

Act Number: 09-090

Bill Number: 5664

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS
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Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, through you, if I could, several questions to the proponent of the Amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed.

SENATOR MCKINNEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, through you, just a follow up --

SENATOR LOONEY:

Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Looney, for what purpose do you rise?

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. With the indulgence of the Minority Leader, I would ask that this bill be "passed temporarily."

THE CHAIR:

This bill will be "passed temporarily." Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

Calendar Number 620, File Number 154, 826 and 924, substitute for House Bill 5664, AN ACT CONCERNING THE AWARD OF RIBBONS AND MEDALS TO VETERANS FOR

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SERVICE IN TIME OF WAR AND CONCERNING FUNERAL HONOR
GUARDS FOR DECEASED STATE OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY as amended by House Amendment
Schedule "A", Favorable Report of Committee on
Veterans, Public Safety and Appropriations.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Maynard.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

Yes, thank you, Mr. President. I move acceptance
of the Joint Committee's Favorable Report and passage
of the bill in accordance with -- accordance? Pass?
Is that the word we use? Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Maynard. You may proceed.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

Thank you, thank you, Mr. President.

I think it's altogether fitting we are acting on
this bill in the Chamber today. It is an Act
regarding awarding of veterans medals, service medals
and ribbons. The bill would extend eligibility to
veterans who are deceased and would extend that all
the back to January 1st of 2000. There's no fiscal
note attached to the bill. This would be within

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existing available appropriations and I might add, that General Martin has kindly offered, given the State's fiscal situation, the volunteer services of up to two dozen of his men to help the Commissioner in the processing of these requests, if so needed.

The House Amendment, interestingly, adds something that I think would be of interest to all Members of the Chamber. It would allow, upon the request of next of kin, for a deceased legislator -- for the funeral of a deceased legislator, for the next of kin to request an honor guard composed of members of the Capital Police instead of the traditional State Police Honor Guard. And that would be, as I say, at the request of next of kin, if so desired.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator Maynard. Further comments on the bill? Senator Maynard.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

If not -- if there's no objection, I'd ask that the item be placed on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Without objection, so ordered.

SENATOR MAYNARD:

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that it be placed on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Without objection, so ordered. Mr. Clerk, would you please return to the call of the Calendar. Mr. Majority Leader.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, if the Clerk might call the first Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

The roll call has been ordered in the Senate on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the Chamber? An immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the Chamber? Mr. President, those items placed on the first Consent Calendar begin on Calendar page 5. Calendar Number 392, House Bill 6433.

Calendar 397, Substitute for House Bill 5915.

Calendar 405, House Bill 5536.

Calendar page 6, Calendar 406, House Bill 5873.

Calendar 457, substitute for House Bill 6264.

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Calendar page 12. Calendar Number 599,
substitute for House Bill 6463.

Calendar page 13, Calendar 608, House Bill 6640.

Calendar page 14, Calendar 611, substitute for
House Bill 6341.

Calendar 612, substitute for House Bill 6286.

Calendar 620, substitute for House Bill 5664.

Calendar page 15, Calendar 622, substitute for
House Bill 6496.

Calendar page 16, Calendar 628, House Bill 5809.

Calendar 630, substitute for House Bill 5519.

Calendar page 23, Calendar Number 284, substitute
for Senate Bill 290.

Calendar page 24, Calendar 103, Senate Bill 754.

Calendar 120, Senate Bill 818.

Calendar 136, Senate Bill 789.

Calendar page 26, Calendar 179, substitute for
Senate Bill 951.

Calendar page 27, Calendar 207, substitute for
Senate Bill 950.

Calendar page 29, Calendar 252, substitute for
Senate Bill 1068.

Calendar page 34, Calendar Number 420, Senate

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Bill 325.

And Calendar page 40, Calendar Number 541, House
Bill 6076.

Mr. President, that completes the items placed on
the first Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

On the first Consent Calendar, the machine is
open.

THE CLERK:

The Senate is now voting by roll call on the
Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to
the Chamber? The Senate is now voting by roll call on
the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return
to the Chamber?

THE CHAIR:

Have all the Senators voted? Seeing that all
Senators have voted, the machine will be closed.
Clerk, please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

Motions on adoption to the Consent Calendar,
number 1.

Total Number Voting	36
Those voting Yea	36

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Those voting Nay 0

Those absent and not voting 0

THE CHAIR:

The Consent Calendar is adopted. Mr. Majority
Leader.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, a few
more items to be marked "go." First, Calendar page
29, Calendar 249, House Bill 6185. Calendar page 35,
Calendar 424, Senate Bill 1045. Calendar page 36,
Calendar 429, Senate Bill 940. Thank you, Mr.
President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, sir. Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

Turning to Calendar page 29, Calendar Number 249,
Files number 49 and 285, House Bill 6185, AN ACT
CONCERNING PENALTIES FOR VIOLATIONS OF CERTAIN
PERSONNEL FILE STATUTES as amended by House Amendment,
Schedule "A". Favorably Reported, Committee on Labor
and Judiciary.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Prague.

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Those voting Yea	142
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	9

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Bill as amended is passed.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 154.

THE CLERK:

On page 33, Calendar 154, substitute for House Bill Number 5664, AN ACT CONCERNING THE AWARD OF RIBBONS AND MEDALS TO VETERANS FOR SERVICE IN TIME OF WAR.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Representative Graziani.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move for acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Question is on acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill. Will you remark, sir?

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Yes. Members of the chambers, back in 2005 we passed the Connecticut Veteran's Wartime Service.

Medal. And basically we're really fortunate to see this bill come to life. By that I mean when this bill originated out of the Veterans Affairs Committee and Public Safety it had a fiscal impact, which caused great concern. And quite frankly, the fiscal note now goes away. By that I mean Appropriations Committee not only put language in line 17 within existing budgetary resource awards, but also move back the deadline to deleting from July 1, 2005, and adding on line 17, for veterans who've died on or after of July 1, 2000. And to members of the chambers, I spoke to Commissioner Schwartz. Commissioners Schwartz had a concern at the time of this bill because of the fiscal impact, devoting resources given this economic climate to process all these applications, but through our Adjutant General, Thad Martin, across the street in the armory, he has offered up to 25 members of the National Guard to help process these applications. And therefore, members of the chambers, the fiscal note disappears.

With that, I'd like to thank, not only, once again Thad Martin, but also Donna Masconi who works with the Department of Veterans Affairs, for hard -- her hard work right along for processing these

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applications. And I understand Mr. Speaker, there's going to be an amendment, a friendly amendment called, and I urge the members to support this friendly amendment and support the bill as amended. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative. Remark further on the bill? The friendly Representative Dargan.

REP. DARGAN (115th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Clerk is in possession of LCO Amendment 6512. May he please call and I be allowed to summarize.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Will the Clerk please call LCO 6512, which will be designated House Amendment Schedule A.

THE CLERK:

LCO Number 6512, House A, offered by
Representative Dargan, Senator Stillman, et al.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Representative seeks leave of the chamber to summarize. Is there objection? Is there objection? Representative Dargan, you may proceed with summarization.

REP. DARGAN (115th):

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Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was brought to my attention by our LCO commissioner's office that a few years ago back, that the commissioner of public safety, if there was a death within the General Assembly, that the Department of Public Safety, if next of kin wanted an honor guard, it would be provided, but since that time we now have our own state capital police officers. And this just simply codifies what we already have on statute and just puts in there state capital police. It also is not an additional added benefit at all for members of the General Assembly or any of our constitutional officers. And I move for its adoption.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

The question before the chamber is adoption of House Amendment Schedule A. Will you remark on the amendment? Will you remark? Representative Perillo.

REP. PERILLO (113th):

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I rise today in support of the amendment. It's very simple. It simply switches responsibility from the Connecticut state police to our state capital police. It does not, as Representative Dargan said, extent to us an additional benefit. It is simply something we already

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are entitled to. And it is a very good amendment and I urge its adoption. Thank you.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative. Remark further on the amendment? Remark further House Amendment Schedule A? If not, let me try your minds. All those in favor, please signify by saying, aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

All those opposed, nay.

The ayes have it. The amendment is adopted.

Remark further on the bill as amended?

Representative Harkins.

REP. HARKINS (120th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the bill as amended. Being part of the Connecticut wartime medal ceremony in Stratford, it was a wonderful event. It was something that our veterans appreciated, and their families. And I'm glad that we're expanding this program more, even though we amended the bill, it's within appropriate funds. We're within budgetary resources. It's a wonderful ceremony and it's very meaningful to the

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family and also, the veterans of the state of Connecticut. And I urge my fellow members to support it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative. Representative Nicastro.

REP. NICASTRO (79th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support the bill as amended. Mr. Speaker, since the inception of the original language of the bill, thousands of Connecticut veterans who served during wartime have received this medal, but also, quite frankly, and quite honestly, a lot of us have received requests from families of veterans who are now deceased, if they were entitled to this medal. And now we, because of this new bill, we'll be able to see to it that they are provided with this medal.

I know there's -- I know, speaking in my city, although Mr. Speaker, there's been probably 20 or 30 people who've come to me and said, gee, my dad passed away last year. Is it possible that I could get the wartime service medal? And this will be able to resolve that. I know that we have the medals on hand, Mr. Speaker, so there's no cost there. So I would

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urge my colleagues to strongly support this bill as amended. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative. Will you remark further on the bill as amended? Will you remark further on the bill as amended? If not, staff and guests come to the well of the House. Members take their seats. The machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber. The House is voting by roll call. Members to the chamber.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Have all the members voted? Have all the members voted? Members, please check the board and make sure your vote has been properly cast. If all members voted, the machine will be locked and the Clerk will please take a tally. Clerk, please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

House Bill 5664 as amended by House Schedule A.

Total Number Voting	141
Necessary for Passage	71
Those voting Yea	141

Those voting Nay 0

Those absent and not voting 10

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

The bill as amended is passed.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 533.

