

110th Congress
The Record of Veterans Legislation
Honorable Steve Buyer, Ranking Member

The U.S. House of Representatives passed 75 Veterans bills during the 110th Congress. Of these, 18 became law, including many important bipartisan initiatives.

Securing Increased Budgets for our Nation's Veterans:

Total funding for veterans programs increased 111 percent during the eleven-year period from 1995-2007 when Republicans were in the majority. During the prior three decades, from 1965 to 1995, total annual veterans' spending only grew an average of less than two percent per year.

The fiscal year 2008 Republican budget for VA would have provided strong funding while avoiding higher taxes embraced by congressional Democrats. During the five years from FY 2008 to FY 2012, this budget proposal would have provided \$8 billion more in mandatory and discretionary funding than the Democratic proposal.

This funding proposal included increased medical services, a dynamic construction program for VA's future strength, and increased spending to slash the backlog in disability compensation claims. These increases would also have accelerated the renovation and construction of national cemeteries, all within a budget plan that would have balanced the budget by 2012 without hiking taxes on Americans.

Major Veterans Initiatives Signed into Law by the President:

Public Law 110-157 – Dr. James Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act (H.R. 797)

- Signed by the President on December 26, 2007.
- Provisions of the legislation include:
 - Improving compensation benefits for veterans in certain cases of impairment of vision involving both eyes.
 - Providing for the use of the National Directory of New Hires for income verification purposes.
 - Extending the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide an educational assistance allowance for qualifying work study activities, and
 - Authorizing the provision of bronze representations of the letter "V" for graves of eligible individuals buried in private cemeteries.
(Representative Doug Lamborn (R-Colorado))

Public Law 110-168 – To authorize a major medical facility project to modernize inpatient wards at the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Atlanta, Georgia (S. 1396)

- Introduced by Senator Isakson (R-Georgia)
- Signed by the President on December 26, 2007.
- Authorizes the appropriations of not more than \$20,534,000 for the modernization of inpatient wards at the VA Medical Center in Atlanta, Georgia.

Public Law 110-387 – Veterans' Mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act of 2008 (S. 2162)

- Signed by the President on October 10, 2008.
- Includes several provisions of other legislation such as:
 - Expansion of Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health Care programs (H.R. 2874), introduced by Rep. Michael Michaud (D-Maine) and Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Florida).
 - Veterans Rural Health Care Act of 2008 (H.R. 1527), introduced by Rep. Jerry Moran (R-Kansas), which passed the House on September 10, 2008.
 - Veterans Revenue Enhancement Act (H.R. 6366), introduced by Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Indiana).
 - Prohibit collection of copayments for all hospice care furnished by VA (H.R. 2623), introduced by Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Florida), which passed the House on July 30, 2007.
 - Provide for Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Facility Authorization and Leases (H.R. 5856), introduced by Rep. Michael Michaud (D-Maine).
 - Comprehensive Policy on Pain Management (H.R. 6122), introduced by Rep. Timothy Walz (D-Minnesota).

Public Law 110-389 – Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008 (S. 3023)

- Signed by the President on October 10, 2008.
- Provides for expedited claims processing for compensation and pension programs.
- Provides for the modernization of VA's Disability Compensation system, with provisions from a number of other bills:
 - Allow for substitution of eligible survivors upon death of claimant for purposes of accrued benefits, introduced by Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colorado) in H.R. 3047.
 - Develop and implement comprehensive information technology upgrades, including web portals, rule-based expert systems, and decision support software to support benefits claims processing capabilities, introduced by Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colorado) in H.R. 3047, the Veterans' Claims Processing Innovation Act of 2007.
 - Reform of the USERRA complaint administrative process, introduced by Rep. David Reichert (R-Washington) in H.R. 1632.

