



CONCERNED
VETERANS
FOR AMERICA

Statement of
Concerned Veterans for America
before the
Veterans Affairs Committee
United States Senate
on
Pending Benefits Legislation

May 13, 2015

S. 270: Charlie Morgan Military Spouses Equal Treatment Act of 2015

To amend title 38, United States Code, to revise the definition of spouse for purposes of veterans benefits in recognition of new State definitions of spouse, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.

S. 602: GI Bill Fairness Act of 2015

To amend title 38, United States Code, to consider certain time spent by members of reserve components of the Armed Forces while receiving medical care from the Secretary of Defense as active duty for purposes of eligibility for Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.

S.627: A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to revoke bonuses paid to employees involved in electronic wait list manipulations, and for other purposes.

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to revoke bonuses paid to employees involved in electronic wait list manipulations, and for other purposes.

Last year it was revealed that wait list manipulations on the part of high-ranking VA employees had resulted in deaths as veterans waited for the care they needed. This was done in order to make it appear as if arbitrarily imposed wait time-reduction goals were being met, given that the annual bonuses paid to those officials depended in part on that reduction. It seems absurd, then, that these officials could still be eligible to a bonus despite their poor behavior, particularly as it has been revealed that the bonuses were paid out on the basis of an untruth.

By requiring the VA Secretary to identify individuals who were involved in wait list manipulation and also received a bonus in part because of the omission, this bill ensures that such behavior is not rewarded. The bill would allow for proper investigation into all cases, and balances employee protections with proper accountability. Those individuals identified and found to be guilty after an investigation will be required to repay that bonus.

CVA SUPPORTS this legislation.

S. 681: the *Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2015*

To amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify presumptions relating to the exposure of certain veterans who served in the vicinity of the Republic of Vietnam, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.

Draft Legislation: the *21st Century Veterans Benefits Delivery Act*

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the processing by the Department of Veterans Affairs of claims for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The VA claims backlog has long been an issue. Veterans are often forced to wait for months – and sometimes years – to have their claims adjudicated and receive benefits that they deserve. Over the past few years, VA has paid lip service to the issue, but little real progress has been made. VA continues to play a shell game, shifting numbers around, but doing little to ensure that veterans are cared for.

This legislation would make needed and sensible improvements to the claims system, and could potentially speed up claims processing, thereby allowing veterans to receive a decision on their claims and get on with their lives. The reporting requirements that are embedded in this bill are especially important to re-build the trust in VA that has been eroded due to the recent scandals. These reporting requirements will help shed light on the issues in VBA, and the systemic changes that this bill would implement will make strides toward rectifying problems in order to help ensure that the backlog is eliminated, and remains so.

CVA SUPPORTS this legislation.

Draft Legislation: *Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living-Adjustment Act of 2015*

To provide for an increase, effective December 1, 2015, in the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.

Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission Legislative Proposals - Regarding Commission Recommendations 11 and 12 (sections 1101-1204)

The recommendations offered by the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission (MCRMC) are, by and large, common-sense proposals which would streamline servicemember benefits while continuing to provide a robust benefits package, ensuring the continuing viability of an all-volunteer force. Recommendations 11 and 12 are no exception. The rationalization of education benefits makes them more user friendly, by eliminating programs that offer less benefit to servicemembers. They make better use of taxpayer dollars as well, by eliminating redundant BAH payments to dependents of servicemembers after 2017. Furthermore, by increasing the time in service needed to transfer the Post-9/11 GI Bill to dependents, servicemembers are encouraged to remain in the military, reducing turnover and keeping experienced NCOs and officers in service.

In terms of transition, the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provides important information to servicemembers as they separate from active duty. CVA does, however, have some reservations about making the educational portion of TAP mandatory. While we understand that the reason for this is to require commanders and line leaders to allow transitioning servicemembers to attend, “check-the-box” training often has the counter effect of causing servicemembers to resent the training, rather than gleaning the information they need.

CVA SUPPORTS this legislation, with some reservations.

Department of Defense Legislative Proposals - Regarding Education Benefits, Transition Assistance Program, and Advisory Board on Dose Reconstruction (sections 514, 522, 542, 545, and 1041)

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.

Discussion Draft including provisions derived from S. 151, S. 241, S. 296, S. 666, S. 695, S. 743, S. 865

To amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the treatment under contracting goals and preferences of the Department of Veterans Affairs for small businesses owned by veterans, to carry out a pilot program on the treatment of certain applications for dependency and indemnity compensation as fully developed claims, and for other purposes.

CVA has NO POSITION on this legislation.