



VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA CALIFORNIA STATE COUNCIL

For Immediate Release
November 7, 2011
Chair, Legislative Committee

Contact: Ken Holybee

(707) 217-9933

holybee@comcast.net

VVA-CSC Announces 2011 California Legislators of the Year

The Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council (VVA-CSC) has named Senator Ted Lieu (Torrance) and Assemblywoman Betsy Butler (Torrance) as their 2011 Legislators of the Year. The VVA-CSC Legislator of the Year award is bestowed upon legislators who have supported California's veterans and their families during their service as California legislators.

Senator Lieu and Assemblywoman Butler were chosen for their leadership, support, and dedication to veterans, service members, and their families.

Senator Lieu served on the Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee since he was first elected in 2005. He now sits on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee where he continues to bring his extensive knowledge of legislation, veterans issues, and military experience to the table. Senator Lieu also currently serves as a Lieutenant Colonel in the United States Air Force Reserve. Prior to that, he served on active duty for four years as a member of the JAG Corps. As an Assemblyman, Lieu tackled a complicated, technical issue which impacts young servicemembers and their families. The payday lending and cash advance businesses which sprung up outside of military bases were found to not only be preying on these financially inexperienced servicemembers, but the practice was also impacting readiness. If a service member is in arrears to these lenders, that makes them ineligible for deployment. The high rates charged by these businesses were also leaving many people perpetually in debt. This is a complex area of the law and Lieu had twice tackled the issue in legislation. Lieu has also carried legislation to allow spouses of the US Armed Forces, National Guard, and Reserves to take up to 10 days of unpaid leave when the military member is home on leave. He also carried a Resolution to commemorate 2008 as the 20-year anniversary of the California Vietnam Veterans Memorial. This year, Lieu pursued legislation (SB 888) to protect the sanctity of the funerals of fallen servicemembers. SB 888 sought to impose time and place restrictions for funeral protests.

Funerals are times when family members and friends pay respect and mourn their loved ones in a private and peaceful manner. Unfortunately, there are despicable groups and individuals who attempt to disrupt these services for selfish political gain. VVA-CSC was a co-sponsor of this legislation.

According to VVA-CSC President Steve Mackey, “Senator Lieu has served veterans well in the Assembly and Senate and we look forward to working closely with him in his remaining 7 years in the Senate. Many problems affecting veterans require a long term commitment and knowledge of the issues and political process to solve and Senator Lieu is a legislator we can count on to help achieve these goals”.

Assemblywoman Butler has an intimate knowledge of the military as her father was a 38 year veteran of the United States Air Force, active and reserve. A freshman legislator who first came to the Capitol in 2011, she immediately tackled one of the most complex veterans issues facing our young veterans of today. The understanding of the effects Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of combat and military service was slowly realized well after the Vietnam War. As a result, many Vietnam Veterans ended up grappling with unresolved stresses in their daily lives. Many ended up homeless on the streets and some were incarcerated rather than treated for these symptoms acquired during their service to our country. Assemblywoman Butler introduced legislation to establish Veterans Courts, similar to Family Courts and Drug Courts, which seek to use treatment as an alternative or in conjunction with incarceration, thereby striving to solve the problem. Butler pushed AB 201 all the way through both houses of the Legislature and got the bill to the Governor’s desk. Legislation dealing with veterans courts is a difficult issue because of the wide array of stakeholders involved. The court system, judges, District Attorneys, Public Defenders, victims rights groups, veterans groups, law enforcement groups, etc. The Governor ultimately vetoed the bill citing budgetary constraints. However, the heavy lifting and consensus building by Assemblywoman Butler has set the stage for future attempts at this important issue for veterans.

VVA-CSC Legislative Chairman Ken Holybee noted “the VVA’s motto is ‘never again will one generation of veterans abandon another’. Vietnam Veterans have made it their mission to assist those young men and women fighting today’s wars and to ensure that they do not face the same obstacles that we faced 40 years ago. We applaud Assemblywoman Butler’s commitment, tenacity, and willingness to tackle the big issues affecting all veterans and we look forward to a long and productive relationship with her and her excellent staff”.

Senator Lieu and Assemblywoman Butler will be presented the awards at the VVA-CSC’s Annual Capitol Legislative Day event on March 28, 2012. This is a day when VVA-CSC leaders and members alike travel to the State Capitol to advocate on issues of importance to veterans and to educate legislators, consultants, and staff.

The **Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council** has over 4300 members and is the California unit of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). VVA was founded in 1978 to promote, support, and aggressively advocate on the full range of issues important to Vietnam veterans, the next generation of America’s war veterans, and to also serve our local communities. The Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is the only national Vietnam veterans organization congressionally chartered and exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. Nationwide, the VVA has over 50,000 members.