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Veterans Newsletter

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July 2016

'Blue Lives Matter': Rep. Burns proposes making attack on police officers a hate crime

In addition to respecting the job veterans have done keeping us safe from foreign threats, Rep. Burns respects the difficult job police officers perform keeping us safe from criminals – and is appalled that all too often these days officers are targeted for assault, ambush or worse.

To send a clear message to those who intentionally seek to perpetuate violence against law enforcement personnel, Rep. Burns has introduced "Blue Lives Matter" legislation that would make police and corrections officers a protected class under the Pennsylvania hate crimes statute.

"While Pennsylvania makes assault against an officer an aggravating factor under its current assault law, that doesn't go far enough," Burns said. "We need to stiffen the punishments for those who willingly assault or kill a police officer. As the recent deaths of five police officers due to sniper fire in Dallas proves, if ever there was a group in need of being a protected class, it's those who put their lives on the line every day to keep the rest of us safe from the criminal element."

Under Rep. Burns' proposed legislation, law enforcement officers of the commonwealth or any of its political subdivisions, as well as corrections officers at state



or county facilities, would gain protected status under Pennsylvania's ethnic intimidation law.

Essentially, their job status would be added to the categories of race, color, religion and national origin currently covered by our state's hate crime law.

"Law enforcement officers risk their lives daily so we all can enjoy peace and security," Burns said. "They deserve the highest level of protection from targeted acts of violence that the law can provide."

"As the recent deaths of five police officers due to sniper fire in Dallas proves, if ever there was a group in need of being a protected class, it's those who put their lives on the line every day to keep the rest of us safe from the criminal element." – Rep. Frank Burns

National Guard pay hiked with Burns' support

An early supporter of House Bill 602, which raises the minimum base pay for members of the Pennsylvania National Guard from \$75 to \$100, Rep. Burns is pleased to announce that the measure became law this month.

This legislation will financially enhance lower-rank enlisted personnel that are activated by the governor for duty during emergencies across the commonwealth, such as those activated for Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee in 2011.

Rep. Burns felt this move was needed because the minimum base pay was last increased in 1996, from \$45 to \$75 per day. The new minimum makes the pay scale more equitable to today's market, and is yet another way to compensate our National Guard personnel for their unselfish sacrifices to our commonwealth and country in time of disaster or emergency.

Be warned: You can get a year in prison for impersonating a vet

Act 32 of 2015 makes it a misdemeanor crime to falsely claim to be a veteran when requesting a veteran's driver's license or ID card.

This has become an issue since Act 176 of 2012 permitted the inclusion of a veteran's designation on state driver's licenses and photo IDs. The purpose of that law was to make it easier for veterans to prove their status without having to carry valuable papers with them at all times.

People convicted of making a false veteran's representation under this new law can face a fine of up to \$2,500 and/or one year in prison.

Burns bill names Cambria bridge after World War II soldier killed in action

Rep. Burns is pleased that his House Bill 1260, which named the PFC Thomas A. Cooney Memorial Bridge spanning Route 22 in Munster Township, became law in June.

Born in 1917, Cooney and his three brothers were raised on a farm outside Lilly.

While serving in the European Theater of Operation in October 1944, Cooney and his fellow engineers encountered heavy sniper and machine gun fire as they cleared mines along a strategically important road in France. He was killed in action along with three other engineers when a delayed-action mine detonated.

"Even though more than 70 years have passed since his heroic actions and death on the battlefield, the bravery and unselfishness of Thomas Cooney has withstood the test of time," Burns said. "Now, his name is forever memorialized – and his story will not be forgotten."

Rep. Burns is eagerly organizing an official bridge dedication ceremony to commemorate the long-overdue honor bestowed on Cooney.



PFC Thomas A. Cooney

State registry for veterans makes it easier to get benefits

A new online Pennsylvania Veterans Registry is available to help veterans better access valuable benefits, services and programs.

The registry is operated by the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. A person who registers will have his or her information shared with the county Veterans Affairs

Office and other relevant state agencies to coordinate services.

In addition, veterans who register can opt in to receive newsletters, news releases and program updates.

The site can be accessed at <https://register.dmva.pa.gov>.

More disabled veterans would get property tax relief under bill supported by Burns

A bill Rep. Burns supports has been introduced, House Bill 1502, that would ease real estate tax burdens on disabled veterans, based on the degree of disability.

Currently, veterans classified as 100-percent disabled by the Veterans Administration are exempt from paying any real estate taxes on their primary home, provided they meet other program requirements.

Under this bill, if the Veterans Administration categorizes a veteran as 50-percent disabled, he or she would be entitled to a 50-percent reduction in real estate taxes owed. A veteran with a 20-percent disabled rating would earn a 20-percent reduction.

This bill is under review by the House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee.

Longtime staffer Trudy Thomas retiring from House

After working 16 years as a legislative assistant for former state Rep. Gary Haluska, then moving over to Rep. Burns' staff in November 2014, Trudy Thomas announced her retirement effective July 22.



Happy retirement Trudy!

Trudy, who finished her House career working in Burns' Patton and Ebensburg offices, was a devoted and valuable staffer who previously worked nine years as a Title I Aide for Cambria Heights School District.

She was born and raised in Patton, where she lives with her husband of nearly 40 years, Dan. They have a son and daughter, and several grandchildren.

Burns and his remaining staff organized a July 19 retirement party in the Patton office for Trudy.

"We are sad to see Trudy leave and she'll be missed," Burns said. "Trudy was a valuable asset not only to my office, but the community. I'm happy to know her and proud to call her my friend."

Fallen state police trooper honored by Burns at bridge-naming ceremony



In a July 8 ceremony organized by Rep. Burns, the family of a state police trooper killed in the line of duty in February 1982 was recognized at a dedication for the Trooper Herbert A. Wirfel Memorial Bridge, which spans U.S. Route 219 on Tower Road in Croyle Township.

Burns' House Bill 1371, signed into law in June, was responsible for naming the bridge in honor of Wirfel, who was patrolling U.S. Route 22 in Cambria County when an unidentified vehicle ran through the radar zone at 72 mph.

During a pursuit waged in unfavorable weather and road conditions, Wirfel's vehicle struck a snow drift partially covering the passing lane and skidded off the highway into a frozen snow bank. The 20-year state police veteran was pronounced dead at the scene at age 45, leaving a wife and seven children.

Burns hailed Wirfel as a hero during the ceremony, held near the bridge at New Germany Grove Hall in Summerhill. The national anthem was sung by Bridget Anne Wirfel, speakers included Gregory Wirfel, and a musical tribute was performed by retired U.S. Navy musician Matthew Wirfel.



State Representative

Frank Burns

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**A COMPLIMENTARY SPAGHETTI
LUNCH FOR OUR VETERANS***
Hosted by State Rep. Frank Burns

Sunday, August 28, 2016
11 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Cresson Volunteer Fire Co. • 223 Ashcroft Ave., Cresson



**MUST
SHOW
MILITARY ID**

***Guests of veterans are welcome; however, the complimentary spaghetti lunch only applies to veterans with a Military ID.**

For more information or to RSVP by Monday, August 22, 2016, please contact Rep. Burns' Portage office at (814) 736-7339.