

STATEMENT OF
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NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

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

H.R. 601, NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS CEMETERY ACT OF 2005

*H.R. 2188, AUTHORIZATION OF MEMORIAL MARKERS FOR THE REMAINS INTERRED
IN AMERICAN BATTLE MONUMENTS*

H.R. 2963, DR. JAMES ALLEN DISABLED VETERANS EQUITY ACT

*H.R. 4843, VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF
2006*

H.R. 5037, RESPECT FOR AMERICA'S FALLEN HEROES ACT

H.R. 5038, PROVIDING GOVERNMENT MARKERS FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN

WASHINGTON, D.C.

APRIL 6, 2005

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.4 million men and women of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Auxiliaries, I appreciate the opportunity to present our views on legislation included in today's hearing. Our views on H.R. 23: "Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II," H.R. 601: "Native American Veterans Cemetery Act of 2005," H.R. 2188: Authorization of memorial markers for the remains interred in American battle monuments, H.R. 2963: "Dr. James Allen Disabled Veterans Equity Act," H.R. 4843, "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2006," H.R. 5037: "Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act," and H.R. 5038: providing government markers for dependent children, are as follows.

H.R. 23 is titled "Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2005." This bill seeks to expand the current dates of service for WWII Merchant Mariners who are recognized as veterans, and to pay a \$1000.00 monthly benefit to these WW II Merchant Mariners or to their surviving spouses. The VFW recognizes the heroic service of

Merchant Mariners during WWII. Their sacrifices and heroic efforts were instrumental in winning the Second World War. We cannot, however, support this legislation to pay a monthly benefit, which would be in addition to any current veterans' benefit that would be otherwise payable. However, we believe that this payment would be disproportionate, in terms of recognition and benefits, to what other veterans who have gone in harm's way in service to the country currently receive. With regard to their service as Merchant Mariners, and the proposal that they should be recognized for this Merchant Marine service in addition to being recognized as veterans, or for a period extending beyond the currently recognized dates of WWII, the VFW has not taken a position on this matter.

H.R. 601 is titled "Native American Veterans Cemetery Act of 2005." This bill would allow tribal organizations to apply for grants to establish and maintain veterans' cemeteries on tribal lands. We fully support H.R. 601. We believe that this is a logical extension of the veterans' cemetery grant program. This legislation will address the needs of Native American veterans and their families, which are not fully met by the National and State veterans' cemeteries.

H.R. 2188 is titled "Authorization of Memorial Markers for the Remains Interred in American Battle Monuments". This bill proposes a change in language to title 38, section 2306; thus allowing memorial markers to be placed in national cemeteries for remains interred in cemeteries administered by the American Battle Monuments Commission. This bill provides recognition on American hallowed ground to the many service members who made the ultimate sacrifice to preserve our freedom, and never returned home. We fully support this bill.

H.R. 2963 is titled "Dr. James Allen Disabled Veterans Equity Act." This bill addresses the payment of service-connected compensation for service-connected loss of vision in one eye, in the event that vision is impaired in the other eye due to not service-related causes. This modification of the paired organ rule makes the evaluation of vision more consistent with other evaluations, like the loss of hearing evaluation. It considers partial loss of function, rather than just the complete loss of function. This is a more equitable outcome in cases where sight deteriorates in the other eye after service. We fully support this legislation.

H.R. 4843 is titled "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2006." This act seeks to adjust compensation rates to reflect the rising cost-of-living. We appreciate the Committee's commitment to maintaining the integrity of the buying power of the veterans' compensation program by providing periodic cost-of-living increases (COLA). We fully support this goal. However, we note that this bill once again contains a provision for rounding down any fraction of a dollar in the COLA calculation. This works against the spirit of this bill. Over time, and when combined with other adjustments made to meet budgetary goals, this has caused erosion of the rates of compensation, and significant problems for America's veterans. It is the underlying cause of some policy problems recognized by the Committee. Accordingly, we support this action to adjust the buying power of this program, which is of critical importance to America's veterans who have sacrificed life and limb for our country, but we urge you to refrain from this process of rounding down the last dollar.

While we realize that restoring the compensation rates to linearity with percentage of disability would require a significant budgetary commitment, we urge you to begin at least the process by enacting a “rounding up” provision this year. This would serve as a show of good faith with America’s veterans.

H.R. 5037 is titled “Respect for America’s Fallen Heroes Act.” This legislation restricts demonstrations at or near National Cemeteries during funerals, and requires approval by cemetery authorities for other demonstrations. The intent is to prevent hateful and offensive speech during a very difficult time for a veteran or service member’s family. We strongly support this legislation, including provisions that urge the state and local governments to enact legislation to protect funeral homes, religious services, and memorial services from this dangerous and damaging abuse of free speech.

H.R. 5038 is titled “Providing Government Markers for Dependent Children.” This bill intends to provide Government markers or memorial headstones for deceased dependent children. This act would provide veterans’ and servicemembers’ families a degree of recognition and comfort during a difficult period. We fully support this bill.

Thank you for this opportunity to present the views of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States on legislation being considered by the Subcommittee.