- Increase the delimiting date for Chapter 35 education assistance for surviving spouses.
- Waive the 24 month limit for Independent Living Program for veterans of the post-9/11 Global Operations period introduced by Rep. John Boozman (R-Arkansas) and Rep. Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin (D-South Dakota) in H.R. 6221.
- Extend the Stimulus Act's increased VA conforming loan limits through 2011, introduced by Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Indiana) in H.R. 5561.
- Extend the Department of Veterans Affairs authority to guarantee Adjustable and Hybrid Adjustable home loans to September 30, 2012, introduced by Rep. Bob Filner (D-California) and Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Indiana) in H.R. 6731.
- Provide assistance to the U.S. Paralympic Integrated Adaptive Sports Program, introduced by Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Indiana) in H.R. 1370, and Rep. Bob Filner (D-California) in H.R. 4255.
- Allow servicemembers to terminate or suspend contracts for cellular telephone service when called to active duty, introduced by Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-South Dakota) in H.R. 6225.
- Authorize VA to purchase advertisements in national media to promote awareness of benefits, introduced by Rep. John Boozman (R-Arkansas) in H.R. 3681.

Additional Legislation Affecting Veterans Considered by Other Committees:

Public Law 110-181 – National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (H.R. 4986)

- Signed by the President on January 28, 2008.
- Includes provisions from an amendment offered by Representative Steve Buyer (R-Indiana) that would require seamless transition for and a continuum of care of wounded servicemembers.
 - Requires the transmission of electronic medical records between the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

**Note – This provision was also offered as an amendment by Mr. Buyer to H.R. 1538, which was referred to both the Committee on Armed Services and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The Committee on Veterans' Affairs majority waived consideration of this bill to the House Armed Service Committee.*

Public Law 110-317 – The Hubbard Act (H.R. 6580)

- Signed by the President on August 29, 2008.
- Provides for the fair treatment of a member of the Armed Forces granted an early discharge from service, pursuant to the Department of Defense policy permitting the early discharge of a member who is the only surviving child in a family in which the father, mother, or one or more siblings, served in the Armed Forces and because of hazards incident to that service was killed, or died as a result of wounds, accident or disease is in a captured or missing in

action status, or is permanently disabled.

- Amends the IRS Code of 1986 to repeal the dollar limitation on contributions to funeral trusts.

**Note – The Committee on Veterans' Affairs majority waived consideration of this bill to the Committee on Armed Services.*

Public Law 110-252 – Supplemental Appropriations for 2008 (H.R. 2642)

- Signed by the President on June 6, 2008.
- Provisions include the following:
- Makes Supplemental appropriations for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for: (1) general operating expenses; (2) information technology systems; and (3) construction for major projects.
- Combat Veterans Debt Elimination Act of 2008 - Prohibits the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from collecting debts owed to the United States by veterans who die as a result of an injury incurred or aggravated while in the line of duty while serving in a theater of combat operations in a war or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after September 11, 2001, if such Secretary determines that termination of collection is in the best interest of the United States. Allows such Secretary to refund amounts already collected from qualifying individuals.
- Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 - (Title V) Amends federal veterans' benefits provisions to entitle to veterans' educational assistance individuals who, commencing on or after September 11, 2001, serve on active duty in the Armed Forces for: (1) at least 36 months; (2) at least 30 continuous days and is discharged or released due to a service-connected disability; or (3) less than 36 months or 30 continuous days, but are discharged or release under honorable conditions, placed on a retired list or into reserve service, or discharged or released from duty due to certain qualifying physical or mental conditions or hardship.
 - Provides soldiers and veterans the option of transferring education benefits to their spouses and children. This proposal was submitted to Congress by President Bush.

Looking Toward the Future for Veterans:

Republican members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee intend to continue work on bipartisan legislation to help VA become more effective and efficient in its use of taxpayer dollars while providing the services and benefits veterans have earned through their military service to our Nation.

A top priority for the next Congress will be legislation to help severely disabled veterans deal with the energy crisis and to enable VA to continue to provide high quality health care services to veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs Energy Sustainability Act of 2008, H.R. 6937 was introduced on September 18, 2008 by Rep. Steve Buyer (R-Indiana) and Rep. Michael Michaud (D-Maine) and would provide a

basis for future energy sustainability legislation for veterans and VA.

The VA Energy Sustainability Act would:

- Direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to implement a sustainable energy program for the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Provide additional grants to veterans to use for energy upgrades for adaptive housing.
- Provide additional specially adapted automobile grants to severely disabled veterans for the purchase of alternative fuel vehicles.