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Military and Veterans Affairs Committee Chair Pilar Schiavo Introduces Bill Package To Protect and Support Veterans

SACRAMENTO – Military and Veterans Affairs Committee Chair Pilar Schiavo announced today a package of three bills dedicated to improving financial protections for reservists and ensuring the Department of Veterans Affairs is serving all veterans, delivering on her commitment to protecting and supporting our veterans.

“The state has established a number of programs to support reservists and veterans; however, as Legislators, it’s our job to make sure these programs are working as intended and that departments are held accountable when they’re not,” said Schiavo. “With this package of bills, we can improve the financial protections for those serving, gain clarity on what aspects of the Department of Veterans affairs can be improved, and ensure a voice continues to advocate in the Department for those who have historically had difficulty accessing the benefits they deserve for their service to the United States.”

A summary of the legislation includes:

AB 1854 will help ensure that when members of the Guard and Reserve are called to active duty, they are able to use credit protections granted to them under existing law. Members of the Guard and Reserve are often called to active duty on very short notice, and sometimes don’t learn of the protections the law provides until it is too late to take advantage of them. The bill creates a 180-day

window following their activation during which they may apply for retroactive deferment of payment and interest on specified debts, such as credit cards, vehicle loans, and mortgages.

AB 1908 will improve government transparency and performance by requiring the California Department of Veterans Affairs to report to the Legislature on the findings of its internal auditor. The requirement imposed by the bill is similar to one that already applies to the California Military Department's Inspector General.

AB 1994 will strengthen representation in state government of minority and underrepresented veterans. The bill adds the Deputy Secretary of Minority and Underrepresented Veterans Affairs to those deputies whose appointments are specified in statute. Those already enshrined in statute are the Undersecretary, the Deputy Secretary of Women Veterans Affairs and the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Homes. The position is a relatively new one, but it is an important one. Minority veterans are less likely to receive benefits, and often live in areas where there are service gaps. Native American veterans, in particular, whose representation in the Armed Forces is about double their proportion of the general population, are less likely to receive benefits that they were entitled to, or could have established eligibility for.

Currently, all three bills are in the Assembly Committee on Rules awaiting referral to the relevant policy committee.

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Assemblywoman Pilar Schiavo was elected to the California State Assembly in November of 2022 to represent the 40th Assembly District, representing the Northwest San Fernando Valley and the Santa Clarita Valley. Upon her election, she was appointed as Assistant Majority Whip by the Speaker of the Assembly and now serves as Chair of the Assembly Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs. Prior to her election, Assemblywoman Schiavo was a Nurse Advocate and Small Business Owner who worked in the labor movement for more than 20 years. Throughout her career, Assemblywoman Schiavo helped deliver healthcare, including reproductive healthcare, to more than one million people and fought to put critical dollars in the pockets of workers. In the Northwest San Fernando Valley, she co-founded an organization that helped secure housing for Veterans experiencing homelessness, co-founded an organization that delivered more than 50,000 meals to people in need, and increased resources to help keep our communities safe. Assemblywoman Schiavo lives in Chatsworth with her daughter Sofia where they love to hike in the Santa Susana Mountains.

