



Vietnam Veterans of America

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

Statement
Of
Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA)

Submitted by

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With

Alan Gibson, Chairman
VVA National Employment, Training, & Business Opportunities

Before the
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunities
Committee on Veterans Affairs,
U.S. House of Representatives

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Herseth, and distinguished Members of this panel, thank you for allowing Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) to present our views on these important issues and contemplated legislation before the Committee today. On behalf of VVA National President Thomas H. Corey and our members and leaders nationwide, congratulations and commendation to each of you for this and other productive hearings you have held earlier this year. Acknowledgement is due to Mr. Alan Gibson, Chairman and to the VVA National Employment, Training, & Business Opportunities Committee he leads for the guidance and work on VVA's remarks here today.

In regard to the Unnumbered HR Bill on Increase in Assistance Amount for Specially adapted Housing, VVA strongly supports this change to increase the assistance. VVA's only concern is whether this increase will be enough to offset the rapidly escalating costs of building materials in all areas of the nation, so that perhaps consulting with the National Builders Association and others may be in order before you go to final mark up of this much needed legislation.

VVA favors Unnumbered HR Bill on Adaptive Housing Assistance for Temporary housing. It is often the case, particularly with younger veterans, that they will return to live with their parents or another family member for a time until they feel ready to launch out on their own. This is an important step to recognize this reality, and you are to be commended for drafting this proposed legislation. Once again, our only concern is as to whether this is enough to do even temporary (but safe) modifications.

In regard to Unnumbered HR Bill on Establishing Professional Qualifications for DVOPs VVA has some serious questions to the means proposed, although not to the concept. - Why is this left to the Department Of Labor without any mention of the Veterans Employment & Training Service (VETS)? Without VETS input, and required consultation with the Veterans Service Organizations, you will have those who have never done the job making decisions on what that job should entail. This would also be yet another opportunity for the Employment & Training Administration to thwart the will of the Congress, in collaboration with many of the Work Force Development Agencies.

All of us familiar with this area already know that what is required by a DVOP cannot be all done by one human being now, even if the local office or center would allow them to do their job properly. If they are going to make professional qualifications they had better be ready to pay for those qualifications. The law currently requires that these positions pay AT LEAST the same pay as a beginning employment specialist in the same agency. However, that "floor" became a "ceiling" almost immediately. The only way many can afford to become a DVOP is because they Military, receive disability compensation in some amount, and have a spouse that works in a reasonably lucrative profession.

VVA would suggest that the Committee consider linking individual pay to these proposed qualifications AND to productivity. Similarly, the funds available to a state or even an SMSA (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area) should be directly tied to real placement numbers (not the UI rolls sham of so-called "placements" currently in place), particularly in regard to disabled veterans.

VVA strongly agrees with the need for HR 1773 - Native American Housing Loan, and agrees with the bill as written.

In regard to H.R. 3082- the "Veteran Owned Small Business Promotion Act of 2005" Vietnam Veterans of America commends the Committee leaders and Members for continued concern and action to assist veteran business owners, particularly service disabled veteran business owners. The move to increase the goal for all veteran owned business owners to 9% of all prime contracts and 9% of all subcontracts is indeed commendable. VVA does, however, encourage you to consider increasing the goal for all veteran owned businesses to 15% and for service-disabled veterans to 5% at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Even the Small Business Administration says that over 20% of all small enterprises are veteran owned and operated, and it should be remembered that the genesis of what ultimately became Public Law 106-50, was HR 5668 which passed the House of Representatives with not dissenting votes in July of 1999, called for a 5% goal for service disabled veterans in all prime contracts and all subcontracts in each agency. The arguments of the then Administration and have the Office of Management & Budget was that it should be reduced because nobody knew how many service-disabled veteran owned businesses existed. In order to get legislation enacted, the goal was reduced to 3%, with the understanding that the issue would be revisited after the study of service disabled veterans (commonly known as the "Camacho Report") was formally delivered to the Congress and released to the public. As of this week, the SBA still has not delivered this report, paid for with taxpayer dollars, to the Congress as required by law. Therefore, we urge the Committee to move to restore the 5% that was the original judgment of the right goal for service disabled veteran business owners by the House of Representatives.

Even more importantly, there must be some sort of sure, swift, and meaningful sanctions for decision makers and contract officers who just simply ignore the law, and even President Bush's Executive Order 13-360 of October 2004. Recently, an active duty field grade officer on the Army's Advertising Group is reputed to have stated in regard to the 3% goal for service disabled veteran business owners "that does not apply here." Incredibly, he still has his rank and position after having shown such disrespect for a lawful order of his Commander In Chief. That is but one of hundreds of examples we can share with you as to the non-compliance with existing law, even though it has now been greatly reinforced by the President's Executive Order. We do not pretend to know what the right sanctions are that would work, but there must be something that can be done to uphold the law. This lack of accountability by Federal managers is an issue that has rankled VVA for 25 years, and we look forward to working with the distinguished members on this panel to achieve much greater accountability at every level of the Federal government and by Federally funded endeavors.

Also in regard to H.R. 3082, VVA believes that on Page 5, that section "(C) 10 year delimiting date should be stricken from the list of ending dates. The reason is that- any Disabled Veteran who dies and the spouse takes his/her position may have small children and/or not have reached retirement age at the end of 10 years, stills needs a means of making a livelihood for him/herself

and or children. This is not taking care of the Veteran or his/her surviving spouse who has borne the battle as well if this 10-year date is left intact.

A key issue that VVA would urge you to modify is the effective date of this legislation once enacted. Why the delay until 2006? Why not now, at the end of FY 2005? If there is a delay until the end of FY2006 there will be 2 chances to delete the effective date and/or Bill. More importantly, VA has had plenty of time to prepare, as they have had a 7% goal for all veteran owned businesses for more than three years, so their marketing plans should already be in place and functioning smoothly.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, VVA favors passage of the Unnumbered HR Bill on VA Disabled Veterans Sports Program in establishing an office with the links noted in the draft bill.

Mr. Chairman, That concludes my remarks. I will be pleased to answer any questions or provide any clarifications you may need.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA
Funding Statement
July 27, 2005**

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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RICHARD WEIDMAN

Richard F. "Rick" Weidman serves as Director of Government Relations on the National Staff of Vietnam Veterans of America. As such, he is the primary spokesperson for VVA in Washington. He served as a 1-A-O Army Medical Corpsman during the Vietnam war, including service with Company C, 23rd Med, AMERICAL Division, located in I Corps of Vietnam in 1969.

Mr. Weidman was part of the staff of VVA from 1979 to 1987, serving variously as Membership Service Director, Agency Liaison, and Director of Government Relations. He left VVA to serve in the Administration of Governor Mario M. Cuomo (NY) as statewide director of veterans employment & training (State Veterans Programs Administrator) for the New York State Department of Labor.

He has served as Consultant on Legislative Affairs to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV), and served at various times on the VA Readjustment Advisory Committee, the Secretary of Labor's Advisory Committee on Veterans Employment & Training, the President's Committee on Employment of Persons with Disabilities - Subcommittee on Disabled Veterans, Advisory Committee on veterans' entrepreneurship at the Small Business Administration, and numerous other advocacy posts in veteran affairs.

Mr. Weidman was an instructor and administrator at Johnson State College (Vermont) in the 1970s, where he was also active in community and veterans affairs. He attended Colgate University (B.A., (1967), and did graduate study at the University of Vermont.

He is married and has four children.