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## **Codey Stands up for Veterans, National Guard Members**

### *Acting Governor Signs Bills Providing and Extending Benefits*

(TRENTON) – Acting Governor Richard J. Codey today signed S1139 and S250, which provide and extend benefits for New Jersey’s servicemen and women.

“This is the least we can do for the men and women who put their lives on the line to keep us safe and protect our freedom,” Codey said. “We recognize the enormous sacrifices they make and are committed to making life easier for them.”

S1139 extends veterans’ benefits to members of the Armed Forces who participated in operations Northern and Southern Iraq. The measure allows veterans of Operations Northern and Southern Watch – the military’s imposition of “no fly zones” over Iraq following the first Gulf War – to take advantage of benefits bestowed on other veterans.

Under the new law, veterans of the two operations would receive a property tax deduction or exemption and qualify for civil-service hiring preferences. Eligible veterans also would be able to purchase service credit for the Public Employees Retirement System, Teachers’ Pension and Annuity Fund, and the Police and Fireman’s Retirement System.

The bill’s sponsors include Senators Joseph Coniglio and Robert E. Littell, Assemblyman Jack Conners, and Assemblywomen Linda R. Greenstein and Alison Littell McHose.

“These soldiers risked their lives out on the battlefield so that we could continue to enjoy the many freedoms we have here at home,” said Coniglio, (D-Bergen). “Easing the job search and retirement benefit application process for these veterans is the least we can do to help those men and women who fought to make life easier for the rest of us.”

Approximately 1,500 additional veterans would be eligible for the property tax benefits under the new law, while 125 veterans would be eligible for the pension benefits.

“There is nothing we can ever do as legislators that would match the sacrifices our Armed Forces make for our country,” Littell (R-Hunterdon, Morris and Sussex) said. “They refuse to turn their backs on their country, we will not turn our backs on them. Our servicemen and women can be sure their contributions will live on in the legacy of freedom they leave behind.”

Conners (D-Camden) said: "Enhanced property tax and pension benefits are a small price to pay for the sacrifice these men and women made serving over the Iraqi 'no-fly zones,'" said Conners (D-Camden). "The increased benefits are just a small token of our appreciation to the New Jerseyans who served after the Gulf War."

Greenstein (D- Middlesex) agreed.

"Many New Jerseyans put their lives on hold to serve in Iraq after the Gulf War," Greenstein said. "It is only right that we provide Iraqi no-fly zone personnel the same benefits other veterans enjoy."

McHose (R- Hunterdon, Morris and Sussex) added: "Extending these benefits to the service men and women who fought in Operation Northern and Southern Watch is a small way to honor their bravery and dedication. We as a nation have an obligation to provide for our courageous soldiers who so valiantly defend the values of freedom and liberty."

S250 makes tax exempt the compensation New Jersey National Guard members receive to cover living expenses while serving on state active duty. The new law provides a New Jersey gross income tax exclusion for housing and food allowances received by guard members who are called up by the governor for emergencies. Stipends for cost-of-living expenses are provided to military personnel on duty away from their home base.

The bill's sponsors include Senators Coniglio and John A. Girgenti, and Assemblymen Douglas H. Fisher and Neil M. Cohen.

"The New Jersey National Guard is the state's first line of defense against any threats to safety," said Coniglio. "Income taxes are one of the last things these soldiers should have to worry about while they are working to defend the State's residents and historic landmarks."

Under current law, housing and food subsidies are not taxable when received by guard members serving by order of the U.S. Department of Defense or the President.

"We need to show our National Guard volunteers that New Jersey appreciates their service, whether they are serving under orders of the Governor or the President of the United States," said Girgenti, (D-Bergen and Passaic) "There is a difference in the benefits for federal and state active duty soldiers, but National Guard members provide the same services, and should be granted the same benefits."

Girgenti serves as the Chairman of the Senate Law, Public Safety and Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Of the more than 8,500 New Jersey National Guard members, approximately 2,000 are currently serving in under federal command in Iraq, Europe and Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

"When called to active duty during a state emergency, guard members put their lives on hold to ensure our safety and to help New Jerseyans in need," said Fisher (D-Cumberland).

“In the interest of fairness and gratitude, living expenses should be exempted from state taxes.”

Cohen (D-Union) added: “Whether serving in New Jersey or overseas, National Guard personnel on active duty should not have their living expenses subjected to state tax. New Jersey's National Guard personnel are ready to serve their state and country at any time. Their tax status shouldn't depend on the physical location of their service.”