

Veterans get new I.D. designation

Written by Sean Green

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Driver's license label allows military vets to easily identify themselves

Veterans are proud of their service and now have a new way to show it and take advantage of benefits offered to them locally and across Louisiana.

House Bill 499 authored by State Representative Henry Burns, R – Haughton, in the House and Senator Robert Adley, R – Benton, on the Senate side, provides that public safety services shall include the designation “Veteran” on drivers' licenses and special identification cards below the driver's photograph. Proof must be provided by submitting a DD Form 214 or equivalent documentation.

DD Form 214 is Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty issued by the the United States Department of Defense upon a military service member's retirement or discharge from active-duty military.

“The purpose of it was to make it easier for veterans to get services and discounts plus the pride of having 'Veteran' on your driver's license,” said Burns. “Which is what I wanted it for.”

Cooper Cochran, Col. retired Army Reserve, served 28 years and jumped at the opportunity to get the designation.

“We have a hot bed of retired military in Bossier and this allows them to take advantage of local programs and benefits,” said Cochran. “Many veterans are not retired and have no means of identifying themselves as veteran For example, if Applebee's is offering a free meal to the military, they have to take that person's word for it.”

The Department of Motor Vehicles office on Industrial Drive in Bossier City even opened on a Saturday morning earlier this month for local veterans to obtain the designation.

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“I have heard nothing but praise on the DMV for how they've treated our veterans. They even opened up on a special day to serve our veterans,” said Burns.

That was when Cochran took the opportunity to get his new license.

“It just so happens my birthday is in January and I'm due for a new license, so I had the opportunity to double dip,” he said.

But ironically, the bill's own author has been one of the 30 or so people to have been turned down for the designation. Mainly because his DD Form 2 — a military retiree identification card — isn't explicitly listed as the qualifying document, although the legislation allows for equivalent documentation.

“I'm not putting a weight on the service. Just because I served 26 years doesn't make me a better patriot than someone else. But I have a DD 2 that says I am retired, and they asked how I could prove that I was honorably discharged. If you're retired with an ID and getting a paycheck, you're honorably discharged,” laughed Burns.

He recognizes his experience is an exception, one that he anticipated and thought he had accounted for in the bill.

“I'm kind of glad it was me so we can work through this thing. The purpose of adding that tweak (documentation equivalent to the DD Form 214) was to allow for another option for honorable discharge,” said Burns.

Currently, the Public Service Commission and attorneys for the Department of Motor Vehicles are working out an extended version of what's accepted.

“I've had more veterans thank me and Senator Adley for that bill than anything. They've showed me their driver's licenses at church and ball games and I can't show them mine,” Burns said

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with a smile.

Cochran said he appreciates the numerous bills Burns has authored to benefit both active duty and retired military.

“You got to carry your driver's license with you at all times, but to carry your military documents and DD 214 is cumbersome. The driver's license is an obvious choice for (the designation) and I thank Henry Burns for helping make this opportunity available,” said Cochran.