

**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD OF  
PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA  
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND  
MEMORIAL AFFAIRS  
CONCERNING**

**H.R. 23, THE "BELATED THANK YOU TO THE MERCHANT MARINERS OF  
WORLD WAR II ACT OF 2005;"**

**H.R. 601, THE "NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS CEMETERY ACT OF 2005;"**

**H.R. 2188;**

**H.R. 2963, THE "DR. JAMES ALLEN DISABLED VETERANS EQUITY ACT;"**

**H.R. 4843, THE "VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING  
ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2005;" AND**

**PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**APRIL 6, 2006**

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Berkley, members of the Subcommittee, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record on H.R. 23, the “Belated Thank You To the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2005;” H.R. 601, the “Native American Veterans Cemetery Act of 2005;” H.R. 2188; H.R. 2963, the “Dr. James Allen Disabled Veterans Equity Act;” H.R. 4843, the “Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2005;” and the proposed legislation. We appreciate the opportunity to offer our views and suggestions on the various programs and benefits being addressed in the hearing.

**H.R 23, the “Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act”**

Although we recognize the sacrifices that these brave men made in service to the nation during World War II and we support the intent of this legislation, we have some concerns with the proposals it makes. The importance of their sacrifices cannot be overstated. While suffering extremely high casualty rates during the war, they delivered troops, tanks, food, airplanes, fuel and other needed supplies to every theater of the war.

However, PVA believes that this bill would be very costly to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). We believe that the money needed to provide this new monthly benefit would reduce the ability of the VA to continue to provide the wide-ranging scope of benefits that it already manages.

We also do not understand how the amount to be provided as a monthly benefit was determined. As it stands, if this legislation was enacted, a merchant marine veteran would

be entitled to a payment equal to veterans who have a 70 percent compensable service-connected disability. Furthermore, the surviving spouses of these veterans would be entitled to a benefit nearly equal to the amount provided to the surviving spouses of veterans with service-connected disabilities. Although we do not dispute the idea that these veterans should receive some type of benefit, we do not believe that the recommendations of this legislation are equitable with similar programs. We are not certain that this legislation maintains the priority that the VA follows for providing compensation benefits.

#### **H.R. 601, the “Native American Veterans Cemetery Act of 2005**

PVA supports H.R. 601 which would allow Indian tribal organizations to apply for federal grants to establish national veterans’ cemeteries on trust lands. This legislation would essentially provide for the same eligibility to Indian tribal organizations for these grants that states currently have when they wish to construct a new national cemetery.

#### **H.R. 2188**

This proposed legislation would authorize the placement in a national cemetery in this country of memorial markers to commemorate servicemembers or other persons interred in an American Battle Monuments Commission cemetery overseas. Many brave men and women are buried in cemeteries that were established overseas following World War I and II. Unfortunately, many of their family members are unable to visit their loved ones because of the geographic challenges. By permitting memorials in national cemeteries here at home, these families will now have the satisfaction of being able to visit their loved

ones without having to travel half way around the world. PVA fully supports this legislation.

**H.R. 2963, the “Dr. James Allen Disabled Veterans Equity Act”**

PVA fully supports H.R.2963, the “Dr. James Allen Disabled Veterans Equity Act.” This legislation would improve compensation benefits for veterans who experience a change in vision impairment over the course of their life.

PVA members share a unique relationship with blinded veterans. Much like PVA members, blinded veterans live with a catastrophic disability every day. Blinded veterans rely on the extensive benefits and specialized services provided by the VA just as spinal cord injured veterans rely on the same benefits and services. This important legislation would allow a veteran who currently experiences visual impairment in one eye to receive an increase in compensation benefits if he or she experiences impairment in the other eye. Current law does not afford veterans this opportunity if they experience impairment in both eyes, despite the now catastrophic nature of the condition.

This legislation would also ensure that the servicemen and women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who have sustained eye injuries will receive the benefits and services that they will need for the rest of their lives.

In discussion with representatives from Blinded Veterans of America (BVA), we were informed that there are problems with the language of the bill as written. However, they

informed us that they are working very closely with Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin to ensure that the necessary changes are made.

**H.R. 4843, the “Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act”**

PVA supports H.R. 4843, the “Veterans’ Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2005.” This bill would increase the rates of compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for certain disabled veterans. As we have done in the past, we oppose again this year the provision rounding down the cost-of-living adjustment to the nearest whole dollar. Continuing to round down these benefits year after year only serves to erode the value of them. Furthermore, this provision forces veterans to bear some of the burden of cost-savings for the federal government.

**Government Markers for Veterans Buried in Private Cemeteries**

P.L. 107-330 authorized the VA to provide private government markers to veterans who have marked graves in private cemeteries. This legislation was meant to provide for recognition of those men and women who have served this nation with honor. However, P.L. 107-330 only provided this benefit retroactively to veterans who died after September 11, 2001. It excludes veterans who died between November 1, 1990 and September 11, 2001. Prior to enactment of P.L. 107-330, the VA estimated that it denied more than 20,000 headstones or markers to these veterans. This legislation would correct this serious inequity. All veterans should be afforded the same recognition of their service following their death. PVA fully supports this proposed legislation.

## **The “Respect for America’s Fallen Heroes Act”**

PVA finds it shameful that the United States Congress is forced to consider legislation that addresses this problem. We have seen the many reports of individuals and organizations that have taken advantage of funeral and memorial services for servicemembers killed overseas to push their agendas and sell their propaganda. We find it unconscionable that anyone would be capable of such actions.

There is perhaps no more sacred ground than the national cemeteries which serve as the final resting place for so many brave young men and women. The importance of these places should not be tarnished. With that in mind, PVA supports the proposed legislation that would prohibit certain demonstrations at cemeteries managed by the National Cemetery Administration and at Arlington National Cemetery.

PVA would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit this written statement. We appreciate the efforts of the subcommittee to address these important benefits. We look forward to working with you to ensure that meaningful benefits improvements are enacted.

We would be happy to answer any questions that you might have. Thank you.

**Information Required by Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives**

Pursuant to Rule XI 2(g)(4) of the House of Representatives, the following information is provided regarding federal grants and contracts.

**Fiscal Year 2006**

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program— \$252,000 (estimated).

**Fiscal Year 2005**

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program— \$245,350.

Paralyzed Veterans of America Outdoor Recreation Heritage Fund – Department of Defense –  
\$1,000,000.

**Fiscal Year 2004**

Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, administered by the Legal Services Corporation — National Veterans Legal Services Program— \$228,000.