THE CLERK:

On page 21, Calendar 533, substitute for Senate Bill Number 46, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONSUMER REPORT CARD, favorable report of the Committee on Insurance and Real Estate.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Representative Fontana.

REP. FONTANA (87th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move for acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill in concurrence with the Senate.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

The question is on acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill. Will you remark?

REP. FONTANA (87th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this bill clarifies and improves and expands upon the so-called

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and there's never enough that we can do. I guess that's what I'm trying to say and thank you very much for taking the time once again, as you're scheduled, to testify before the committee.

SENATOR CALIGIURI: Thank you.

REP. GRAZIANI: Any questions from the committee members? If not, thank you very much.

SENATOR CALIGIURI: Thank you.

SENATOR MAYNARD: With that, we have our Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, Linda Schwartz, who's with the deputy Commissioner, John Wiltsy.

Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, both Mr. Chairmen, Senator Maynard, and Representative Graziani. I am Linda Schwartz, and I am the Commissioner. I have the honor to be your Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs, and I am here to testify on a proposal to award the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal, HB 5664.

As you know, Connecticut has had the tradition of striking a medal to honor the men and women who go to war since the time of Civil War. However, this was true for the Spanish American War and World War I and then we stopped there and didn't really enact another legislation until 2005 when the Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal was authorized. In that time, it was designated that it would be for specific veterans who served during time of war which the dates were determined, and it was to award a ribbon and a medal for those who were called to active duty service and for residents then or now at the time of the award. And then, in 2008, we -- you extended the eligibility for the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal to qualified veterans, who

posthumously who have died after the date of the enactment of the legislation creating the medal.

This -- let me just say that since 2006, the Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs has issued nearly 21,000 Wartime Service Medals; however, this is only approximately 11 percent of the actual number of estimated recipients which was 186,934. We looked at -- in preparation for this, we looked at what would the eligibility be for a posthumous award of this medal dating back to World War II, and, using the Department of Veterans' Affairs statistics, we see that at a minimum, it would actually double the number of people who were eligible to about 187,588.

Really, the Department cannot provide you with a realistic estimate of how many people we would be talking about for the posthumous award. But I would like to bring it to the attention of the committee that when the original act was passed, the Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs was not allocated any funding for this actually. It was done with the help of the military department through a military assistance account. The reoccurring expenses for the program were not envisioned at the time. I don't think we thought we'd be doing this for four more years but the truth of the matter is is that when the military department transferred the funding that actually -- after we purchased the medals -- and we have a set number of medals -- there was about \$84,000 left, which they gave us to help us with the -- offsetting the cost to the Department for the personnel and the operating costs to increase -- to support the increasingly, very, very popular program.

We have had to reassign and dedicate 1.5 full-time equivalent staff members to this and that is a reoccurring cost to the Department, and we have estimated for you in our testimony that that's

approximately \$52,000 a year. We see a great deal of complexities rising from administering a posthumous Wartime service medal. And so we wanted to alert you to the fact that should you choose to support the additional requirements, we would respectfully request that you authorize funding for the necessary personnel to support two new clerical positions with the total of three FTE, and you can tell from my testimony that that's about \$100,000 a year.

What we did, we took to heart exactly what you were trying to convey to those who served during time of war, and we went to -- we designed a -- with the help of my deputy, Mr. Wiltsy, we not only designed the medal -- if you haven't seen it, we could pass it around -- but we also created a certificate for people. And we've created a package which contains a letter from myself and a letter from the Governor thanking the individual veteran for the service. And this is about \$5 a piece. So it was used to offset the people that we had dedicated for this. We took that out of hide actually, and they were really supposed to be doing other work, but they were doing the medals.

This fiscal year we estimate that we will have to redirect exists resources to the tune of about \$108,000. I hope you're getting the message that we have a program that means a great deal to the veterans. I think I've been with many of you as we have done these presentations. We have also been mailing them out to people, but this is the great unknown is what is the scope of this proposed legislation? How much would it actually cost us to administer it?

And let me just say something else. I think some of you have all -- may have experienced this. I know Senator Roraback has. That once you pass this, we have a hiring freeze on so we really can't, you know, step up the pace. But the other

part is people immediately think their supposed to be able to get their medals. So there's a lot of that goes into really putting this from your concept and what you're trying to accomplish to the reality. We have provided documentation as to the numbers of medals we still have available. We have also, actually, given you a spreadsheet of the amounts that we think we could actually distribute in a year's time. And, with limited resources, this would be a very difficult challenge because I know that you would want us to do it with great respect and with the professionalism that we've already shown. But, at this particular time, I'm taking people away from other jobs to do this job.

I know as a veteran myself and as a Vietnam veteran, I have done and do support every measure and every effort to honor the service of our men and women. But, at this particular time, unless we have additional resources, it would be very difficult to give this effort the dignity and respect and to be respectful of the veterans as it deserves.

I'm happy to answer any questions that you may have.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Thank you very much, Commissioner. We appreciate the effort you and your department have made to get medals out to date. We know that you had an enormous initial response to the medal. You've already made it through, I think, a backlog of nearly 10,000, if I'm not mistaken.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Yes. And we've done that because several veterans' organizations, most notably, the Unknown Veterans of America, came in on weekends to help us get this together and to help us to get the medals ready for presentation. So we have tried to be wise and to use the resources we have to the best of our ability. I

am not sure what -- how this will end up, but I just think it's important for you to know that, one, we've never been given any money to administer this program. We have done the best we can.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Thank you, again, Commissioner. I think there's broad recognition among the members of this committee and, indeed, the General Assembly, in general, that we're facing very difficult times. And every department is challenged by any new requests that come of this nature. I think it's important for the public, and I'm delighted that this hearing is being telecast so people can hear from you directly.

These things, well we certainly wish to be able to do them, do cost money, and they're balanced against other needs, and, certainly, our primary objective is making sure we're caring for our veterans and those in need, and we wouldn't want to tax your services any more than is absolutely necessary in a manner that is -- other than for that primary need. But I do think that we might want to just keep open the concept of being creative, as we are in every department, and thinking of ways that we might be able to utilize other mechanisms other than tasking you directly for this.

And I wonder if you've had any thoughts on how we might, through existing records, through town clerk's offices, not while -- I'm not suggesting we pass the buck to them but any place where we have existing records that are accessible that we might be able to streamline and not overburden your department.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Let me say that each case is uniquely individual. The truth of the matter is is that during World War II, they did not have the DD 14, uniformly was not provided to show the

dates of service. That's one of the things that in the proposed legislation you really haven't give any start date of when this would be, you know, going back to the days of World War II, or were you considering back to World War I? So you really need to make the state date of maybe of World War II.

Streamlining the process is very difficult because the criteria states that you are either a resident of Connecticut or you are a resident now. When we first started this program with the medals, we got a lot of letters requests for the medal from people who had been stationed at the naval base at Navy Groton. So because they were in school there, they thought that they would qualify. And let me just say that.

[End of tape 1A]

[Beginning of Tape 1B]

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: [Continuing] -- because I was there on TDY, and I need this for my collection.

When we were given the initial allocation, it was actually from the Department of the Military and they were the ones that purchased the medals. We had a set amount. We knew how many people at that particular time that were living in Connecticut, were eligible for the medal and that is if we bought a medal for everybody. That's it. And so we really haven't used them all, as you can see, we gave you -- we have maybe 161,000 left, but the importance is is that from a personal point of view, medals -- are we giving the medal for the veteran? That's the most important question.

We know that some families were very disappointed when their veteran died after this medal was authorized. We certainly have an inventory for

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it, and it seemed -- it seemed the right thing to do.

This reaching back to the time of my father and trying to figure out how to do that logistically has -- I haven't got a real thought about that.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Thank you and you raise a point that I think is worth noting that we did, in fact, last year extend the service medal to anyone who had served from the time that the medal was struck, which I think is a look back of about five years.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Yes.

SENATOR MAYNARD: For that very reason that we didn't want people who had recently lost family members while this medal existed to be -- to feel as though they were denied that so I appreciate your willingness to work on that goal.

Are there other members who would like to comment, my cochair, or others?

REP. GRAZIANI: Commissioner, great seeing you as well. Goes to the old adage, no good deed goes unpunished --

[Laughter]

REP. GRAZIANI: -- with this law here. But we understand exactly where you're coming from. One of the concerns -- and, obviously, what brought this bill upon is that you have somebody, who, you know, their husband or father or grandfather passed away and they have the display case proudly with, you know, his or her, medals and awards, and they'd like to -- they feel a sense, if you will, of entitlement to that for their loved one. There's something out there, I would like to add to, you know, my loved one's case, so to speak. And it's hard to turn people away saying, well,

you know what? You really don't qualify because of the dollars, but any other time, if we had -- let me put it this way. If we had a surplus? Is that something that you could work with if the economy turns around to the robust times and there was more money than anyone knew what to do with? Of course, it's not going to happen in my life time. But anyway, but would you --

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Should that day come.

REP. GRAZIANI: -- right. Would you be willing to revisit the issue? I guess. It's a hypothetical question I realize that.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: There -- the hypothetical question is I believe that the medal was created not to disappoint people. It's not something so that the people can be disappointed. I think the medal was to reflect the respect and dignity this State has for the men and women who served. And I would certainly work with this committee to do what I could within the realm of reality. I know that the question also included in the bill that you have proposed is also to -- there are many cases that come to my desk and, perhaps it's a good thing I'm a nurse, because we have a kind heart, but we also know the hard facts.

So, to answer your question, I would certainly work with this committee and with the veteran community to come up with something that would be -- would not be a dream on what we've already authorized. And I would also say that we have to think about the people who are still serving. We have a war going on, and we really don't even know how many people will be eligible for this medal when we reconvene or when we convene next year. So it's a really open-ended question. If the committee wanted to direct the Department to have some qualifications or some other things besides a blanket posthumous award of the medal, I think

that would be both judicious and it would be a responsible way to approach the problem.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you, Commissioner. Just to follow up on Senator Maynard's about when it's processed. Can you give us a sense what is the process when an application comes through? Can you explain from the start to the finish and approximately how long that takes?

