

**California VFW Legislative Report—1-11-2010**  
***William Manes, State Legislative/PAC Chairman***

The California State Legislature returned to Sacramento and started the 2010 session on January 4. I am, therefore, beginning the periodic e-mail reports on issues of concern to veterans.

One of the first items of business was to receive the Governor's State of the State Address, and the proposed budget for 2010-2011.

**Budget Plans.** As has been well publicized, the State is facing another serious deficit of some \$20 billion for the coming year. The Governor, along with the Budget proposal, set another Special Session of the Legislature to, again, address this situation. Theoretically, this means that the Legislators must give the deficit priority consideration and, unless a proposal is submitted to the Governor in a short period of time, they will be restricted in the actions they can take on other legislative matters. In actual practice in the past, the Legislators merely pass a few bills of dubious benefit, but add language to the bills that "this addresses the budget deficit." Then they merely continue with business as usual.

**Department of Veterans Affairs.** Although the Governor states that the Budget "calls for even greater reductions in nearly every aspect of state government than were necessary in 2009," the proposed Budget for the Department, remarkably, appears to be little affected. The significant adjustments for next year, in fact, involve increases: \$8.3 million is added to activate business operations and to begin admissions at the Veterans Homes in West Los Angeles, Lancaster, and Ventura, and an additional \$11.7 million is provided for the full year cost of these three homes which began operations in 2009-10.

Another increase of \$2.4 million is programmed for construction planning for the future Veterans Homes in Redding and Fresno.

Other changes include an increase from \$8.3 to \$8.9 million for veterans services personnel. State subvention funding to the Counties for the Veterans Services Offices remains at \$2.6 million, as it has been for the past few years.

The Veterans Quality of Life Fund, which receives donations from the income tax check off donations and which supports the Welfare and Recreation activities at the State Veterans Homes, is going from \$110,000 in 2008-09 and \$80,000 in 2009-10 all the way to zero because of the low level of donations from taxpayers. Since the donations failed to reach a minimum level set by the Franchise Tax Board, this item is being removed from the check off list. (But see information of AB 1088, below.)

More details will become available as the Legislature's Budget Committees convert the Governor's proposals to actual appropriations.

**Pending Bills.** Although a few bills have been introduced this past week, there is nothing new at this time related to veterans affairs. There are efforts to continue committee actions on some bills which were introduced in 2009 but did not pass the legislative chamber in which they were introduced. Two bills of particular interest, both of which are supported by the VFW Department of California, are Assembly bills. If the efforts are successful, the bills will have to pass both the policy and fiscal committees and then pass a floor vote in the Assembly before the end of January.

**AB 498 Vehicles:** special interest license plates and decals (Mary Hayashi, Hayward)

This is effectively a new bill in that the bill number was used for a different subject last year. The intent is to permit a veteran who is eligible to have the ex-POW license plate, which does not cost the usual state registration fees, to instead use the veterans organization special license plate and still be exempt from paying the fees. Some former POW's are reporting serious stress problems when persons who see the ex-POW plates insist on questioning the veteran concerning the experiences in the prison facilities.

The bill is sponsored by the VFW and is scheduled for its first committee hearings during the coming week.

**AB 1088 Taxpayer contributions:** California Veterans Fund (Nathan Fletcher, San Diego)

This bill is intended to restore the donations which were previously authorized on the income tax check off list for the Veterans Quality of Life Fund, to help support the welfare and recreation activities at the California Veterans Homes. The bill is also scheduled to receive committee hearings during the coming week.

**Legislative Calendar.** Important dates for legislative activities in January 2010 include:

Jan. 10 —Budget must be submitted by Governor

Jan. 15 —Last day for policy committees to hear and report bills introduced in 2009 for referral to fiscal committees

Jan. 18 —Martin Luther King, Jr. Day observed.

Jan. 22 —Last day for any committee to hear and report to the Floor bills introduced in their house in 2009.

Jan. 31 —Last day for each house to pass bills introduced in their house in 2009