Local veteran sues Pentagon, wins back pay

By Chris Vetter
Chippewa Falls News Bureau

When Mike Hanke returned to the Chippewa Valley in spring 2010 after a tour in Iraq, he expected to go back to work as an ROTC cadre at UW-Stout in Menomonie.

But Hanke, a 47-year-old Chippewa Falls city councilman, was surprised to learn he had lost his job with the Department of Defense while he was overseas and would not be rehired.

Hanke's active duty status ended March 27, 2010. On April 6 of that year he went to UW-Stout to request to begin working again. "That's when I found out I no longer had a position," Hanke said.

Hanke filed a complaint against his termination, arguing federal law prohibits soldiers from losing their jobs because they were activated into service. He was part of the 128th Infantry unit of the Wisconsin Army National Guard that went to Baghdad.

Earlier this month, Hanke reached a settlement with the DOD, which oversaw Hanke's job. Hanke declined to reveal the size of the settlement but said it is believed to be the second-largest of its kind.

The settlement covered Hanke's lost wages from April 2010 through this month but did not include punitive damages, he said.

Hanke worked on logistics with the ROTC, a college-based program for training commissioned officers in the armed forces.

Hanke lost his job at UW-Stout during his second tour of duty, in 2009-10. During that tour of Iraq, Hanke was working for Communications Technologies, a company with whom the DOD contracted.

The DOD decided to stop doing business with the company and hire employees itself, and later decided Hanke would not be rehired for his old job.

Hanke plans to retire from the military this year after 21 years of service.

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