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Yes, I can. We have put on our website the application so that people can actually print it out in their home and fill it in. They need to have a copy of the DD 214 showing that they meet the criteria for the periods of -- wartime service periods. We will look at the DD 214. When it comes to my office, I send it to the Office of Advocacy and Assistance where I have commandeered two people that usually work on this project -- program, and we will then issue -- we'll validate it. We'll enter it into a registry, and we will convey to the people that prepare the packet with this the name and address of the individual. The name of the individual is put on the certificate so it looks very professional because it is and then that packet will be sent to the individual.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you for those steps. But do we have -- what is it normally from start to finish for process time you enter it in the register. Does it take 24 hours? Does it take 72 hours?

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: No, our backlog, we get a lot of requests. So as you can see from one of the in your -- in my testimony, I think, I provided for you a spreadsheet of how many -- wartime service medals we actually do a year, and it's like 3500 a year. When, in the beginning, we had a backlog of about 10,000. Senator Maynard is correct. And so that's when we asked people to come in and help us with packaging because it really doesn't come like

this. It comes with just the medal and the ribbon and we felt that, you know, you can't slap a ribbon and a medal in somebody's hands. We have it mounted and that takes time.

So -- we also are doing other things. This office is also responsible for assisting veterans with their claims for benefits and any services and programs through the VA. So it's a very limited thing. We really, at the time, did not anticipate that -- that this would be, first of all, it is a full-time job for the two people that are there. We just didn't anticipate that that would be the issue. In addition to that, I think some of you have been with us when we have done medal ceremonies. I think Senator Fasano, actually, was the first person that we worked with when we first got the medals, and he can tell you it's not easy to get these medals on people. So that's why we got the card. And that takes a lot of really work with the local people, the local veterans organizations. Many legislators choose to sponsor these medal ceremonies so getting the group together, what we call packaging for a certain town the medal applications. They bring those in. It takes a long time to process them. So we ask for a lead time before we, actually, do the medal ceremony. But I will say that it is probably one of the most moving experiences to look at men who served during World War II and to my comrades who served during Vietnam to look them in the eye and to give them this medal and to tell them that on behalf of the citizens of this State, it is a great honor for us to give them this medal. It means a great deal to them. And, for some, they've never been thanked for their service. And, as you know, being in the military, there aren't medal ceremonies like this anymore. People don't pin the medals on or give them to people.

So we have tried to step it up a notch and make it worthy, not only of the veterans, but of the

citizens of our state.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you very much, Commissioner. We realize what you're up against, quite frankly.

Representative Guerrera.

REP. GUERRERA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Good afternoon, Commissioner, how are you?

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Good afternoon.

REP. GUERRERA: You know, I'm reading through this, Commissioner, and I've got to be honest with you. I have a problem. And when I say I have a problem, it's saddens me, because I know there are many families that would like to see that medal. And we talk about when times are good and if we had money, and so forth. But, you know, when our veterans went to go fight, they didn't ask if the time was good, if the time was bad. They just did what they had to do to make sure that we enjoy the freedoms that we enjoy today.

And I think when I say I'm saddened, you know, after hearing last night's speech by the Governor, with all due respect, in regards to that, you know, no tax increases and we all have to cut; we have to do our part here. I think these individuals have done their part more than we can ever ask. And to see them get a medal is just the smallest thing we could ever do.

And, like you said, when you do that, when you give them to the family members or for those people that are there, it's an amazing event. I've been to some of them. And, it's just, you know, you just sit there and you're in awe because these are individuals who don't ask for anything, as you know. And I just think that when we look through these budgets and we go through this deliberation that we have to keep in mind that

these individuals risked their life and sacrificed their life for all of us here.

I think this is just a small part what we can do for them. Thank you.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Thank you, Representative Guerrera. Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO: I just want to say, Commissioner, with respect to giving out the medals that you didn't give out. I think your office does it with a lot of class and dignity that is well deserved of our veterans. And every time you shake the hand of a veteran and I've watched when you had 40, 50, 60 of them, you look them dead in the eye and you say to them what you just said with all the heart that you say it with each and every time and that means a lot. I still get letters from some veterans from time to time who think back upon that day that they received the medal from you, and I'm not saying that because you're here. That's the truth. Is that the way you -- I mean, the presentation. I agree with you. I could never open up those damn medals with my thumbs no matter how hard I try. So I'm glad you went to the card because you couldn't do it before. But you do do a great job. And Representative Graziani is right to the extent of what it means to them. It probably even means a little bit more to those who've lost their father or their husband, and it's sort of reinforces what they believe that their father or husband stood for. There are other issues that this committee kind of talked about, screening, which is what if a son or a daughter don't get along who do you give the medal to? You know, then we're going to be in probate court for all we know, you know. So there are other issues that it gets into that gets a little bit on the murky side. But I think the comments of Representative Guerrera, I should say -- I said Graziani -- Representative Guerrera are very well

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taken that we need to be very cognizant of that reinforcement even in tough economic times.

And I appreciate the comments of Representative Guerrero.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Thank you.

Senator.

REP. COUTU: Hello, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Hello. How are you, Representative?

REP. COUTU: Thank you for coming today. I always appreciate everything that you do.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Thank you.

REP. COUTU: And you're part of the military family. You've served with us. You've continue to serve and help us through the years, and we all know how much you do.

My concern would be the idea that potentially you'd get a big backlog and some of the older veterans would be at the end of the backlog and because you said up to -- how long did it take potentially? A year?

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: No, in actuality, it took several months when we were first getting up but, you know, within 90 days.

REP. COUTU: Okay. Ninety days.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: But let me tell you that if we receive a request from a World War II veteran, it goes out that day?

REP. COUTU: Oh, great. All right. That was my other concern.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: We had some instances where, unfortunately, the veteran passed away waiting for his medal. And we didn't want that to happen again. So, as soon as it comes in, it goes out for and I think now with the age range, we're looking at the Korean veterans, too. Because really -- and let me just say this, too. We have gone to the bed side of dying veterans to give them that medal. We wanted to be sure that they knew how much they were respected.

I'm sorry. I interrupted you.

I would just like to say something to the committee, and to you, Representative Guerrero. Don't feel sad, be glad. Because this is the General Assembly that authorized a medal they maybe should have been authorized years ago. So take that and know that so many people, the people that we have given this medal to now know that this legislature and this State was trying to make up for something that had gone unnoticed.

SENATOR MAYNARD: I'm sorry. Representative, you had another question.

REP. COUTU: I just want to follow up and say that's exactly how I feel. I feel I guess the tens of thousands of people that we have handed this out to everyone of their families are grateful, appreciative, and that just shows why a lot of people have respect for your agency and the state, for, actually, all the good that we do do. Being a veteran who serves now, I know how much we do and thank you.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Thank you, Representative.

Are there other questions for the Commissioner?

Representative Nicastro.

REP. NICASTRO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Commissioner, I think I had the honor of having you pin me. If you recall in Bristol we had the first one at the Memorial Boulevard School. There was roughly 1200 people in the audience, if I remember right, you pinned 500 or 600 veterans in Bristol that day.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: I think I had help with Mr. Wiltsy.

REP. NICASTRO: Yes. There were two lines there, yes there was. And, if you recall the expression on their faces and their families, the wives, the parents, the mothers and fathers and the excitement, the group pictures and photos, that was priceless. I mean, I recall that date vividly. And I hear where my colleague's coming from, and I think if there's any one that we can continue this program and keep it going, it's well worth the money. I understand the budgetary problems. I really do. I truly do. Not only here at the State level but at the local level. But it's not that often where you can see tears drawn as much as we saw that day in Bristol. That auditorium holds 14, 15 -- I forgot how many it holds but you saw it was packed. You sat on that stage and you came down with your deputy, and we had all those hundreds of veterans pinned. And I was so proud to see that happen that day. I was just -- I felt so bad that my dad had passed before this happened because I know how he would have been. And I was so honored to have you pin me. And, again, if there's any way we can keep this going, I'd like to see it happen. And I know you would, too. I understand. You're caught between -- we know that.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Please do not think that the program will end. I come from this military, too, and I know that you would recognize the can do attitude. That's what we've been working with since 2005. I'm just making you aware that this additional expansion of the program is almost too much for us to do right now with what we have. And I don't want anyone to think that the medal program is in jeopardy because we have several medal ceremonies already scheduled for the next month. But this posthumous is -- it would be difficult to document for some people. It would be difficult for us to process without additional resources. And I say that you really do know that if you enact this, people are going to be lining up outside the next day and you don't want to disappoint them either.

REP. NICASTRO: I understand. I truly understand. I'm just saying that if there's any way -- and I know it has -- I think you said you had a 100,000 medals left or something like that?

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Yes, we do. We bought one medal for every living person in 2005 that served during time of war. And the Adjutant General Martin and I got our heads together. We designed the medal and we bought enough for everybody whose was living at that time.

REP. NICASTRO: And that was a wise move considering what the problems we have today.

COMMISSIONER SCHWARTZ: Right. And, in addition, really when you look back to retro back to World War II, it's almost as -- twice as much. It would double the demand, and that's why we're saying we would need extra resources.

REP. NICASTRO: I understand. Thank you, Commissioner.

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and one thing about you, you don't pull any punches.

DENNIS OPAROWSKI: I have been accused of that.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Well, at least we know where you stand. We don't have to worry about reading between the lines.

DENNIS OPAROWSKI: As long as it's not out in traffic. We're all okay.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Terrific. Any questions from the committee members?

