



Vietnam Veterans of America

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A Not-For-Profit Veterans Service Organization Chartered by the United States Congress

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

OF

VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA

SUBMITTED BY

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Associate Director of Government Relations

BEFORE THE

THE HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE
on
DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS

REGARDING

H.R. 23, H.R. 601, H.R. 2188, H.R.2963, H.R. 5037 and H.R. 5038

APRIL 6, 2006

Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee, on behalf of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), I thank you and your distinguished colleagues for the opportunity to offer our statement for the record on these important pieces of legislation.

H.R.23 - The Belated Thank You for the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2005

Merchant Mariners remained in war zones long after the fighting troops came home to enjoy the benefits of the GI Bill. They suffered many casualties: 54 ships struck mines after V-E or V-J Day. Although they are honored on countless memorials across the country, including the World War II Memorial in Washington, DC, sadly, in some places, they are deemed “civilians” and relegated to the back of the monument. Merchant Mariners still seek full, official recognition for their heroism and vital role in making World War II victory possible.

VVA fully supports H.R 23, which provides monthly compensation to WWII Merchant Mariners or their widows in lieu of benefits not received after World War II and gives Social Security credit for time served in the Merchant Marine.

H.R. 601 – Native American Veteran Cemetery Act of 2005

American Indians have served in every war fought by the United States of America. During World War I approximately 12,000 served with the American Expeditionary Force and many distinguished themselves in the fighting in France. In World War II, more than 44,000 fought against the Axis forces in both European and Pacific theaters of war. These Americans compiled a distinguished record of courage and sacrifice. More than 42,000 American Indians fought in Vietnam. American Indian contributions in United States military combat continued in the 1980s and 1990s as they saw duty in Grenada, Panama, Somalia, and the Persian Gulf.

Native Americans continue to play a major role in the armed services with nearly 11,000 on active duty today.

VVA believes it is time that Native American veterans who served our country so honorably are allowed to pursue a decent, dignified resting place on their tribal lands and fully supports H.R.601.

H.R. 2188 – To authorize the placement in a national cemetery of memorial markers for the purpose of commemorating servicemembers or persons whose remains are interred in an ABMC cemetery.

The American Battle Monuments Commission commemorative mission is reflected in 24 overseas military cemeteries which serve as resting places for almost 125,000 American war dead: 30,921 from World War I, 93,246 from World War II, and 750 from the Mexican War. Additionally, 6,033 American veterans and others are interred in the Mexico City and Corozal American cemeteries.

The Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration maintains 122 national cemeteries in 39 states (and Puerto Rico) as well as 33 soldiers' lots and monument sites. As written H.R. 2188 is very vague and is not fiscally sound. VVA believes the subcommittee needs to take a closer look as to whether NCA and state cemeteries have available space to fulfill the needs addressed by this legislation.

Therefore, VVA does not support the bill as written.

H.R. 2963, Dr. Allen Disabled Veterans Equity Act

VVA fully supports the bill as written

H.R. 4843, Veterans COLA Adjustment Act of 2006

H.R. 4843 would increase the current levels of disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the VA clothing allowance, and the various rates of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) for disabled veterans and their families. The percentage of increase would be equivalent to the percentage of the cost of living adjustment (COLA) for Social Security beneficiaries, and would become effective as of December 1, 2006. VVA fully supports this provision. These COLA increases are absolutely necessary to ensure that veterans and their dependents receive meaningful benefits, and to prevent them from falling through inflationary cracks.

VVA also urges you to consider language in this legislation that would include COLA increases for children receiving \$250 DIC compensation. DIC payment is not affected by COLA increases.

H.R. 5037, “Respect for America’s Fallen Heroes Act”

VVA fully endorses the a bill which would ban demonstrations for an hour before and an hour after funerals taking place at our national cemeteries (including Arlington National Cemetery), and would impose a 500-foot restriction on demonstrations at national cemeteries, and would allow a civil infraction for violations. The bill would also express the “sense of Congress” that all states should enact similar legislation for state and private cemeteries, and for funeral homes.

The bill also affirms that that there are certain places, special places, that should be off-limits to politicking and demonstrating

H.R. 5038, Veterans Memorial Act of 2006

VVA supports reauthorization of this program through 2010 and supports the provision in the bill that would provide markers or memorial headstones for deceased dependent children of veterans whose remains are unavailable for burial.

Mr. Chairman, again all of us at VVA thank you for this opportunity to present our statement for the record on these improvements in vital veterans benefit.

Vietnam Veterans of America

**Testimony before HVAC
H.R. 23, H.R. 601,
H.R. 2188, H.R. 2963, H.R.
5037 and H.R.5038**

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Funding Statement
April 6, 2006**

The national organization Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a non-profit veterans membership organization registered as a 501(c)(19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

For Further Information, Contact:

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SHARON HODGE

Sharon Hodge currently serves as Associate Director of Government Relations. She develops legislative and regulatory strategies at the national level and advises the Director on issues concerning veterans' advocacy programs, legislative issues and strategies based on Convention resolutions, National board directives, and policy decisions.

Ms. Hodge was awarded a 2005 Certificate of Appreciation from National President, Vietnam Veterans of America; a 2005 Certificate of Appreciation from Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America; a 2000 Certificate of Appreciation from the Washington, DC, VAMC Winterhaven; a 2000 Certificate of Appreciation from Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America; a 1999 Certificate of Appreciation from the VVA Nebraska State Council; the 1998 The Chapel of Four Chaplains Legion of Honor Award; and the 1997 Government Affairs Special Recognition Award, from Vietnam Veterans of America.

Ms. Hodge works tirelessly as an advocate on behalf of our nation's veterans. Among her many accomplishments, she established a grassroots online advocacy network and effectively recruited more than 500 legislative coordinators, and she organized a grassroots advocacy campaign in 2000 for enactment of the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act. P.L. 107-95.

She has two children and currently resides in Silver Spring, Maryland.