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Delegates push veteran bills

One aims to keep work registration updated in service

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CHARLESTON — A Morgantown delegate is helping lead the charge to secure benefits for the state's veterans.

Delegate Barbara Evans Fleis-



chauer, D-Monongalia, is co-chairwoman of the joint interim Select Committee on Veterans Affairs and a member of the House Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security Committee. She is a co-sponsor of three veteran-related bills introduced during the first days of the session. Local delegate, Linda Longstreth, D-Marion, also co-spon-

STUDY will look at veterans' issues in West Virginia.

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sored the bills. She is vice-chairwoman for Veterans Affairs of the House Committee and a member of the select committee.

Fleischauer explained that these bills were inspired in part by the U.S. Department of Defense. The select committee has worked with the agency's State Liaison Office for several years, and has developed

bills from its annual list of "Key Personnel and Readiness Issues."

Here's a look at each bill.

Professional credit for military training

HB 4037 aims to require professional licensing and registration boards to count military training and experience as credit toward a license or registration. Fleischauer said this bill is based on other

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states' laws.

Longstreth said vets "get excellent training in the service. When they come out they should be given some credit for that training — which I think is wonderful."

The various boards would submit rules to the Legislature that determine what type of experience and training would fulfill their requirements.

The bill would also require that the veteran's license or registration remain in good standing and be renewed while the veteran is on active duty and six months after discharge without payment of fees or dues, and without taking continuing education courses — which the veteran couldn't access while on duty.

Morgantown veteran Frank Vitale, a co-founder of Vetconnection.org, proposed this bill during a July interim meeting.

"The United States military provides the finest training in the world," he said in an email exchange. "Specifically, there can be no better medical training-ground than the Medical Corps of the United States military. First-aid providers, medical technicians, nurses, physicians — these experts are the backbone of a healthy military. ... So given the level of training, the training environment and the quality of the experience, why would these experts not be qualified to perform CPR when they return? Or provide other

Protection of unemployment benefits

HB 4007 would amend the state code section that defines reasons for denying unemployment benefits to someone who quits a job.

It would protect the unemployment benefits of a veteran's spouse who quits a job because the veteran is transferred to another place of duty. It would also protect the employer by not holding the employer responsible for the charges incurred by the benefits.

It ranks as item No. 2 on the 2012 Department of Defense's list. Fleischauer said this isn't that common an occurrence in West Virginia. But "I think it would make the transition easier for spouses of military service members who transfer to bases in other states. It is not the fault of the spouse who has to move with a service member and it is not the fault of the employer."

Fleischauer said the fiscal note with the bill is relatively small, about \$40,000 to \$50,000, and this year the agency that administers the fund testified to the select committee that it supports the bill.

Vitale said the unemployment rate for returning veterans is more than double that of the national average. "We should dedicate our efforts to assisting families in whatever way we can. There is a significant burden placed on the remaining family members during deploy-

eran's family to obtain five copies of the vet's death certificate at no cost. Certificates cost \$5 each.

Fleischauer, a lawyer, said estate matters can be difficult. "All of the entities which process benefits — insurance companies, banks, pension funds, etc. — all need original death certificates. This bill is really to help the family members during what can be a difficult time. The

thinking was that this was a small thing we could do to make this cumbersome process a little easier for the families of people who have served our county — and sometimes made the ultimate sacrifice."

Longstreth agreed and said, "We're just honoring our veterans. Let's give it to them because they served our country."

It's a small but significant

gesture for the family of our fallen heroes," Vitale said.

In recent years, roughly 10 percent of the bills introduced make it all the way to the governor's desk. Last

year it was 191 of 1,984.

Given the odds, Longstreth said, "I'll be happy if one gets passed." She'd prefer to see all three. "We should do all we can."

services for which they have been trained?

“When it comes to licensing/certification for medical professionals, transportation providers, as well as other related military occupations, the state would be fortunate to attract and/or retain these experts for the workforce.”

ment. Unemployment and a decrease in household income and security, shouldn't be one of them.”

Death certificate copies for families

HB 4038 is relatively low on cost, and big on service to vets' families. It would allow every deceased vet-