If not, thank you very much, Dennis. Right now I'll turn it over to my cochair.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you. Next I believe it's Robert Moeller. Am I pronouncing that correct? Bob's here to speak on 51 -- 5295, 5664 and 5137 -- or 5139 rather.

Good afternoon, sir.

ROBERT MOELLER: I fell asleep up there.

Good afternoon, Representative Graziani and members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs. My name is Robert Moeller. And I am president of the Connecticut Chapter Association, United States Army.

The Connecticut chapter has been in existence since 22, April, 1959. It has 461 members. Six sustaining corporate members, which includes Sikorsky Aircraft and Atlantic Inertial Systems, Colt Firearms, Goodrich, Hamilton Sustrand, and Ensign Bickford and 22 corporate members.

The Association of the United States Army is a private, professional, nonprofit, educational organization, and is the only nonprofit

organization dedicated to support the Army, active National Guard, Army Reserve, Department of Army civilians, retirees, family members and veterans. I am also a retired command sergeant major with 41 and a half years of service both active duty and with Connecticut Army National Guard. And I'm here to offer testimony on three bills before you. I'd like to start with proposed House Bill 5295, the act concerning additional pay for active service after September 11, 2001. In 2007, a proposed bill, Number 40-6949 was introduced to amend the general statutes to provide a service bonus to members of the United States Armed Forces on active duty including but not limited to the National Guard on active duty and added \$1,000 to the combat zone bonus.

The result was a substitute bill that only increased the bonus amount and further disenfranchised Connecticut citizens serving in the five branches of our military forces and their reserve components. The current law enacted, in 2005, had placed a price on the service of one group and nothing on others. Creating, as one individual stated, groups of haves and have nots.

In West Hartford, at the Army Reserve Center, you have National Guard and several Army Reserve units. All of both groups have served in OIF and OEF, some more than once. You have families, such as the family in East Hartford, with a daughter in the Air National Guard and a son in the Army Reserve. Another family living in Woodbury has a son -- has a son in Afghanistan with the Army National Guard, and his brother serving in Iraq with the Marines from Plainville, Connecticut. One has, the other has not.

Captain Robert Devito of Tolland was awarded the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award by President Bush for his service in Iraq. But he is not entitled to the Connecticut bonus. Staff Sgt.

shoes after I leave. A suggestion would be that additional tax breaks for all uniformed service members of the military branches. Respectfully,
Louis M. Poma

In closing, in 2005, a mistake occurred and Connecticut reservists were underserved and for the three years attempts were made to try and correct this oversight. The stock answers were not this budget year or there is no new spending. The sands of time are running out and unless in issue is reserved now, it never will come to fruition and Connecticut reservists along with their active duty counterparts will continue to be served -- underserved by the state of Connecticut.

The second bill is proposed Act Number 5664, an act concerning the award of ribbons and medals to certain veterans for service in time of war.

This concerns Connecticut and New England Chapter of the Laos Veterans of America. These valiant men fought in the Vietnam War for the American forces. Approximately 25 of these veterans are members of the Connecticut Chapter of the Association of the United States Army. They live in towns surrounding Hartford. They're extremely patriotic and participate in many patriotic events.

Dan McHale, the transition assistant adviser, will be testifying on their behalf. After his testimony, you will understand why they should be qualified to wear the Connecticut Wartime Service -- the veterans service medal. I strongly support this bill.

The third bill is proposed House Bill 5139, an act concerning the 100 percent deductibility of veterans pensions. Many retirees look for areas to retire that give them the most benefits to live on their retirement pay, good employment,

affordable housing, low taxes, et cetera. One of these enticements is their military retirement will not be taxed. The State of Connecticut could be attractive to these servicemen and women who after 20 years of voluntary service to their country bring a strong work ethic, expertise in many and various skills. It is my recommendation that strong consideration be given to this legislation. And I would also appreciate a 100 percent deduction.

I thank you for the time and careful consideration of the legislation before you. And I will answer any questions that you may have at this time.

REP. NICASTRO: Thank you, Robert.

Any questions? It appears none. Thank you very much. Thank you for your service to our country. Thank you very much, again.

I'll turn it over back to Senator Maynard.

SENATOR MAYNARD: Thank you, Representative Nicastro.

Our next -- oh, I'm sorry. Yes, okay. I'm sorry. I was having trouble reading. Sorry, general Brigadier McHale.

Thank you. You knew who was coming? Thank you.

A VOICE: I've just got to do this.

[Fanfare]

[Laughter]

DANIEL MCHALE: That's a past life.

A VOICE: I had to do it for 24 years.

HB 5139 SB 119 SB 566

DANIEL MCHALE: Senator Maynard, cochair Representative

HB 5295
HB 5664

Graziani, Representative Nicaastro, Fasano, Chris Coutu, congratulations.

I have with me Colonel Sar Phouthasack, a Laotian veteran who served and during my testimony, I will introduce him. And he will give you a little background information that only he can give.

Before that, though, I would like to -- a little piggy back off of Sergeant Major Moeller's testimony on House Bill 59 -- or 5295, an act concerning additional pay for active service after September 11th. And it's the combat zone we're talking about. And, as a TAA, I provide each state assistance, each state and veteran assistance in entitlements and benefits. I facilitate these benefits through briefings for returning Connecticut military, the National Guard, the Reserve, and the active duty personnel and their families.

As a TAA, there's one in each state and they're, actually, the single point of the contact for any federal or state asset or resource that benefits all branches of the military community.

I am continually asked about the combat zone payment available to the Air and the Army Guard. And I find it very difficult and disheartening to have to tell a Marine reservist or reservist that even though they are Connecticut resident, they are not eligible for the combat zone payment. I've met numerous parents of several -- to have siblings in multiple services and branches why their sons or daughters were denied the combat zone when their other sibling got the combat zone payment.

And I would like to thank the committee at this point for raising the ceiling on the combat zone payment to \$1200. And thank you for your progress in assisting veterans through these past

legislative years. Sergeant Major Moeller mentioned Joe Kiley and his two sons, one in Falujah and one with the 102nd Infantry in Afghanistan. But it's constant. It's not just because we know somebody. It's other parents that come up, especially, with the Marine Corps, when the briefings are over and they sign up for the War Time Service Medal, and I have to deny them the applications for the combat zone payment. The 405th Combat Support Hospital in West Hartford, the 25th Marines in Plainville, the 411th, the MI Detachment in East Windsor, we reach out to everybody as far as being a liaison to the VA. And I just wanted to mirror what Sergeant Major had to say about the combat zone payment. Nobody deserves more than the Guard. The Guard has done an unbelievable job. They led the way. They're in multiple deployments. And they deserve every entitlement and benefit. It's just hard for some of the families to understand when they have a sibling in multiple branches why they're not entitled to it. I just wanted to comment on that bill.

On House Bill 5664, an act concerning the awards, and ribbons, and medals to certain veterans for service in wartime -- or at time of war. The Lao Veterans of America, which includes 45,000 members throughout the country and Canada of which Connecticut's chapter has approximately 30 to 40 members residing in Bridgeport, New Britain Suffield, Bristol, Enfield, and numerous other towns around the state.

During the Vietnam war, the Mung and the Lao special combat units served under the direction of the United States military and clandestine forces in Laos. They fought courageously for ten years some even longer with the American special forces and special operations units. The war you weren't supposed to talk about. These people bore the brunt of the fighting against the North Vietnamese

and the communist Pathet Lao in a covert war. Their missions, first, were to secure and rescue downed American crews that were shot down over countries you can't mention. And the second was to stop the reinforcements of the NVA troops and the war supplies along the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

They served bravely and suffered great losses during the war. There were 35,000 -- 35 to 40,000 killed in combat and another 60,000 wounded or missing from 1960 to 1975. All Connecticut members supported the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. And, Senator Graziani, you and I both know that when we were over there, we had a calendar called a short timer's calendar. There was a light at the end of the tunnel for us but not for these individuals, not for these courageous soldiers and their families who stood up to tyranny.

While Connecticut members supported the U.S. Army during the Vietnam war, all of these veterans fought behind enemy lines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and in teams and as individuals. As a war most -- after the war, most of Connecticut residents -- they're now living here -- fled this country as refugees. Not only did they fight with us and befriend us, but we left them there. And when I say "we," I mean our government and our -- especially our government. Approximately, 30 of the individuals are members of the Connecticut Chapter of the AUSA, the Association of the United States Army. They were granted a waiver for residency and citizenship. They worked in all types of industries here in Connecticut and support all the veterans and the family functions. They march in all the parades and are at all the memorials and all the Veterans Day celebrations. Many of the siblings serve in the U.S. military. Several are serve in Iraq now in the U.S. Armed Forces.

They were awarded a Congressional recognition in 1991. I would ask this committee to support the proposed HB 5664 so that these brave warriors and patriots can be presented to Connecticut Wartime Service Medal. The medals are already available and will be at no cost to the state. They've already been procured and stored.

As a transitional assistance adviser and a member of the associations -- the National Guard Association, and many of the VSOs, I would also like to state that I support HB 5139; SB 119, an act concerning tuition waivers for veterans for fees and books; and Senate Bill 566, an act concerning tuition waivers for certain veterans enrolled in public colleges and universities.

I realize that -- well, let me introduce Colonel Sar, and then -- I'll give you a little background on his organization.
Colonel Sar.

SAR PHOUTHASACK: Good evening -- I'm sorry. Good afternoon, lady and gentlemen.

HB 5664

Thank you for having me here.

I represent Daniel McHale, Mr. Moeller and also INAUDIBLE -- thank you very much. My former life, U.S. secret army, Vietnam War served in Laos. I have recruit and training by U.S. Special Forces from 1961. I graduate in 1962 and then they borrowed me to Region 3 by military Special Force, Colonel Tom [inaudible.]

And also my boss, he still alive and over here in Ohio, Lima, Ohio. Colonel James [inaudible] in the 1964, he had me jump over behind enemy lines in North Vietnam because we had a couple troops in there. One group we lost contact to the [inaudible] military air base in Thailand.

