

## **State Legislative Report: Property Tax Relief February 2019**

The Texas Legislature is now in session and we are beginning to have new committee chairs and members getting themselves oriented to the tasks at hand. The Governor, Lt. Governor and House Speaker are intent on giving property tax relief while at the same time they are in dire need of new revenue for funding of public education. In addition, they are aware of the Hurricane Harvey relief that also needs a great deal of money. There is also some talk of getting into the “Rainy day” funds to take care of some of these issues.

The Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations, of which I am the Chairman and of which TCC is a member, held its bi-annual meeting on January 26, 2019. The major issue that TCVO will direct focus will be the changes necessary to the current property tax law for disabled veterans with under 100% disability. At present, this is a fixed amount that is entirely dependent on the level of disability of the veteran. TCVO wants to change the property tax application to a percentage which would adjust the amount of exemption based up the percentage of disability rating to the value of the veteran’s home. If passed, it would initiate a change to the Texas Constitutional which does require a public vote. However, it would solve the problems created as home values of homes fluctuate now and into the future. TCVO’s top priority is this property tax reduction for all Veterans disabled less than 100%. The challenge is that this significantly impacts the state and county finances. Jim Brennan, TCVO Legislative Director, expects that by the end of March or early April the direction of these financial issues will be clearer. We can then determine the direction that TCVO will take to promote property tax reduction for Veterans disabled less than 100%.

Sam Wilder, Association of the US Army and TCC Federal Legislative Affairs, is pressing for an alternate bill which would be only a partial solution for disabled veterans with 80-99% disability. House Bill HB 716 would provide 80% to 99% Disabled Veterans with property tax exemption based on their % of VA disability rating. TCC voted last year to accept a position paper supporting this legislation. Sam is continuing to solicit support from the various state-wide veteran organizations in support of this bill.

While TCVO and I will lend support to any bill coming before the legislature benefiting veterans, my opinion, having dealt with the legislature for many years, is that we should not be looking for an incremental solution but rather focus on all efforts into a full solution for ALL disabled veterans. My fear is that going for a partial solution will generate “veteran’s” fatigue that will make it much harder for us to get a comprehensive bill passed in the end. Remember that any change will require Texas voters to approve any change. This fatigue will come if they see multiple bills for approval rather than a single comprehensive bill. TCVO will work with legislators to develop the optimal solution that will benefit all veterans disabled less than 100%.

Jim Cunningham, TCC State Legislative VP