

STATEMENT OF  
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VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH REGARDS TO  
PENDING VETERANS' BENEFITS LEGISLATION

WASHINGTON, DC

JUNE 11, 2002

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.7 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Ladies Auxiliary, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on the following legislation:

**H.R. 3173**

The *Servicemembers and Military Families Financial Protection Act of 2001* is supported by the VFW. This bill will amend three facets of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act of 1940 by:

- Increasing the monthly housing payment protection from \$1,200 or less, to a maximum of \$1,950. We agree this 38% increase is very reasonable given present monthly rental and/or mortgage payments.

- Allowing personnel covered by the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) to opt for and pay for increased coverage in increments of \$250,000 up to a maximum of \$1 million. This would be an increase of \$900,000 for active duty personnel and an increase of \$750,000 for members of the Guard and Reserve. The way the bill is written, there will be no additional cost to the government.
- Making primarily an administrative change by replacing the word "wife" with the word "spouse". This change reflects the fact that a greater portion of military persons are women and therefore the word "spouse" better describes the dependent eligible for protection while the military member is on duty.

### **H.R. 3735**

The VFW supports H.R. 3735, the *Department of Veterans Affairs Overpayment Administration Improvement Act of 2002*. This measure would bring about two important changes in the administration of overpayments of veterans benefits. It would extend the time that the veteran has to make an application for a waiver of an overpayment in instances where a timely appeal of the overpayment decision has been filed. Secondly, H.R. 3735 would authorize the Secretary to waive certain debt for the convenience of the government, particularly in cases where the cost of recovery could exceed the amount of the original overpayment.

We believe this measure will be of immense benefit to both the veteran and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

### **H.R. 3771**

We are pleased to lend our support to H.R. 3771; a measure that provides that monetary benefits paid to veterans by states and municipalities shall be excluded from consideration as income for purposes of pension benefits paid by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

## **H.R. 4042**

The VFW strongly supports H.R. 4042, the Veterans Home Loan Prepayment Act of 2002. This measure would prohibit residential mortgage lenders from collecting additional daily interest charges once prepayment in full of housing loan guaranteed by VA has been made.

This measure seeks to correct a long standing practice used by many mortgage lenders of deferring or recording payments made after 12:00 noon to the next business day. Thus, a Friday payment is recorded as being made on Monday or perhaps Tuesday in cases where a bank holiday is being observed on a Monday. The practice of deferring payments to the next business day can result in additional cost a payee who is often unaware of the policy.

We believe the provisions of H.R. 4042 will effectively address the problem of daily interest charges being unfairly billed to veterans.

## **H.R. \_\_\_\_\_**

This draft bill, cited as the *Arlington National Cemetery Burial Eligibility Act*, is strongly supported by the VFW. For the past several years, we have supported all legislative attempts to codify the rules for interment in Arlington National Cemetery and to clearly limit any policy of exceptions to these rules. Those primarily eligible in this bill are:

- Any member of the Armed Forces who dies while on active duty;
- Any retired members of the Armed Forces;
- Any member or former member of a reserve component of the Armed Forces who at time of death was under 60 years of age and who, but for age, would have been eligible at time of death for retired pay;

- Any former member of the Armed Forces separated for physical disability before October 1, 1949, and who served on active duty and would have been eligible for disability retirement;
- Any former member of the Armed Forces who served honorably and received an award for valor or the Purple Heart medal;
- Any former prisoners of war who dies on or after November 30, 1993;
- Any member of a reserve component of the Armed Forces who dies in the line of duty while on active duty for training or inactive duty for training;
- The President or any former President.

The only exception to those categories mentioned would be made by the President for an individual whose acts, service, or contributions to the Armed Forces are so extraordinary he/she could become eligible after the Secretary of the Army immediately notifies the Chairman and Ranking members of both the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

The VFW believes this bill, if enacted into law, will reassure the American public that the rules for Arlington National Cemetery are clearly defined, properly codified and published for all to see.

**H.R. \_\_\_\_\_**

Finally, Mr. Chairman, we support the draft bill that provides for payment by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation to the surviving spouse of a deceased veteran who for at least one year preceding death had a service-connected disability rated totally disabling that was due to a service-connected cold weather injury.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions the subcommittee may have.