Actually, me and my boss we set up the American air base in Thailand. We have [inaudible] Ubon, Udorn, Korat and Takhli. Takhli is the American B52 air base in there.

And that day my boss he asked everybody, every group in my group special force [inaudible] in 1962. He said I asked everybody, nobody volunteered to jump over behind enemy lines in North Vietnam. And he said, How about you, sir? I said -- Mr. Bill, he still on in Arizona right now. He's almost 80 years old. I said, call and say hi to him, every time and mostly on Veterans Day, Memorial Day and Christmas and Thanksgiving.

DANIEL MCHALE: Who do you work for? Where's your employment here in Connecticut?

SAR PHOUTHASACK: In Connecticut?

DANIEL MCHALE: Yeah, in Connecticut. Who do you work for?

SAR PHOUTHASACK: In Connecticut, I work for Coherent in Bloomfield. They make lasers.

First, my job in United States, I worked for telecom -- telephone company because I had background in military. I was technician for radio or Army radios, and things like that. They hire me for telecom technician fix customer's phone, service

And I found my -- you know, I tell you this world too small. I found my instructor, Major Paul Smith. He lived in Enfield. I'm sorry. When I talk about him I cry all the time. This my instructor in special forces air borne.

I applied for job in Colt Firearms in West Hartford, and at the time, he interviewed me. He's supervisor. He interviewed me. And he read

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my resume and he said, You remember me, he said. I said, no, sir. You know, two American guard trained you special forces. You know who I am? I think about him for over almost four years, how could I remember? He's a lot of change. I'm sorry. Little fat, something like that. And said --

DANIEL MCHALE: When did you come over here? And how did you get here?

SAR PHOUTHASACK: I came here by refugee. Actually, I told a little bit. I go back to how I came here in, when, why. And Mr. Paul Smith -- I think it was that, you know, Capt. Paul Smith? He said, yes, he said. Oh, my god, he said, almost four years, he said. At that time, 19 years old. He said, right now you married? I said, yes, sir. How many kids do you have? I said, Four boys, four girls. Oh, my god, he said. Definitely, I have four boys, four girls because one time my wife she got twins.

DANIEL MCHALE: Okay.

SAR PHOUTHASACK: Thank God for that. Also, I'll be very short.

I served in Vietnam War for 19 -- actually, from '60. They select me to the Special Force. I came back in 1962. In 1963, they sent me to vacation. I heard from radio. They said, I'm sorry, they killed President John F. Kennedy. Hurry up, you're going have to report to headquarter right away. We moved headquarters to Thailand. We couldn't stay in Laos. We moved to Thailand after that.

I'm sorry. I apologize. My accent it's not right. I'm sorry.

REP. GRAZIANI: No, you're doing just fine.

SAR PHOUTHASACK: And, until 1973, I left only 50 men with me. Actually, I was a commander. I had 250 men. They moved me up to the capital city. I used to work with Colonel James [inaudible] in American Embassy in Thailand for intelligence. [I left 50 men and after that 1975, Colonel James, he had me aside, You want to stay in Thailand or you going to the United States? Oh, I'd like to go to Australia, I said. You can't go to Australia. You don't work for Australian government. You work for the U.S. government, he said. Okay, yes, sir. And he said, if you don't go. I said, I've got to stay in Thailand for a while before I married with a Thai woman. I can stay in Thailand for a while. He said, okay, two weeks, you go see me in American air base.

DANIEL MCHALE: What year did you come here?

SAR PHOUTHASACK: 1983. February 23rd. This 23rd, this month, the 23rd, it will be 26 years. I lived in Connecticut. And then he told me go see me in Udorn in American air base Udorn. I worked for him from 1975 to '83 then I came here.

DANIEL MCHALE: You worked for the CIA, at that point, and then came back to Connecticut. They're all like this. Every one of the Mung and the Lao warriors live in Connecticut, have the same background.

SAR PHOUTHASACK: Yeah. Right now I am Lao Veteran of America President in Connecticut New England Chapter. Also, I have membership in AUSA, [inaudible.] I served a lot of committee, U.S. volunteer for homeland security. And I tried to recruit all my group. We help to serve for our country prepare for protecting our freedom, protect our country. So I --

DANIEL MCHALE: They were recognized by Congress in

1991. There's also -- in the testimony that I prepared, there's a citation from Congress. There's a letter for citation from Senator Dodd on May 5, 2005, to the Lao Veterans of Connecticut and Connecticut New England Chapter, a State of Connecticut, an official citation in '98.

So he's got quite -- or the Lao veterans have a quite a little package here. And what we're doing and asking for is that they live in Connecticut, they're Connecticut residents, to be allowed to be issued the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal.

One of the prerequisites for that is to have a DD-214, but, obviously, from the testimony, there's no such thing as a DD-214 in this case.

So I realize that this is something that would be an honor. It's an honor and a privilege to know Colonel Sar and the Laotians here. And it's humbling to me. Their war record is just amazing. This is why we ask you to support Bill 5664.

I realize that not only the country and the state, are in the worst financial discord since the Great Depression and everyone will have to sacrifice, but no entity makes a bigger sacrifice than those who step forward and put their lives on the line for this state and this country.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee and ask the committee's support for the legislation regarding benefits supporting the military community not just the 5664, but the 5139, Senate Bill 119, Senate Bill 566, and, with that, I'd like to, again, thank the committee and just thank you for your assistance for everything you've done for -- not only the veterans but the currently serving military. Thank you.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you both for serving and to you, you're an unsung hero.

SAR PHOUTHASACK: Thank you, sir.

REP. GRAZIANI: We don't hear about it or read about it that often, but just the way you expressed yourself related to those stories. You knew you did your job. You were a great ally. And we worked hand in hand and, General McHale, thank you very much for bringing this to light. I know we briefly talked about it last year, but, you know, here you are standing next to this hero.

DANIEL MCHALE: Hero, correct.

REP. GRAZIANI: For all those years. And it's about time that we get the recognition and rightfully you deserve for such a terrible time in part of our history. So I want to thank you personally.

SAR PHOUTHASACK: Thank you very much, sir.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you.

Are there any questions or comments from the committee? If not, drive safe.

DANIEL MCHALE: Thank you, sir.

REP. GRAZIANI: Is Debbie Newton here?

[Laughter]

REP. GRAZIANI: Guess not, so we'll move on.

[Laughter]

REP. GRAZIANI: Debbie, it's all yours.

DEBBIE NEWTON: Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am Debbie Newton, legislative chair and past

SB 119 SB 566 HB 5094

HB 5139

HB 5141

SB 119

FEBRUARY 3, 2009

Senator Andrew Maynard, Co-Chair
Representative Ted Graziani, Co-Chair
Honorable Members
Connecticut Select Committee on Veterans Affairs
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06105

IN RE: Testimony regarding Proposed H.B. No. 5295 and H.B. No. 5664 f' H.B. 5299

Good morning Sen. Maynard, Rep. Graziani, and members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs. My name is Robert Moeller and I am President of the Connecticut Chapter, Association of the United States Army. The Connecticut Chapter has been existence since April 22, 1959. It has 641 members, 6 Sustaining Corporate Members, which include Sikorsky Aircraft, Atlantic Inertial Systems, Colt Firearms, Goodrich, Hamilton Sunstrand, Ensign Bickford; and 22 Corporate Members. AUSA is a private professional, non-profit educational organization, and is the only non-profit organization dedicated to support the Army – Active, National Guard, Army Reserve, Department of the Army Civilians, Retirees, Family members, and Veterans. I am also a retired Command Sergeant Major with 41 ½ years of service, both active duty and with the Connecticut Army National Guard, and I am here to offer testimony on two bills before you.

I'd like to start with Proposed H.B. 5295, An Act Concerning Additional Pay for Active Service After September 11, 2001. In 2007, a Proposed Bill No. 6949 was introduced to amend the General Statutes to provide a service bonus to members of the United States Armed Forces on active duty, including, but not limited to the National Guard on active duty, and add a \$1,000.00 Combat Zone bonus. The result was a substitute bill that only increased the bonus amount and further disenfranchised Connecticut citizens serving in the five branches of our military forces and their reserve components. The current law enacted in 2005 has placed a price on the service of one group and nothing on others creating, as one individual stated, groups of "have and have nots". In West Hartford, at the Reserve Center, you have a National Guard and several Army Reserve units, most all of both groups have served in OIF or OEF, some more than once. You have families, such as a family in East Hartford, with a daughter in the Air National Guard and a son in the Army Reserve; another family, living in Woodbury, had a son in Afghanistan with the Army National Guard and his brother serving in Iraq with the Marines from Plainville, CT, one has, the other has not. CPT Robert Devito, of Tolland was awarded the General Douglas MacArthur Leadership Award by President Bush, for his service in Iraq, but he is not entitled to the CT Bonus. Staff Sergeant Terry Rathburn, a Maine wounded in Fallujah, is not qualified for the Combat Zone payment. I would imagine that there are many more such stories. I know the bottom line is numbers and money. As far as numbers, I believe that roughly there are approximately 500 military reservists, who are Connecticut residents, and called served on Active Duty. Most of the Connecticut based reserve units have members from all the surrounding states. Also many reservists are called to Active Duty as individuals and sent to other units to fill unoccupied positions. They don't have the luxury of going overseas with their

friends and neighbors. Some States, such as Massachusetts, have bonus programs, but they recognize residents who have served in all branches of the military. An example is a Mass. resident in the CT National Guard can collect from both States, however, a CT resident in the National Guard of another State, collects nothing. It's amazing that the State can find millions of dollars for land purchase, as published last week in a news article, but they can't find money to pay a combat zone bonus to reservists, who volunteered to fight for their country and our freedoms. If you look at a combat uniform of any service person, over the left pocket it designates the branch of service, which is preceded by two words, United States. Oh yes, one more thing, the individual who administers the bonus program isn't eligible for the bonus, he's an Army Reservist.

