MILITARY AND VETERANS ISSUES AT NCSL LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT

By James B. Reed

State legislators from across the country will gather in Chicago on Aug. 8-9 to address the needs of military veterans and to explore how states and military leaders can further collaborate to safeguard the local military presence that both defends our nation and provides economic benefits to the state.

The keynote address before the NCSL Military and Veterans Affairs Task Force will be given by Erica Jeffries, director of the Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs. Ms. Jeffries will discuss the IDVA’s work with military veterans and specifically address veterans in crisis.

The task force will also spend time exploring better ways to deal with the epidemic of veteran suicides. A recent Veterans Administration study concluded that 7,403 veterans took their own lives in 2014, a rate of 20 per day. This accounted for 18 percent of all suicides in America, while veterans make up less than 9 percent of the U.S. population.

A Chicago group called Thresholds will discuss its Veterans Project that assists veterans with housing, employment supports and substance abuse counseling. In addition, Rob Trigg, Jr., the founder of Formation 22 is scheduled to speak about this effort involving 25,000 veterans that allows military veterans to share issues and concerns with each other in a closed group forum. Its motto is “No service member left behind.”

The Military, Your Community and the Economy Issue Forum will take up the potentially changing economic impact of military installations, in light of defense budget cuts and the threat of a future Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC). The session will focus on the steps taken by states and military leaders to protect the military presence through minimizing encroachment and other collaborative approaches.

Tim Ford, executive director of the Association of Defense Communities will lead a discussion among Jennifer L. Miller, deputy assistant secretary of the Air Force, Tom Neubauer, vice-chair of the Florida Defense Support Task Force and Delegate Richard Anderson of Virginia.

Additional sessions will take up military voting, recent activities of the Texas Military Department, best practices in employment of veterans and the use of service dogs. Click here for a full rundown.

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