

**“The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers”**

**[Henry VI, Part 2, Act IV, Scene 2.](#)**

It's one of Shakespeare's [more famous lines](#).

The line was said by a character called Dick The Butcher. His friend and fellow plotter of all things grandiose, Jack Cade, was promoting his idea of a utopia if all would pledge allegiance to him as king.

Mr. Butcher was suggesting to Mr. Cade that if they removed the lawyers as barriers to their plans, Mr. Cade could become the king and all would be well in the paradise he'd create.

Shakespeare tells us that if we want false promises we should rid ourselves of the people who are our guardians of the rule of law...attorneys.

Attorneys are among America's most motivated and best educated citizens. The business they're in is one of the most closely controlled and regulated professions in history. Most lawyers are ethical and they work really hard for clients. Most lawyers (particularly veterans law attorneys) aren't wealthy, not even close.

So why are lawyers eternally dissed? Disabled veteran and veterans law attorney [Ben Krause](#) tells me it's what he calls 'Bigfoot Syndrome'. Nobody can prove that such a creature exists but legends persist.

To protect veterans from this imaginary monster, Congress outlawed lawyers from assisting veterans with VA claims. Then they chartered [Veterans Service Organizations](#) (VSOs). These VSOs are private businesses as well as organizations run by each state. Each operates under a charter that directs them to provide certain services to American military veterans at no out-of-pocket cost to the veteran.

There is no shortage of VSOs. Most have office space and a large presence within VA facilities. They're as much a part of the VA system as any employee or VA volunteer; *they're all on the same team*.

All promote that they provide “free” services to veterans and that lawyers charge outrageous fees for the exact same services. They also promise that veterans really don't need an attorney for their VA claims and appeals and that one of their service officers will do the job every bit as well as a lawyer would.

Let's think about that for a moment. The state is suggesting that your important veterans legal affairs would be best managed by an undereducated government employee. Seriously?

Veterans law attorneys are required to complete a basic college degree and then they compete for placement in a law school for another 3 years of intense education that grounds them in the principles and the practice of law. There is a national association of lawyers that sets standards and guidelines for each state association and each state association for lawyers is responsible for licensing and testing to insure competence.

VSOs have no such educational standard. A college degree isn't required...each of the dozens of organizations that tout abilities to manage your claims and appeals set their own standards.

We don't understand why the state of Minnesota would establish legislation requiring MN veterans law attorneys [to issue a disclaimer](#) telling veterans that they can use a VSO for free? Why would we want to turn our problems over to another government agency, one that appears to be in bed with our antagonist?

It seems clear that the state of Minnesota (and Iowa and Utah earlier on) played into someone's political ploy given the government resources that will be wasted trying to enforce this excessive and unnecessary law.

Veterans represented by an attorney already have two options for recourse if their attorney does something unlawful: they can report them to [VA's Office of General Counsel](#) and their attorneys state bar association. Both of these offices are charged with investigating complaints of wrongdoing.

Veterans are subjected to paternalism at every turn. We're told what's good for us and that we should trust the bureaucrats who will make decisions for us. VAWatchdog strongly objects to the Minnesota state posture that we're not capable of making these decisions for ourselves.

The state of Minnesota wants to convince you can take your claims and appeals to some of the highest courts in the land and you do not need an accredited veterans law attorney lawyer to guide you...a VSO will do just as good a job!

Every time you file a claim or initiate an appeal, a government lawyer is somewhere in the mix on the receiving end. While your claims are decided by a Veterans Service Representative (VSR) or a Ratings Veterans Service Representative (RVSR), there are lawyers overseeing broader policies and driving many decisions.

The [VA Office of General Counsel](#) positions lawyers at every VA regional office as well as at the VA Central Office...headquarters. VA employs hundreds and hundreds of attorneys at regional offices and even more at the [Board of Veterans Appeals](#) (671 at last count).

When you file an appeal of a denied claim, these 671 plus attorneys are the people who will guide the VA response and who will defend the Secretary at the BVA and the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims to continue to deny your claim for benefits.

Yet the state of Minnesota wants you to believe that one of their lesser skilled bureaucrats will do just as good a job for you and won't cost you a thing.

The facts are simple, there is no free lunch. The state provided VSO is well paid and provided with excellent benefits by the state employer. They're paid by your tax dollars. That same principle applies to the private industries who provide VSOs. They're paid by your membership dues as well as funding from other government entities.

The VSO is paid whether you win your appeal or not. If you win, the lawyer is authorized to be paid 20% of any retroactive benefit pay you may receive.

*If you don't win, a veterans law attorney doesn't get paid.* I'd say that's a pretty good motivator to work hard for you.

While we're debating who is the most qualified person to represent you, let's look at the requirements for a Minnesota CVSO and a piece of the curriculum vitae of a veterans law attorney.

The CVSO isn't required to have a college degree although it is preferred. The CVSO is trained on the job. An assistant CVSO who may have even fewer qualifications performs essentially the same duties as a CVSO. [The new CVSO can come in cold with zero experience and soon be managing your legal affairs.](#)

“...a person accepting appointment to the position of county veterans service officer or assistant county veterans service officer or other equivalent assistant position must agree to receive, within six months of the appointment, training and education for the duties of the position, including development of an effective working knowledge of relevant laws, rules, and regulations pertaining to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, as applicable to veterans cases before the department and the administration of those cases.”

One of the veterans law attorneys who advertises in Minnesota via the VAWatchdog states his qualifications as follows:

- Graduate of the US Military Academy, West Point, New York
- 20 years of active Army service, with multiple deployments, including tours with 2 Infantry Division, 10th Mountain Division , XVIII Airborne Corps, and Third Army. Military qualifications to include Airborne and Master Explosive Ordnance Disposal badges.
- Graduate of the Command and General Staff College (w/ honors), FT Leavenworth KS

- Master's Degree in Strategic Planning from the School of Advanced Military Studies, FT Leavenworth KS
- Graduate of the College of Law, Georgia State University (cum laude)
- Numerous military and foreign awards
- Inaugural recipient, Marshall-Tuttle Award Award from the State Bar of GA for work in support of military and veterans

Admissions:

[State Bar of Georgia](#)

[Georgia Supreme Court](#)

[Georgia Court of Appeals](#)

[US District Court](#)

[US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims](#)

[Adjunct Professor - Emory Law](#)

Let's stop a moment and ask ourselves who is the more competent person to represent our appeal? Here at the VAWatchdog, that isn't much of a decision to make. We'll choose the highly motivated, well educated lawyer every time.

You should too.

/s/ Jim Strickland

*This was written with the input of veterans law attorneys who shall remain anonymous so they can carry on their important work defending veterans against the government...many thanks to each of you!*