

By **Mitch Fuller**, Director of Governmental and Public Affairs

THE TEXAS VFW is fully engaged in our advocacy efforts and the National and State level. The Regular Session of the 87th Texas Legislature ended on May 31, 2021. Since the end of the Regular Session, Governor Greg Abbott called two Special Legislative Sessions. The Second Special Session began on August 7, 2021 and includes 17 items identified by Governor Abbott as his legislative priorities, including a proposed constitutional amendment that must be approved by voters in November that will eliminate the current quorum requirement that 2/3 of members of the Senate or House must be present for the body to conduct business. If the proposed Constitutional Amendment passes both Houses (2/3 majority vote required) and is signed by the Governor and approved by the voters, a simple majority will be the new quorum requirement.

During the Regular Session, the Texas VFW was invited, asked, or testified on its own initiatives on more than 30 bills that were filed, including our two bills, Senate Bill (SB) 989 and SB 1493, which would have prevented closure of our Posts due to future emergency orders of the Governor. These bills were heard in a hearing of the Senate Business and Commerce Committee on the floor of the Texas Senate on April 20, 2021. There was a strong presence of more than 50 comrades from across Texas at the Capitol as State Commander Dick Shawver and Fuller testified. Although the bills did not get a vote out of committee, we did make our case strongly that the Texas VFW is essential to the State of Texas and the communities we serve during our testimony and by our constant presence at the Capitol during the Regular Session which made quite an impact.

Texas VFW was honored by Resolutions in the Senate and House of Representatives on the floor of the Senate on May 11, 2021 honoring Texas VFW's 100th Birthday. The Department of Texas was chartered on April 21, 1921. Senate Resolution (SR 353), authored by State Senator Roland Gutierrez of San Antonio, and signed by Lt. Governor

Dan Patrick and all 31 Texas Senators, honored this occasion. State Representative Donna Howard of Austin authored a resolution honoring the Texas VFW in the House of Representatives.

Of the more than 30 bills on which we testified in Senate and House Committees, 17 were signed into law by the Governor. These bills included a broad range of issues related to veteran transition to civilian sector employment and apprenticeships, and professional licenses for veterans and military spouses. Other important bills were property tax exemption for surviving spouses of service members killed in the line of duty, and mental health initiatives, including a bill related to a study of alternative treatment for PTSD. Highlights include SB 4, authored by State Senator Dawn Buckingham of Lakeway. Texas VFW was invited by the Senate State Affairs Committee and Senator Buckingham to testify on SB 4, which requires the National Anthem to be played at all professional sports events in Texas, if the team receives any public money from any level of government. SB 792, authored by State Senator Donna Campbell of New Braunfels, requires a handicapped placard or handicapped symbol on a license plate for handicapped parking effective January 1, 2022. Disabled veteran plates alone (without the handicapped placard or symbol on the plate) will no longer be enough to legally park in a handicapped spot with the new law. Our testimony on these bills solidified what we already know: the Texas VFW is the preeminent Veterans Service Organization in Texas.

Since the end of the Regular Session and during the Special Sessions, the Texas VFW continues to advocate for our interests in the public and private sectors, including meetings of the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), Texas Lottery Commission (TLC) and the Bingo Advisory Committee of the TLC and senior leaders of these agencies, as well as members of Congress.

Mitch Fuller

State Senator Sarah Eckhardt of Austin (left), Mitch Fuller (center) and State Senator Roland Gutierrez of San Antonio (right). Senator Gutierrez authored Senate Resolution (SR) 353, which honored the 100th Birthday of the Texas VFW, during the Regular Legislative Session.

Update LEGISLATIVE



State Senator Kelly Hancock (left) of North Richland Hills is the new Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Border Security Committee.



Mitch Fuller (left) stands with Chairman of the Texas Lottery Commission, Robert Rivera (right) who is appointed the Chairman of the Lottery Commission by the Governor.

