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John A. Scocos Column: Supporting Community Partners, Employment Efforts and Veteran-Owned Businesses

As the 2015-2016 legislative session is nearing its end, there are a number of pieces of legislation that are making their way through the Wisconsin State Legislature that will positively affect veterans and their families in our state. We are always looking for ways to better support our military veterans, and much of this legislation comes from the input and feedback of veterans and the groups that directly assist them.

We understand that we need strong community partners to help us serve the various needs of veterans and their families throughout the state. To that end, we are working with the legislature to so that the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) would have permanent authority under **Senate Bill 418** to provide up to a total of \$250,000 in grants each year to nonprofit organizations that provide financial assistance or other services to veterans and their families. A nonprofit organization may receive up to \$25,000 under this program. In the past, non-profit organizations received similar grants for student veteran programs, therapy programs for PTS and TBI, and to provide food to veterans in need.

Ensuring that veterans have access to good, family-supporting jobs has been a priority for the WDVA for many years. We have been strongly supporting **Senate Bill 419** that would allow our agency to provide up to \$500,000 in grants each year to assist veteran entrepreneurs, to give employers in state incentives to hire veterans, especially disabled veterans, to help fund employment training for veterans, especially disabled veterans, and to improve employment outcomes for veterans in this state overall.

We want to support our veteran-owned businesses and we know that you do, too. **Senate Bill 575** helps us to recognize these businesses. Once this bill passes, the WDVA will design an official "Wisconsin Veteran-Owned" logo for use by businesses owned by Wisconsin veterans and an official "Wisconsin Disabled Veteran-Owned" logo for use by businesses owned by Wisconsin veterans who are also disabled. These new logos will help us to recognize, support and market these veteran-owned businesses.

These three bills have made their way through the Wisconsin State Senate and have great bipartisan support in the Assembly, where they are expected to be voted on next. We are proud to work with the legislature in support of these forward-thinking, proactive efforts regarding veterans issues. We are hopeful that all will pass in the coming days so we can continue to move forward with our community partners and others to meet the needs of our veterans.