

# Texas Legislation

## Report #1:

**Jim Cunningham**

### **TCC Executive Vice President - State Legislative Affairs**

The State has just gone through primary voting for Representatives and some Senators with runoffs in May and the final votes in November. We will definitely have a new Speaker of the House and so new and/or renewed relationships will be made with the new Speaker. Legislative goals for the benefit of our military community are being formulated and will be presented to key legislators as we come closer to the 86 session and during the interim.

The first key issues, no doubt, will be continued protection of the Hazlewood Act and changes to the ad valorem tax exemptions for disabled veterans to put their exemptions on a percentage basis as opposed to a fixed amount. During the 85 session, it was apparent that the legislative budget board had given a fiscal note to the proposed changes to disabled veteran relief, numbers which were wrong to the extent that they did not separate already existing exemption amounts from possible new exemption amounts that would result from a change in law. This was seen by veteran advocates as well as legislators and is the primary reason that these changes did not go anywhere during the session. HB3002, which has been discussed at some earlier TCC meetings and was set out as a policy statement by the Council to be introduced as a new bill in the next session, also came about. It failed to reach a vote, in my opinion, due to the fact that it was seen as favoring one group of veterans to the possible detriment of other disabled veterans, County tax entities did not want to have a separate group to contend with when granting exemptions and its fiscal note was such that it would reach over 122 million over the years in projected revenue loss to the counties. The legislature was not in the mood to cause such a hit to the counties during this session. There was not widespread support of this bill by the VSO's that I came in contact with at the state level. It is planned, and we are already working on getting a more favorable look at changing the exemption law, for all disabled veterans in the 86th session. Legislators will be looking at getting correctly presented information from the LBB as to the actual costs of the proposed changes and the Governor has already stated that he wants to revamp property taxes for all during the 86th, which would put us in a much more favorable position to accomplish our goal.

Work is being done on a veteran's summit meeting to be held at the Capitol on May 2, 2018. We have been asked to contribute to the agenda and are in that process already. This summit will consist of the Governor and various legislators speaking, panels composed of veteran related state agencies and panels of veteran organizations at the state level. All issues related to veterans will be discussed and I see this as a great opportunity to let our legislators and state executives know what our military community as a whole needs and would like to see happen legislatively. More to come.