don't know whether they opened these offices or did what they were supposed to do, but the money was put there. There was a half a million dollars. I got them that money. We were hoping for a million to really have even more than we were anticipating, but we did put money in place to reach out for additional

Federal moneys. That was the whole thrust of that piece of legislation.

I don't know what happened. Somebody mentioned that they started to parcel out \$2000 for this and \$3000 for that. I don't think it was going in the right direction. Maybe we have to look into it to make sure that that money goes where it is supposed to go, to open up these offices so that if a person has a problem, and there are Federal programs on a Federal level, we have the personnel to reach out and get those moneys for our people.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Rodney? (negative response)
Peter?

ASSEMBLYMAN GENOVA: I would like to say, you know, this Committee has to crawl before we can walk. We are not going to promise you the moon. I made that perfectly clear last week in Union County. We have made several recommendations to the chairpersons of the standing committees and to the Speaker of the Assembly regarding legislation that we would like to see posted for immediate consideration. We are looking at legislation concerning educational benefits for veterans, PERS programs. We've got a bill in on the conformity dates -- several bills in. We are going to make recommendations on that very, very soon.

But, I am not going to tell you that we are going to oblige you with every bit of legislation you want, because a lot of it is costly -- extremely costly -- and the State just can't handle it. You will be well-aware of what we are doing through your representatives. We are going to be making a midyear announcement of our progress to date. Certainly -- I hope anyway -- that you are all satisfied with what we have done on behalf of the 900,000 veterans in the State of New Jersey.

I can't say that this Committee should go after the Federal government and criticize them, because you have

representatives in the State of New Jersey from both sides of the aisle who have been reluctant to advance the needs and concerns of the veterans publicly. If they promised you -- as one gentleman said before -- and haven't delivered, that certainly has been a message.

It is clearly obvious that this Committee-- We have been organized since mid-January -- the latter part of January -- and we are doing the best we can. We will work together for all of you. You've got people here who are very familiar with veterans' programs. You've got people here who are veterans. You've got seven distinguished people of the lower house who are going to work on your behalf. We are just not going to build up your considerations. I want you to know that we are going to be very, very sincere with everything we do. I mean that from the bottom of my heart. We've got good members here. To tell you that we are going to pass a bill that is going to provide a \$150 property tax deduction-- The State could never handle that. It would be virtually impossible for us to do that, but we are going to give you something better than you have right now.

So, work with us. Have enough confidence and trust in us, and I am sure you will be very, very satisfied with the progress that this Committee will make. I would like to make just one correction. It was Chuck Hardwick who decided that this Committee should be formed, not the Governor. I mean, the Governor takes credit for a lot of things. But, Chuck Hardwick, who is my distinguished colleague in District 21, has the utmost respect for the State's veterans, and it was because of Chuck that this Committee was formed.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Thank you, Peter. Yes, Mr. Wides?

MR. WIDES: I was derelict when I didn't mention that two weeks ago, New Jersey Bell had a memorial service for its

Vietnam era veterans who were killed in action by dedicating a plaque at 540 Broad Street. The families of those Vietnam era veterans were there. Peter Genova was there. Peter make a very eloquent -- very eloquent -- speech, talk, eulogy -- whatever you want to call it. When they dedicated the plaque, Mr. Campanella (phonetic spelling), the President of New Jersey Bell-- After taps was played, he was crying. There wasn't a dry eye in the place. And, Peter, you did very well. We were proud of you.

ASSEMBLYMAN GENOVA: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: On behalf of the Veterans' Affairs Committee of the New Jersey Assembly, I would like to thank each and every one of you for taking the time to come out to speak with us tonight.

We would ask one thing. We would ask that you maintain your vigilance, and that you spread the word throughout your fellow veterans that this Committee does exist, and this Committee is going to look out to further the interests of all veterans in the State of New Jersey.

I know that each and every one of you came from a distance. Have a safe trip home. I want to thank the City of Garfield for hosting us this evening and for extending their hospitality to us and to all of you who are here from Garfield and from neighboring communities.

We are going to continue having our Committee hearings throughout the State, and I would invite you to attend each and every one of them.

Yes, Irving?

MR. FINVER: I have one more statement, please.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Okay.

MR. FINVER: You must get a better list of your veteran leadership than you have in your office. From what I understand, people were informed by you simply going to the telephone directory, and those veteran organizations that have

post homes were notified. Many posts do not have a home. There is no telephone for them. You must get a better list of your leadership.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Yes, Assemblyman Paterniti?

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: Let me ask you, if we don't have it, why doesn't the State run an ad in the newspapers? Let them write in and give their addresses and so on and so forth, so we will have a list and we can inform them when these hearings are going to be held so they can come in and participate.

MR. WIDES: There is a list available.

ASSEMBLYMAN PATERNITI: There is a list available? Okay.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: I'm sorry, Stanley. What did you just say?

MR. WIDES: There is a list available. You can call Leon Cheeseman (phonetic spelling) at the Veterans' Programs and Services, he can make it available.

ASSEMBLYMAN FRELINGHUYSEN: We have that list already, and we are trying to get a more up-to-date list. A lot of the State commanders are waiting until the next election before they provide any more details.

ASSEMBLYMAN DiGAETANO: Okay. Thank you very much for coming, and a safe trip home.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)

