



March 21, 2007

H.R. 797 - To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve compensation benefits for veterans in certain cases of impairment of vision involving both eyes, and for other purposes

Floor Situation

H.R. 797 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) on February 5, 2007. The bill was ordered to be reported from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, by voice vote, on February 15, 2007.

H.R. 797 is expected to be considered on the floor on March 21, 2007.

Summary

H.R. 797 lowers the requirement for receiving disability compensation through the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans with eye impairments as a result of service-connected disability or non-service-connected disability.

The bill defines the requirement for compensation as the "impairment in each eye is to a visual acuity of 20/200 or less or a peripheral field loss of 20 degrees or less." The current definition requires legal blindness to receive disability compensation. By lowering this restriction, the VA is coming inline with Medicare and Social Security.

The bill also requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide to the Secretary of Health and Human Services with information regarding the National Directory of New Hires, for the purpose of determining eligibility for means tested benefits provided by title 38.

H.R. 797 continues authorization of the veterans work study program through 2009 and also permits the families to choose a bronze "V" for placement on a privately procured grave market in lieu of a headstone provided by the Federal government.

Background

The Department of Veterans Affairs currently holds that to receive disability compensation due to blindness, a veterans' vision must be deemed legally blind. Other Federal agencies, such as Medicare and Social Security, do not maintain this stricter standard and the VA is coming in line with the rest of the government.

Also, studies have shown that if a person loses sight in one eye due to injury, the other eye degenerates and creates vision problems. Currently, the VA does not cover disability when a veteran experiences vision problems with an eye that was not injured while in service. The bill will correct this oversight and cover disability if a veteran experiences vision problems that are non-service-connected.

Current law only permits families to choose a government headstone for graves already marked by a privately procured grave marker.

Under current law, work study benefits expire on June 30, 2007.

CBO Estimate

CBO estimates that enacting this legislation would decrease net direct spending for veterans' benefits by less than \$500,000 in 2008, by \$13 million over the 2008-2012 period, and by a net amount of \$15 million over the 2008-2017 period.

Staff Contact

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