

Department of Pennsylvania
Veterans of Foreign Wars
of the United States

CHARTERED BY CONGRESS

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July 31, 2009

To Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell and
Members of the Pennsylvania Conference
Committee for the 2009-10 State Budget:

The leaders of the undersigned Pennsylvania Veterans Service Organizations join me in writing to you on behalf of the state's 1.1 million veterans. Our organizations represent male and female veterans who range in age from early 20s to 80-plus, who come from varied ethnic and economic backgrounds, and who either fought in foreign wars or preserved peace at home or abroad.

We have attempted to work collaboratively with policymakers during this very difficult budget process for the 2009-10 fiscal year. We have met with lawmakers individually, attended public rallies and participated in legislative hearings to share our concerns. However, there is still uncertainty about where loyalties lie for funding all existing programs since both chambers offered budgets that differ in how they would treat veterans and their families.

As the Conference Committee meets to create common ground on a budget, our veterans organizations remain very concerned about the Commonwealth's willingness to fulfill all of its commitments to the men and women who have served our country.

The real issue at hand during budget negotiations is choosing priorities. No one is more deserving of priority status today and tomorrow than our veterans including those who are living the twilight of their lives in State Veterans Homes. No one, period. Not lawmakers, not judges, not the Governor, not the most powerful lobbyists, not the rich – no one! We don't mean to offend anyone, but veterans deserve the best possible service, support and assistance from government at all levels. Veterans programs and services should receive the same high priority as education and human services.

Any funding decrease to programs should only come after in-depth study that conclusively shows funding cuts would not negatively impact veterans and their families. Unless there is a clear case showing a decreased need—and before you reach this conclusion you must consider the new wave of veterans from service in Iraq and Afghanistan, those already home from this and other wars, and troops who will go to future war zones—we cannot stand idle as proposed reductions to veterans programs and services are moved around like pawns in the budget process.

We also continue to urge lawmakers to increase funding for the Act 66 VSO Grant program, which has a proven track record of serving veterans and the State extremely well by bringing millions of federal dollars into Pennsylvania as revenue. The return on this State investment is truly impressive.

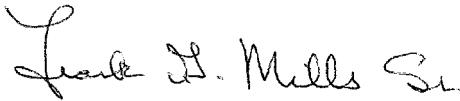
Just as veterans stepped up to protect freedom worldwide, legislators and the administration should recognize that veterans and their families have already sacrificed well above and beyond what most citizens endure for their nation—enormous life-changing sacrifices. The services and programs bestowed upon veterans represent the fulfillment of a pledge.

As President John Fitzgerald Kennedy said, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

Everything done by the state and federal government impacts the answer to the question of who will guard America's freedom in the future. As George Washington, said, "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by our nation."

Our organizations and 1.1 million veterans are closely watching how you and your fellow elected officials fund programs and services for veterans of past service, those who are at war on foreign soil today and those who stand ready to deploy at the call of the Commander-in-Chief.

Respectfully,



Frank G. Mills, Sr., State Commander
Pennsylvania Department Veterans of Foreign Wars



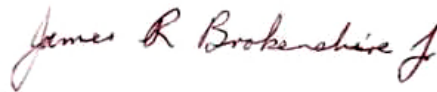
Paul Hastings, Chairman
Pennsylvania Veterans Commission



W.J. "Sandy" Sandell, State Commander
The American Legion - Department of Pennsylvania



Larry Holman, President
PA War Veterans Council
Immediate Past President Jewish
War Veterans - Pennsylvania



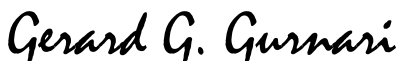
James Brokenshire, Past President
Military Officers Association of America
Pennsylvania Council of Chapters



Jeffrey White, President
Vietnam Veterans of America
PA State Council



Timothy Birtle, Commander
Disabled American Veterans
Department of Pennsylvania



Gerard G. Gurnari, Commander
AMVETS
Department of Pennsylvania



Neil Appleby, Secretary-Treasurer
& Past National President
Blinded Veterans Association of Pennsylvania



Leanna L. Dietrich, Commandant
Marine Corps League - Pennsylvania



Donald L. Cohick, President
**State Association of County Directors of
Veterans Affairs**