

VETO MESSAGE:

VETO MESSAGE - No. 82

TO THE ASSEMBLY:

I am returning herewith, without my approval, the following bill:

Assembly Bill Number 6574, entitled:

"AN ACT to amend the executive law, in relation to a veteran speaker education program within the division of veterans' affairs"

NOT APPROVED

This bill would require the Division of Veterans' Affairs (NYS DVA) to establish a Veteran Speaker Education Program, which would allow school children to hear veterans discuss their military experiences. In particular, NYSDVA is required to create a pamphlet that describes the program and identifies veterans who are willing to speak at public and private elementary and secondary schools about their wartime experiences. The pamphlet, which must be updated annually, must list each veteran's contact information, a description of his or her service, the time and length of his or her service, the geographic area where the veteran served, and his or her rank.

The bill would also require the NYSDVA to establish an identification system, which will include background checks, to ensure that speakers actually served in the United States armed forces. NYSDVA would also be required to establish an evaluation process by which teachers can review the speakers who visit their classes. The bill would be effective immediately and the pamphlet must be made available to school districts by October 1, 2007.

The bill seeks to facilitate the ability of teachers to locate veterans who can provide school children with personal accounts of their

participation in the armed conflicts of the 20th century. Although this is a worthy objective, the way in which this bill seeks to achieve that goal is flawed.

First, the bill is premised upon the belief that the wartime accounts of veterans are in danger of being lost as veterans pass away, but there are many programs throughout the nation that preserve such accounts. Indeed, the New York State Military Museum and Veterans Research Center in Saratoga operates a Veteran Oral History Program, which has been digitally preserving video and audio interviews of New York veterans for seven years. These interviews are available for viewing by students. Although it is entirely reasonable to encourage schools to seek out veterans to relate their experiences to school children in person, no legislation is needed for them to do so, because schools are free to contact local veterans' organizations for assistance in locating speakers.

Second, NYSDVA currently does not have the funding or the staff to implement the provisions of this bill. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how NYSDVA could locate individual veterans all over the State, contact them to see if they are willing to serve as speakers, verify their military service, implement any other actions needed as part of the required identification system, and publish and distribute a pamphlet by October 1 - two months from now - without any additional staff or resources.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the core mission of NYSDVA is to assist New York State's veterans in receiving federal, state and local benefits to which they might be entitled. Implementing the provisions of this bill will simply divert scarce resources from that core mission, and will result in a reduction in the assistance and benefits that New York's veterans need and deserve.

The bill is disapproved.

(signed) ELIOT SPITZER