I would like to read a letter that I received from SFC Paul Mozzocato, who was not able to testify today. He is an AGR member of the Army Reserve, who is on duty in New Hampshire and lives in South Windsor.

In closing, in 2005 a mistake occurred and Connecticut reservists were underserved and for three years, attempts were made to overcome this oversight. The stock answers were; this is not a budget year or there will be no new spending. The sands of time are running out and unless this issue is resolved now, it will never come to fruition and Connecticut reservists along with their active duty counterparts will continue to be underserved by the State of Connecticut.

Proposed H.B. No 5664 An Act Concerning the Award of Ribbons and Medals to Certain Veterans for Service in Time of War concern the CT and New England Chapter of Laos Veterans of America. These valiant men fought in the Viet Nam war for the American Forces. Twenty-five of these veterans are members of the Connecticut Chapter of the Association of the United State Army. Many of them live in towns surrounding Hartford. They are extremely patriotic and they march every year in the Hartford Veterans Day Parade and also participated in Memorial Day parades in South Windsor and other communities. BG Dan McHale will be testifying on their behalf. After his testimony, you will understand why they should be qualified to wear the Connecticut Wartime Veterans Service Medal. I strongly support this Bill.

I wish to thank you for your time and careful consideration of the legislation before you, and I will answer and question you may have of me.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert C. Moeller
CSM, AUS-ret
President

L1

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
287 West Street
Rocky Hill, Connecticut 06067

TESTIMONY OF DR. LINDA S. SCHWARTZ, COMMISSIONER,
Department of Veterans' Affairs
Before the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs
February 3, 2009

**HB 5664: AN ACT CONCERNING THE AWARD OF RIBBONS AND
MEDALS TO CERTAIN VETERANS FOR SERVICE IN TIME OF WAR**

Good Afternoon, Chairman Maynard, Chairman Graziani, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am Dr. Linda S. Schwartz, Commissioner of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. I am pleased to offer testimony today on the impact of expanding the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal Program to the families of all deceased wartime veterans and certain foreign nationals as proposed in HB 5664.

As you know, Connecticut has a rich history of recognizing its citizens who have answered the call of war dating back to the Civil War when the state struck and issued its first wartime service medal. This proud tradition was sustained for all wars up through World War I when, for some unknown reason, it unfortunately fell off.

The current Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal was established as a result of Public Act 05-3 (June Special Session) to help restore that important tradition. The legislation required the Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs, in conjunction with the Adjutant General, to establish regulations establishing a program to award a ribbon and medal to qualified wartime veterans from World War II to the present who lived in Connecticut when they were called to active duty service or are now residents.

Public Act 08-87 extended the eligibility for the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal to otherwise qualified veterans who died on or after July 1, 2005. This date corresponds to when the medal was first authorized by the General Assembly.

Since early 2006, the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs has proudly issued nearly 21,000 Wartime Service Medals to qualified veterans through a combination of direct mailing and personalized presentation ceremonies. This represents approximately 11% of the total estimated 186,934 eligible wartime veterans still living in Connecticut.

Using statistics from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USVA), HB 5664 would, at a minimum, double the eligibility pool for the current Wartime Service Medal to the families of another 187,588 deceased wartime veterans who recorded Connecticut as their home of record at the time of separation from the Armed Forces.

In addition, this bill would include wartime veterans who declared Connecticut as their residence at the time of death. The USVA is unable to determine the additional number of wartime deceased veterans from World War II forward who would be eligible based on their Connecticut residency at the time of death. This is likely to be a very large population, covering all veterans who died in Connecticut from December 7, 1941 to the present.

HB 5664 also requires medals to be awarded to living or deceased Foreign Nationals recognized by the USVA as wartime veterans. We cannot estimate the number of eligible deceased wartime veterans from other nations who entered the military from Connecticut or who died in Connecticut.

When Public Act 05-03 was passed, biennial funding to the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs to support the recurring costs of operating this program were not envisioned or provided for. The initial costs of designing and producing the initial 280,000 medals were funded out of an existing "military assistance account" controlled by the Military Department. The Military Department transferred to us in Fiscal Year 2007 the final available program funding of \$84,895 to assist us with mailing and processing expenses, effectively closing out the initial start-up funding.

The Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs has never been funded in its budget for the personnel and operating costs to support this increasingly popular program. We have had to reassign and dedicate 1.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members to process medals applications, respond to inquiries and help organize public ceremonies at an estimated annual cost in personnel funding of \$52,727 this year. The dedication of these limited staff resources to this program obviously means that other services to veterans are sometimes delayed. The complexities of administering a posthumous wartime services medal program, including dealing with new documentation requirements and multiple family members, will certainly be much greater than the existing program. In the event the General Assembly chooses to support the additional requirements of HB5664, we would respectfully request the necessary personnel services funding to support two new clerical positions – for a total of 3 FTE staff positions – to be dedicated to the Wartime Services Medal Program at an estimated annual cost of \$102,161 per year in total salaries.

Our agency has also implemented substantial enhancements and efficiencies to the medals program based on feedback from the Connecticut veterans' community. All recipients now receive an attractive, personalized certificate along with their medals and those wartime service medals which are mailed are delivered in a professional package which includes the medal on a presentation card, the personalized certificate, and a letter from the Governor as State Commander-in-Chief. In order to

save staff resources, we have contracted with an outside company to print, assemble and mail these personalized medal packages at an average cost of \$5 per medal. This fiscal year we estimate we will re-direct existing agency resources to spend over \$108,000 on printing, mailing, assembly and records storage costs to support the current wartime services medal program.

In conclusion, HB 5664 would clearly add new budgetary pressures to this currently unfunded program and the agency overall. It is impossible to predict the level of interest by families in posthumous medals awards but as outlined, the exposure could be significant. Based on our current level of issuing approximately 10,000 medals to living veterans per year and a conservative estimate of another 3,500 posthumous medals to the families of veterans, we estimate the total costs of this program for the upcoming FY10-11 biennium to be approximately \$385,000 (see enclosure).

As a Vietnam Veteran and long-time veterans' advocate, I certainly support the concept behind this well-meaning proposal. I have spent my life honoring veterans and I am moved every time I am able to present a Connecticut Wartime Service Medal to one of our veterans. However, in this time of tight budgets, the funding which would be required to properly support this program must be carefully balanced against other pressing needs. In the event the Committee supports this legislation, for the sake of clarity, I would recommend limiting the eligibility for posthumous medals to the start of America's official entry in World War II, December 7, 1941.

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of Connecticut's veterans. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs
War Time Service Medal Deployment Plan and Budget FY10-15
 Including Additional Costs per proposed HB 5664
 Projected as of 02-02-2009

	Personal Services	Printing & Mailing	Equipment	Total Projected Yearly Cost	Estimated # of living wartime service medals to be deployed	Estimated # of posthumous wartime service medals to be deployed	# of medals available
Fiscal Year	3.0 FTE*	Include costs of certificates/ letters, processing, and mailing	Additional computer setups and fire proof secured cabinets		VA 2007 statistics of 186,934 CT Vets	VA 2007 statistics of 187,588 deceased vets in CT	245,000 end of FY09
FY10	102,161.58	76,000.00	14,000.00	192,161.58	10300	3500	231200
FY11	107,269.66	86,526.00		193,795.66	11330	3850	217700
FY12	112,633.14	98,509.85	4,000.00	215,142.99	12463	4235	204200
FY13	118,264.80	112,153.47		230,418.26	13709	4659	190700
FY14	124,178.04	127,686.72	4,200.00	256,064.76	15080	5124	177200
FY15	130,386.94	145,371.33		275,758.27	16588	5637	163700
Total	694,894.16	646,247.37	22,200.00	1,363,341.53	79471	27005	

*Personnel services costs based on annual costs of three (3) clerical FTEs

Medals Distribution By Year to Date (As of 1/1/09)

Year	# of Medals	
FY06	2841	
FY07	5463	
FY08	7804	
FY09	5142**	(**10,300 Projected as of 7/1/09)
Total	20,750	

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Transitional Assistance Advisor-CT (TAA)
Written Testimony

FEBRUARY 3, 2009

Senator Andrew Maynard, Co-Chair
Representative Ted Graziani, Co-Chair
Honorable Members
Connecticut Select Committee on Veterans Affairs
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06105

IN RE: Testimony in Support of Proposed Senate & House Bills (HB 5664, HB 5295, HB 5139, SB 119, SB 566)

My Name is Daniel McHale, I am a resident of Avon, CT, and I am the Transitional Assistance Advisor (TAA) for Connecticut. I am a contractor working for the Dept. of Defense, through the contract company SKYLINE. I am a Vietnam Veteran and have completed 35 years of military service with the Regular Army and the CTARNG. I retired in August of 2005 as a Senior Officer. I am also the AUSA, CT Chapter 1st Vice President and chair the Veterans Advisory Committee.

As a TAA, the program provides a person in each State or Territory to assist service members in accessing benefits and entitlements offered by community, state and federal resources. I facilitate entitlement and benefits briefings for returning Connecticut military, National Guard, Reserves and active duty military personnel and their families. **The TAA in each state is the "single point of contact" for Federal and State assets and resources that benefit all branches of the military community.**

(HB 5295) An act concerning additional pay for active service after September 11th, 2001.

I am continually asked about the Current Combat Zone Payment available to the Air and Army Guard. I find it very difficult and dishearting to have to tell a Marine or Reservist that even though they are a Connecticut resident, they are not eligible for the Tax free combat Zone payment. I have numerous parents that have several siblings in different branches of the military. Case in point: MAJ (Ret) Joseph Kiely, a Vietnam Vet and prior National Guards Officer that had two sons deployed at the same time: One in the 25th Marines out of Plainville in Falusa, Iraq and the other with the 102nd Infantry, in Afghanistan.

