

**TESTIMONY OF**

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**SUBMITTED BY**

**RICHARD WEIDMAN**  
**DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**

**BEFORE THE**

**THE HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS**

**REGARDING**

**H.R. 1108, H.R. 2095, H.R. 2222 AND H.R. 3731**

**APRIL 11, 2002**

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) and our National President Thomas H. Corey, I thank you and your distinguished colleagues for the opportunity to appear here today to offer our views on these important pieces of legislation. Ensuring that the Montgomery GI Bill for Education is implemented properly, strengthening the VA home loan guaranty program by making it more fair to those who are now part of our primary military force pursuant to the "Total Force Concept," assisting surviving spouses, and strengthening the Service Disabled Veterans Insurance program all are part of the very core of veterans services and benefits. VVA commends you, Ranking Democrat Mr. Evans, and the distinguished members of the Committee for your diligence to ensure that where needed these programs are modernized to meet changing needs of the veterans' community.

**H.R. 1108 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide that remarriage of the surviving spouse of a veteran after age 55 shall not result in termination of dependency and indemnity compensation.**

VVA supports H.R. 1108, which changes the statute so that remarriage of the surviving spouse of a veteran after age 55 shall not result in termination of dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC). The majority of the surviving spouses are in fact women who are nearing retirement age, or have been retired for some time if they ever worked outside the home. In many cases these women devoted themselves to taking care of their spouse who was profoundly disabled, and therefore did not have the opportunity to build a career as a result. While DIC is frankly inadequate to be able to support an adult in most of the country, these spouses deserve DIC to recognize their sacrifice and service to their country by means of caring for profoundly disabled veterans.

VVA also urges that the Committee seriously consider increasing the dollar amount for DIC before the end of the 107<sup>th</sup> Congress, as the amount currently provided is just simply inadequate to enable these spouse to survive, much less live decently if they do not remarry.

VVA supports HR 1109.

**H.R. 2095 - Reservist VA Home Loan fairness Act of 2001**

VVA favors passage of this proposal, which would provide for uniformity in fees charged qualifying members of the Selected Reserve and active veterans for home loans guaranteed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. given the realities of the total force concept in our Armed Forces today. This proposal will simply provide equity and more fairness in this vital program.

VVA supports HR 2095.

**H.R. 2222 - Veterans Life Insurance Improvement Act of 2001**

VVA favors passage of this prospective legislation, which would make certain improvements to the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance life insurance programs by clarifying succession of beneficiaries when the primary beneficiary cannot be found. However, VVA urges the Committee to provide due diligent oversight over the regulations, procedures, and actual practices of who is judged to be the person "equitably entitled" to the award.

The reduction in premiums for disabled veterans participating in this program are welcome, and apparently reflect the strong funding position of the Fund at this time.

VVA does urge the Committee seriously look at the need to offer options for increased amount of benefits, for commensurately greater premiums, for both veterans who are 100% totally and permanently disabled. VVA also urges the Committee to consider providing similar options for veterans who are adjudged to be 30% to 90% disabled as well. The disabled veterans who are rated in this range have almost as great difficulty in finding life insurance adequate to cover needs of their family should they die as do the veterans adjudged to be 100% disabled. In addition to the difficulty of finding an insurer who will accept them, the cost is often far too high for the veteran to afford, often running in excess of \$6,000 per year, which is beyond the reach of most of these veterans. Looking at the average income of the disabled veterans in this range of adjudicated disability who depend almost exclusively on the Veterans Health Administration's medical care should be instructive in this regard

VVA supports passage of HR 2222

**H.R. 3731 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to increase amounts available to State approving agencies to ascertain the qualifications of educational institutions for furnishing courses of education to veterans and eligible persons under the Montgomery GI Bill and under other programs of education administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.**

VVA strongly favors early passage and enactment of this measure, which would increase amounts available to State approving agencies to ascertain the qualifications of educational institutions for furnishing courses of education to veterans and eligible persons under the Montgomery GI Bill and under other programs of education administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. VVA has called for a significant increase in the funding for this program for several years, as the amount available has not been at the needed level to accomplish their vital role of helping to ensure the integrity and usefulness of this vital veterans benefit.

While the \$18 million for FY 2003, and an annual increase of 3% for FY 2004 and FY 2005 should be adequate for this program to meet the very large responsibility assigned, it is essential the actual appropriations matches the amounts authorized. Further, we encourage the Committee

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to consider ways of ensuring that for FY 2006 and beyond that the program not again be strained to the point of breaking by being level funded when both the number of veterans utilizing the Montgomery GI Bill and other responsibilities are increasing.

VVA urges passage of HR 3731.

Mr. Chairman, again all of us at VVA thank you for this opportunity to present the views of Vietnam Veterans of America on these important improvements in vital veterans benefits. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

**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, 23<sup>rd</sup> 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 Readadjustment 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.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA  
Funding Statement  
April 11, 2002**

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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