



Senator Eliot Shapleigh

District 29

Press Advisory

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SENATOR SHAPLEIGH, REPRESENTATIVE MOODY, TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION TO HOST PRESS CONFERENCE ON VETERANS PENSIONS, HIGHLIGHT VETERANS BILLS

"Many vets and widows of vets do not know about pensions and other benefits.

We want more vets to claim benefits that they have sacrificed to earn"

EL PASO - On Friday, February 27, 2009 at 10 a.m., at VFW Yucca Post 8919, Senator Eliot Shapleigh (D- Dist. 29, El Paso) and State Representative Joseph E. Moody (D- Dist. 78) will host a press conference to address declining rates of veterans receiving benefits they are eligible for.

Also attending the press conference will be John R. House, director of marketing & training for the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) and TVC Commissioner John McKinney.

"Many vets and widows of vets do not know about pensions and other benefits. We want more vets to claim benefits that they have sacrificed to earn," Senator Shapleigh said.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), nationally, only 27 percent of eligible veterans receive VA pension and only one in every seven eligible veterans survivors receive VA pension. Only 27 percent of recently separated veterans take advantage of the GI Bill.

Eighteen percent of recently separated veterans are unemployed and of those who are employed, 25 percent earn less than \$21,840 per year. In Texas, 140,000 veterans sought employment assistance last year while the Texas unemployment rate was 4.2 percent. This number is expected to rise now that Texas' unemployment rate has reached nearly six percent.

El Paso county is home to roughly 48,000 veterans. Bills filed this session by Senator Shapleigh and Representative Moody hope to assist veterans both in El Paso and across the state.

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"El Paso and Fort Bliss are historically intertwined. Fort Bliss has brought many families to our community. We have grown and diversified as a city thanks to our relationship with Fort Bliss and the military men and women that have settled here," Representative Moody said. "My hope is that we as a state, take care of those men and women that have served our country. My hope is that we especially take care of those who have returned home with injuries and disabilities."

[H.B. No. 1008](#) and [SB 192](#), filed by Representative Moody and Senator Shapleigh, respectively, would exempt totally disabled veterans from having to pay property taxes. While the citizens of Texas voted on and passed a constitutional amendment exempting disabled veterans, the relevant statutory changes have not been made. These bills would make those changes mandatory.

Senator Shapleigh has also filed several other bills relating to care for veterans:

[SB 189](#) - Would establish a 36 percent interest rate cap on military borrowers and dependents in order to prevent abusive payday lenders from targeting military families. The Department of Defense concluded that payday lending and other high-cost lending products are a threat to national security and destructive to troop morale while being actively deployed. Although federal legislation has been passed, this bill is necessary because it gives our state regulators a role, thereby increasing the likelihood of compliance.

[SB 196](#) would increase public education funding for students who are transferring schools as a result of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, as well as students whose parents are serving our country in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. These soldiers' children face a special set of challenges, whether it be adjusting to a new school and community or the fact that one or both parents are stationed abroad in a war zone. This increased allotment will allow school districts to address the need for additional counselors, both to assist relocating military students and to help students with the effects of Texas-based servicemembers who are killed or injured in action.

[SB 200](#) would extend in-state tuition rates to veterans, their spouses, and their children. Veterans and their families have served our state and nation while in the armed forces, and allowing them to enjoy a reduced rate of tuition is simply a small measure of thanks for their sacrifice.

[SB 672](#) would add disabled veterans to the definition of what constitutes a Historically Underutilized Business (HUB). The statewide HUB program currently facilitates the use of HUBs in state procurement and provides information on the state's procurement process only to minority and woman-owned businesses.

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[S.B. No. 1030](#) would require each member of the Texas National Guard who served during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom be screened for traumatic brain injury and receive assistance in obtaining appropriate medical care should they test positive. The bill also creates a Texas Servicemembers Assistance Program. The program would provide a 24-hour, toll-free telephone hotline through which a servicemember or a family member of a servicemember may obtain telephone counseling and information about mental health conditions that are likely to affect the servicemember, provide traumatic brain injury screening to all interested servicemembers, and provide servicemembers with additional treatments, including peer-based counseling, psychotherapy, prescriptions and occupational therapy services.

Texas veterans may obtain information on their eligibility for VA benefits through The Texas Veterans Commission. TVC provides services to veterans seeking employment, job training and career assistance. TVC also reviews, evaluates, approves and oversees education and training programs available to veterans and dependants eligible for the G.I. Bill and other benefits.

In 2008, TVC represented more than 158,000 veterans for disability and compensation claims state-wide. Veterans may inquire about TVC services at any of the following locations:

VA Health Care Center

5001 N. Piedras
El Paso, Texas 79930
915-564-7852

Center for Workforce Preparedness

1359 Lomaland Dr.
El Paso, Texas 79935
915-887-2440

Veterans County Service Officer

- El Paso County
4641 Cohen Ave., Suite D
El Paso, Texas 7924
915-759-7990

Department of Veterans Affairs

- Health Center
7500 Viscount Blvd., Ste C-50
El Paso, Texas 79925
915-771-7026

VA Vet Center

1155 Westmoreland Dr., Suite 121
El Paso, Texas 79925
915-772-0013

What: Senator Eliot Shapleigh and State Representative Joseph E. Moody to host a press conference to address declining rates of veterans receiving benefits they are eligible for

When: Friday, February 27, 2009 at 10 a.m.

Where: VFW Yucca Post 8919, 5535 Saluki Dr. 79924 ([Map](#))

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