I briefed both units when they came home and had to tell his Father and the young Marine, that he wasn't eligible for the States Combat Zone Payment. I won't pass on the Father's comments, but the young Marine was very put off to say the least.

I briefed numerous reservists and their families that deployed; the 405th Combat Support Hospital (CSH) from West Hartford, the 25th Marines from Plainville, the 411th from

Danbury, and many others after they returned from combat. I accepted applications for the Connecticut War Time Service Medal but, had to refuse applications for the "CBT Zone" payment because, even though they are Connecticut residents and tax payers, they don't qualify for the payment because they are in the Reserves. I left the Armory with an empty feeling in my stomach.

The State employee that administers the CBT Zone payment and family Assistance program is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Reserves and recently returned from a tour in Afghanistan and he can't even apply for the Combat Zone Payment.

When I came home from Vietnam, the State of Connecticut gave me Three Hundred dollars for serving the state and the nation and I was in Federal Service. Please understand, I'm grateful that the National Guard receives the CBT Zone payment that was passed into legislation and then increased up to Twelve hundred Dollars. The CTARNG is the largest military in the State and is well deserving and lead the way with many deployments and continue to deploy in support of the War on Terrorism. They most of all deserve the every benefit and entitlement that is available. I and many others would like the Current Bill amended to include all of Connecticut's military that step forward and go into harms way.

(HB-5664) An act Concerning the awards of Ribbons and Medals to certain Veterans for service in time of War.

Laos Veterans of America, which includes 45,000 members through out the Country and Canada of which Connecticut's Chapter has approximately 30 to 40 members residing in Bridgeport, New Britain, Suffield, Bristol, Enfield, Manchester, Wallingford, New Haven, Danbury and several other towns through out the state.

During the Vietnam War, the Hmong and Lao Special Combat Units served under the direction of the United States Military and Clandestine forces in Laos. They fought courageously for over 10 years with the American Special Forces and Special Operations Units. The War you weren't supposed to talk about! These people bore the brunt of fighting against the North Vietnamese and the Communist Pathet Lao in a "Covert War". Their mission were to first rescue "downed American Air Crews and second to stop reinforcements of NVA troops and war supplies along the Ho Chi Minh trail. They served bravely and suffered great losses during the war. There were 35,000 to 40,000 killed in combat and 60,000 wounded or missing from 1960 to 1975.

All Connecticut members supported the US Army during the Viet Nam war. All of these veterans fought behind enemy lines along the Ho Chi Min trail in teams or as individuals. After the war most of the CT residents fled to this country as refugees. Approximately 30 individuals are members of the CT Chapter of AUSA (Association of the United States Army). They were granted a waiver for residency and Citizenship. They work in all types of Industry and support all Veteran and family functions. Many of their Siblings serve in the US Military and several are serving in Iraq.

They were awarded Congressional recognition in 1991. I would ask the Committee to support HB 5664 so these great warriors and patriots can be presented the Connecticut War Time Service Medal. The medals are already available and will be at no new cost to the State.

As the Transitional Assistance Advisor, for the record I would also like to state that I support:

HB 5139 AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEDUCTABILITY OF VETERANS PENSIONS.

SB 119 AN ACT CONCERNING TUITION WAIVERS FOR VETERANS TAKING SUMMER AND INTERSESSION CLASSES AT PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES COURSES to add "AND" for fee's and books as an amendment.

SB 566 AN ACT CONCERNING TUITION WAIVERS FOR CERTAIN VETERANS ENROLLED IN PUBLIC COLLEGES OR UNIVERSITIES. to add "AND" for fee's and books as an amendment.

I realize that not only the Country and the State are in the worst financial discord since the great depression and everyone will have to sacrifice, but no entity makes a bigger sacrifice than those who step forward and put their lives on the line for this State and Country. In closing -I would like to thank the committee and ask for the committee's support with the legislation regarding benefits supporting the military community.

Daniel J. McHale, BG (Ret-CT)
 Transitional Assistance Advisor-CT
 Room 214
 360 Broad Street
 Hartford CT. 06105
 Off. 860-524-4908
 Cell-860-748-0037
 Fax: 860-548-3288
 SKYLINE
 Utd, Inc.

"I feel that my life would have been empty and meaningless if I had not been able to be a Soldier".



ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

2425 WILSON BOULEVARD • ARLINGTON, VA 22201

LTC SAR PHOUTHASACK
 IS A LOYAL MEMBER OF THIS ASSOCIATION
 AUG 2002 AUG 2008 334627
 MEMBER SINCE EXPIRES MEMBER NUMBER
 Connecticut Chapter

U.S. National Defense Force Support Command
 440 Massachusetts Avenue, NW # 330
 Washington, DC 20016-5572



Rank Grade: COLONEL O-6 Date: October 2007

Type Name: Sar Phouthasack

Signature: *Sar Phouthasack*

UNDESIGNATED IDENTIFICATION CARD

UNITED STATES VOLUNTEER SERVICES





U.S. VOLUNTEERS

NAME (FIRST, MIDDLE, LAST)
 SAR PHOUTHASACK

RANK, GRADE
 LTC/O5

LT. COL. Sar Phouthasack

America's
 Non-Profit Organization

2112573



Major Sar Phouthasack

U.S. SPOUSE REGISTRATION

Walter
 National President

DL

DRIVER LICENSE

232813

SOCIAL SECURITY



THIS NUMBER HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED FOR
 SAR PHOUTHASACK

Sar Phouthasack
 SIGNATURE



Phouthasack





SGU Veterans and Families of USA, INC.

A Non-Profit Organization

United States Volunteer USV.

Connecticut and New England Chapter

United States National Defense Force Support Command

(SEP) 1st Bde, 25th Civil Affairs Support Division (CASD)

28 Indian Hill, RD. Windsor, CT. 06095-1451

Tel. (860) 683-1829 Cell. (860) 836-2341, E-mail sarp1942@yahoo.com



Military. Army, Special force – Ranger Airbone From 1960 – 1975
Served. U.S. Secret Army Vietnam War Service In Laos,
Mission. Special Combat Mission Behind Enemy Lines, Front Lines Combat
Respon. Chief of Commander Communication for 2nd Division, Recruits, Training, and
 Supporting, to the front lines
Activity. In Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand.
Rank. COLONEL.

After Communist Took Over Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia; and worked for
 US Consulate In Thailand From 1975 - 1983

COLONEL. Sar Phouthasack

President: of Lao SGU Veterans and families of USA., INC. CT. & New England
 National: Vice President Lao SGU Veterans of USA., CT. & New England Chapter
 1st Begade, 25th General Commanding Support Division (CASD) CT., NE.
 Commander, 1st New England Brigade (USV)
 Member, of Association of The United States Army
 Member Of FBI. Infragard Security

Washington, DC 20515

*"In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger."
—President John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961.*

In tribute to the Hmong and Lao special combat units that served under the direction of United States military and clandestine forces in Laos, we join the grateful people of America to award to you this

Commendation and Citation for Vietnam War Service in Laos

Maj. Sar Phouthasack ID. # 2112573

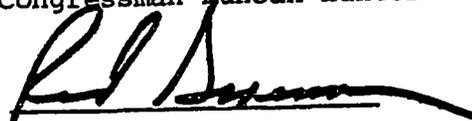
On this 14th day of May, 1997

For your courageous defense of your people and homeland against communist aggression and your support and sacrifice on behalf of the United States military and clandestine forces 1961-1975. Hmong and Lao special combat units operated in crucial air and ground operations for the United States military and clandestine forces, including the rescuing of downed air crews and the interdiction and destruction of enemy troop and supply convoys.

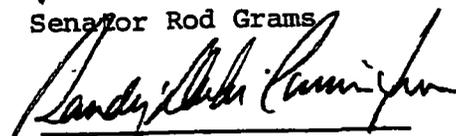
Now, therefore, on this 14th day of May, 1997, on the occasion of the Lao Veterans of America National Recognition Day ceremonies at the Vietnam War Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery, we salute your receipt of the Congressionally authorized Vietnam Veterans National Medal and we confer upon you and the other Hmong and Lao combat veterans this commendation and citation, and the long overdue recognition and honor you so rightly deserve for your sacrifices on behalf of the United States, Laos and the freedom loving people of Southeast Asia.



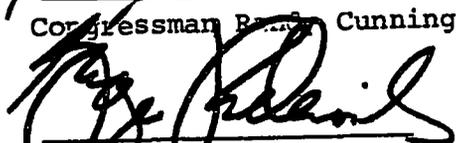
Congressman Duncan Hunter



Senator Rod Grams



Congressman Randy Cunningham



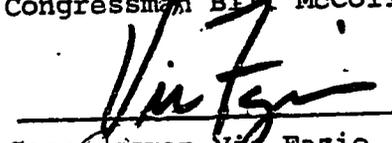
Congressman George Radanovich



Congressman Dana Rohrabacher



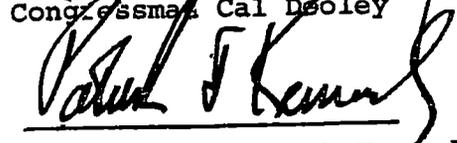
Congressman Bill McCollum



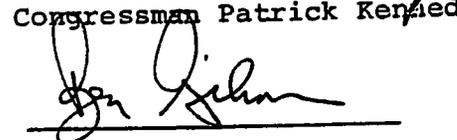
Congressman Vic Fazio



Congressman Cal Deoley



Congressman Patrick Kennedy



Congressman Ben Gilman

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

"A measure of the heroism and effectiveness of the Hmong struggle can be seen in the fact that the North Vietnamese forces arrayed against them increased over the years from the original 7,000 to 70,000, including several of North Vietnam's best divisions."

