

King County Councilmember

Bob Ferguson

Special Veterans Day Issue



Dear Neighbor:

Like many of you, I grew up hearing family members talk about their experiences in the military. My late father was always proud of his service in the Navy, and my grandfathers served in World War I and the Spanish-American War. Additionally, eight of my uncles served in World War II. I learned about the Normandy Invasion, the sinking of the *Quincy*, and Patton's Army not just from my history books, but from my uncles who told me their stories about those experiences. Because of their influence, on both a personal and public policy level, I know that veterans deserve our support.

As we honor our nation's veterans on November 11, I want to take the opportunity to keep you informed about how your investments are being used to help veterans in King County. In November 2005, King County voters overwhelmingly approved the Veterans and Human Services Levy with nearly 60 percent of the vote.

Approval of the levy was very rewarding for me because I led the effort to place it on the ballot. Half of the levy's revenues fund services for veterans, military personnel and their families. The other half funds regional health and human services for King County residents in need. In order to pay tribute to our veterans on Veterans Day, this newsletter is devoted to sharing information about the portion of the levy that is funding veterans services.

I hope you enjoy seeing how your investments in the Veterans Levy are assisting veterans and their families in our community.

Sincerely,

Bob

King County Veterans Levy background

In 2005, I proposed to increase funding for veterans services. Federal spending on mental health and drug treatment services for veterans had declined, and the county did not have enough funding to meet the needs of its veterans, particularly with new veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

I proposed that a levy be placed on the ballot to allow voters to decide if they wanted to invest in increased veterans services. I worked for a year with citizens and elected officials, and the King County Council voted 12-1 to place the levy on the ballot. In November 2005, voters overwhelmingly passed the measure with nearly 60 percent of the vote.

When drafting the ballot measure, I worked to ensure that your tax dollars reach the intended recipients. We created two oversight boards to oversee expenditures of levy proceeds. The citizens serving on the oversight boards make sure the funds are supporting those who need services the most.



Bob's late father, Murray Ferguson (left), served in the Navy.

Challenges facing veterans

Nationally and locally, many of our veterans are dealing with challenging situations. For example, nearly 25 percent of homeless people are veterans.* While there is no single explanation for the high prevalence of homeless veterans, contributing factors include post-traumatic stress, chemical dependency, unemployment, and mental illness.

The Veterans Affairs Northwest Health Network serves veterans in Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. The network reports that its region:

- Has the highest proportion of homeless veterans hospitalized for mental illness, at nearly 50 percent, compared with a nationwide average of 28 percent.
- Ranks fifth in the nation for the number of homeless veterans dealing with acute psychiatric disorders and fourth in the nation for hospital admissions of veterans dealing with alcoholism and substance abuse.
- Has an estimated 6,000 homeless on any given night and over 40 percent of homeless adults in the region are veterans.*

These difficulties are compounded in King County because of three main factors: the high cost of living makes affordable housing scarce; housing and treatment often are not linked; and housing assistance is often limited to children and families, while many veterans are single men.

As a result, the conditions facing many veterans in King County are less than ideal.

* Source: *Veterans Affairs Puget Sound*, www1.va.gov/pugetsound/page.cfm?pg=2

Quick facts about the Veterans Levy

The Veterans Levy is a six-year levy that taxes King County property at a rate of \$0.05 per \$1,000 of assessed valuation. The levy generates approximately \$13.3 million per year, and it will be in effect through 2011. The cost for a \$400,000 house is \$20 a year.



King County



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King County Courthouse
516 Third Avenue, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104-3272

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Seattle, WA
Permit No. 1788

District One

Tel: 206-296-1001

Fax: 206-296-0198

TTY/TDD: 206-296-1024

E-mail: bob.ferguson@kingcounty.gov

Web: www.kingcounty.gov/ferguson

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Therese McDermott and Bob, along with members of the Veterans Levy Oversight Board (from left) Stanley Gunno, Bill Wood, Gary Kingsbury, and Doug Hoople, at the McDermott Place groundbreaking event in Lake City.

Levy implementation

The following are examples of how levy funds are helping veterans and their families:

- Increasing permanent housing, such as McDermott Place in North Seattle and the Renton Regional Veterans Housing, with supportive services for veterans. These projects leveraged levy funding with other sources.
- Investing in services to treat depression in chronically ill and disabled elderly veterans and spouses.
- Expanding the geographic range of services available from the King County Veterans Program to increase access to basic living services like food, transportation and utilities.
- Increasing post-traumatic stress disorder counseling by 3,000 hours.
- Opening a new veterans services office in Renton. The office shares space with WorkSource and provides veterans with a range of employment and training programs in South King County that was previously unavailable.
- Providing training to increase knowledge regarding the range of available veterans services, which allows veterans and their families better access to benefits.

You can learn more about the levy and how its funds are being used at www.kingcounty.gov/ferguson.

Reducing recidivism among King County veterans

In May 2008, the United States Interagency Council to End Homelessness named King County's Jail Initiative Project as one of "20 Innovations Achieving Results" for its work to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for incarcerated veterans. The project is supported with Veterans Levy funds.

The project saves taxpayers over \$500,000 annually, and increases the number of veterans who become employed and secure a stable living situation after they are released from jail. The average annual recidivism rate in the program is 17 percent. The recidivism rate for King County's general jail population is 58 percent.

Receipt of Vietnam veterans award

During the recent Vietnam Veterans of America Convention, I was recognized by the Seattle Chapter 102 for my work on behalf of the veterans community and had the honor to address the attendees regarding the county's efforts to improve services for veterans. It was a tremendous honor to receive the award. You can learn more about their organization at www.vva.org.

Museum of History and Industry (MOHAI) presents a Library of Congress exhibit:

From the Home Front and the Front Lines

November 1, 2008 – January 19, 2009

Photos, letters, diaries, oral histories, and more from veterans of WWI, WWII, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf War, and those who supported them at home.

Information: 206-324-1126, www.seattlehistory.org

FREE admission to veterans and active members of the Armed Services on Veterans Day.