—Ambassador William Colby, Former CIA Director

In tribute to the Hmong and Lao special combat units that served in the
U.S. Secret Army in Laos, we join the grateful people of America
to award to you this

Commendation and Citation for
Vietnam War Service in Laos

to

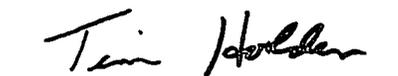
MAJ. SAR PHOUTHASACK ID# 2112573
On this 14th day of May, 1998

For your courageous defense of your people and homeland against communist aggression, as well as your support and sacrifice on behalf of the United States military and clandestine forces, 1961-1975. Hmong and Lao members of the U.S. Secret Army fought in the Vietnam campaign in crucial air and ground operations as pilots, air crews and soldiers in support of Air America, the U.S. Air Force "Ravens" Program, U.S. Army Special Forces' White Star Teams and other American military efforts.

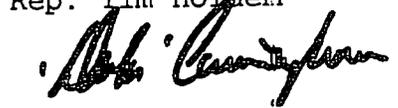
Now, therefore, on this 14th day of May, 1998, on the occasion of the Lao Veterans of America National Recognition Day ceremonies at the Vietnam War Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery, we salute your receipt of Vietnam War medals and we confer upon you and the other Hmong and Lao combat veterans this commendation and citation, and the long overdue recognition and honor you so rightly deserve for your sacrifices on behalf of the United States, Laos and the freedom loving people of Southeast Asia.



Rep. Dana Rohrabacher



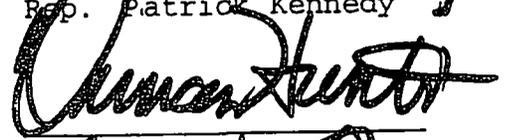
Rep. Tim Holden



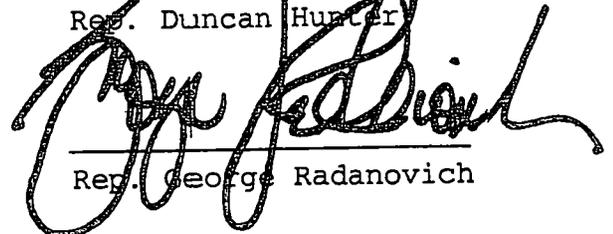
Rep. Randy Cunningham



Rep. Patrick Kennedy



Rep. Duncan Hunter



Rep. George Radanovich



Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

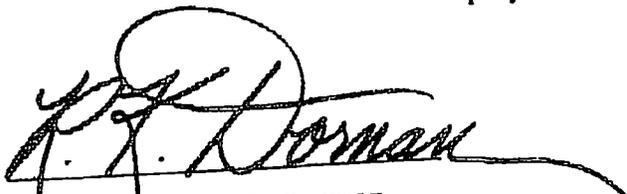
*" In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom n its hour of maximum danger."
—President John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961.*

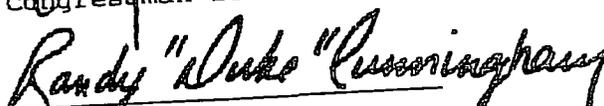
In tribute to Former CIA Director Ambassador William Colby and the United States military and clandestine forces who served in the Vietnam War, we join the grateful people of America to award to you this

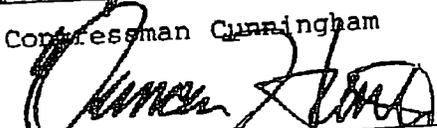
Commendation and Citation for
Vietnam War Service in Laos

Major Sar to Phouthasack
On this 12th day of May, 1996

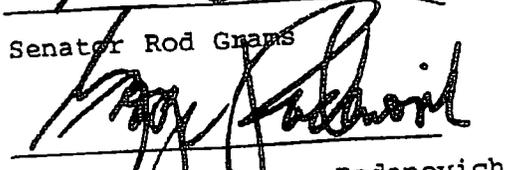
For your courageous defense of your people and homeland against communist aggression and your support and sacrifice on behalf of United States military and clandestine forces. Hmong and Lao units in the Royal Lao armed forces operated in crucial air and combat support missions for United States military and clandestine forces, including the rescuing of downed air crews and the interdiction and destruction of enemy troop and supply convoys. Against overwhelming enemy manpower and weaponry, the outnumbered Hmong and other Royal Lao forces successfully fought as allies of the United States to maintain the freedom of Laos and other Southeast Asian nations threatened by the invasion of the Soviet-backed, North Vietnamese Army. Now, therefore, on this 12th day of May, 1996, we confer upon you and the other Hmong and Lao combat veterans this commendation and citation and the long overdue recognition and honor you so rightly deserve for your sacrifices on behalf of the United States, Laos and the freedom loving people of Southeast Asia.

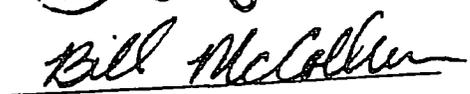

Congressman Bob Dornan


Congressman Cunningham


Congressman Duncan Hunter


Senator Rod Grams


Congressman George Radanovich


Congressman Bill McCollum

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515



Commendation and Citation



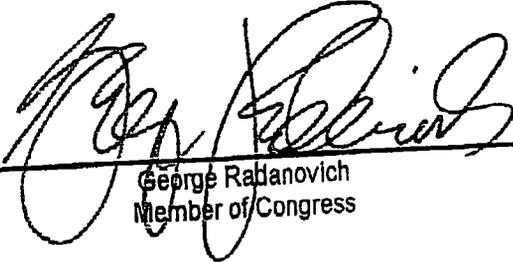
Presented To

Maj. Sar Phouthasack # 2112573

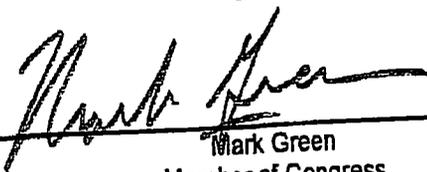
In special recognition of the sacrifices and courage of Laotian and Hmong veterans of the U.S. "Secret Army" and their American advisors, who served freedom's cause in Southeast Asia.

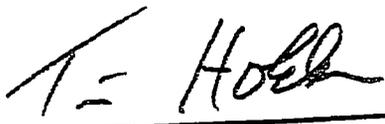
We join the people of the United States and our nation in deepest gratitude to you for your crucial and historic contribution to the Kingdom of Laos and American national security during the Vietnam War.

We commend and honor you for your bravery and extraordinary efforts on behalf of United States military and clandestine forces during the Vietnam War.


George Ratanovich
Member of Congress


Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress


Mark Green
Member of Congress


Tim Holden
Member of Congress

CONSULATE OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

11 January 1983

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This letter is to introduce and recommend Mr. Sar Phouthasack who has been a faithful and reliable employee of the United States Government for over 17 years. He worked in Laos until the communist takeover in 1975 and then in Thailand through December 1982. He has extensive experience in repairing and maintaining radio, television and other electronic equipment. Mr. Phouthasack also has over 8 years of supervisory experience and has been responsible for management of up to 20 indigenous personnel.

While working for the United States Government in South-east Asia, Mr. Phouthasack demonstrated initiative, imagination and self-reliance. He has developed effective and productive management skills that have earned the confidence of his supervisors and respect of his subordinates. Mr. Phouthasack can be relied upon to perform with minimal supervision.

Mr. Phouthasack would still be a highly valued employee of the United States Government in Thailand had he not chosen to emigrate to the United States and seek employment in the private sector. Your consideration of Mr. Phouthasack's application would be greatly appreciated as he goes with our full blessing and belief that he will succeed in any endeavor if given the opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "George W. Kenning Jr.".
George W. Kenning Jr.
Consul
Udon, Thailand

000158

CHRISTOPHER J. DODD
CONNECTICUT



May 5, 2005

Lao Veterans of America
Connecticut & New England Chapter
c/o Major Sar Phouthasack
President

Dear Friends:

I write to extend my sincere appreciation for the service of Laotian and Hmong veterans who bravely fought alongside United States military and clandestine forces in the Kingdom of Laos.

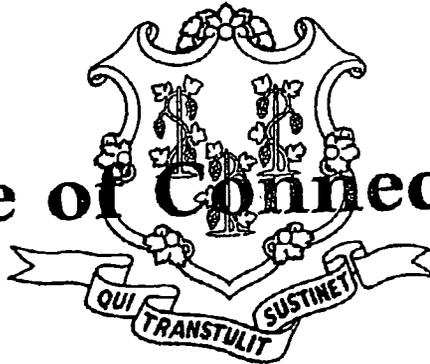
Laotian and Hmong units performed vital operations during the Vietnam War to protect United States troops, rescue American pilots, and defend the people of Laos.

The United States honors your sacrifices on behalf of our armed forces, and I commend you for your contributions to United States led efforts overseas.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Dodd", written over the word "Sincerely,".

CHRISTOPHER J. DODD
United States Senator



State of Connecticut

General Assembly

Official Citation

Introduced by REPRESENTATIVE WENDY A. CURREY, 10TH DISTRICT
REPRESENTATIVE RICHARD A. CHRIST, 11TH DISTRICT
REPRESENTATIVE RICHARD DEERY, 6TH DISTRICT
SENATOR GARY CEBEAU, 3RD DISTRICT

Be it hereby known to all that:
The Connecticut General Assembly
hereby offers its sincerest congratulations to:

MEMBERS OF THE LAO VETERANS OF AMERICA, INC.
CONNECTICUT AND NEW ENGLAND CHAPTER

in recognition of

YOUR DEDICATION TO YOUR PEOPLE AND TO THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT.
CONGRATULATIONS ON DEVELOPING YOUR ORGANIZATION.

The entire membership extends its
very best wishes on this memorable occasion
and expresses the hope for continued success.

Given this 21st day of MAY 19 88
at the State Capitol
Hartford, Connecticut

by

Kevin B. Gallia
President Pro Tempore

Thomas O. Pith
Speaker of the House

William J. Propp
Secretary of the State

