

HR 2297

Veterans Benefits Act of 2003

Congress: 108 (2003–2005, Ended)

Chamber: House

Policy Area: Armed Forces and National Security

Introduced: Jun 2, 2003

Current Status: Became Public Law No: 108-183.

Latest Action: Became Public Law No: 108-183. (Dec 16, 2003)

Law: 108-183 (Enacted Dec 16, 2003)

Official Text: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/108th-congress/house-bill/2297>

Sponsor

Name: Rep. Smith, Christopher H. [R-NJ-4]

Party: Republican • State: NJ • Chamber: House

Cosponsors (9 total)

Cosponsor	Party / State	Role	Date Joined
Rep. Brown, Henry E., Jr. [R-SC-1]	R · SC		Jun 2, 2003
Rep. Evans, Lane [D-IL-17]	D · IL		Jun 2, 2003
Rep. Michaud, Michael H. [D-ME-2]	D · ME		Jun 2, 2003
Rep. Brown, Corrine [D-FL-3]	D · FL		Jun 24, 2003
Rep. Filner, Bob [D-CA-51]	D · CA		Jun 24, 2003
Rep. Gutierrez, Luis V. [D-IL-4]	D · IL		Jun 24, 2003
Rep. Rodriguez, Ciro D. [D-TX-28]	D · TX		Jun 24, 2003
Rep. Royce, Edward R. [R-CA-40]	R · CA		Jul 9, 2003
Rep. Udall, Tom [D-NM-3]	D · NM		Jul 10, 2003

Committee Activity

Committee	Chamber	Activity	Date
Veterans' Affairs Committee	House	Reported by	Jun 25, 2003
Veterans' Affairs Committee	Senate	Discharged From	Nov 19, 2003

Subjects & Policy Tags

Policy Area:

Armed Forces and National Security

Related Bills

Bill	Relationship	Last Action
108 S 1132	Related bill	Dec 17, 2003: Referred to the Subcommittee on Total Force.
108 HR 241	Procedurally related	Dec 16, 2003: See Public Law 108-183.
108 HR 533	Procedurally related	Dec 16, 2003: See Public Law 108-183.
108 HR 761	Procedurally related	Dec 16, 2003: See Public Law 108-183.
108 HR 1167	Procedurally related	Dec 16, 2003: See Public Law 108-183.
108 HR 1838	Procedurally related	Dec 16, 2003: See Public Law 108-183.
108 HR 1949	Procedurally related	Dec 16, 2003: See Public Law 108-183.
108 HR 2164	Procedurally related	Dec 16, 2003: See Public Law 108-183.
108 HR 2285	Procedurally related	Dec 16, 2003: See Public Law 108-183.
108 HR 966	Procedurally related	Nov 19, 2003: Provision was dropped when H. R. 2297 passed the Senate with an amendment by unanimous consent.
108 HR 1460	Procedurally related	Jun 25, 2003: Received in the Senate and Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 - **Title I: Survivor Benefits** - (Sec. 101) Provides that the remarriage of a surviving spouse of a veteran after age 57 shall not bar the furnishing of veterans' dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC), home loan, and educational benefits eligibility. Requires spouses who remarried after age 57 but prior to the enactment of this Act to apply for such eligibility within one year.

(Sec. 102) Authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide to any child of a veteran of covered service (active military duty within a specified period during which the veteran was exposed to a herbicide agent) in Korea who is suffering from spina bifida the health care, vocational training and rehabilitation, and monetary allowance currently required to be paid to a child of a Vietnam veteran who is suffering from spina bifida.

(Sec. 103) Authorizes the payment of proceeds following the death of the insured under the National Life Insurance Program and the United States Government Life Insurance Program: (1) to another beneficiary designated by the insured, if the first beneficiary does not make a claim for such proceeds within two years; or (2) to any person designated by the Secretary to be equitably entitled to such proceeds, if no claim has been filed by any designated beneficiary within four years.

(Sec. 104) Repeals the limitation on the accrued benefits required to be paid by the Secretary upon the death of a veteran or other beneficiary. Requires benefits to be paid to the surviving parents upon the death of a child claiming benefits as a child of a Vietnam veteran.

Title II: Benefits for Former Prisoners of War and for Filipino Veterans - Subtitle A: Former Prisoners of War -

(Sec. 201) Revises Federal provisions relating to the presumption of service-connection for certain diseases manifest in former prisoners of war to deem the following diseases to have been incurred in or aggravated by military service without any minimum period of internment (currently, internment of at least 30 days is required): psychosis; any of the anxiety states; dysthymic disorder; organic residuals of frostbite when consistent with prisoner conditions; and post-traumatic osteoarthritis. Adds cirrhosis of the liver to the list of diseases which will be considered as having been incurred in or aggravated by such service if: (1) the veteran was interned for at least 30 days; and (2) the disease becomes manifest to a degree of ten percent or more after active military service.

Subtitle B: Filipino Veterans - (Sec. 211) Qualifies for: (1) the payment of certain survivors' benefits the surviving spouses of former members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army or new Philippine Scouts who served with U.S. armed forces during World War II and who became U.S. citizens or lawfully resided in the United States; and (2) national cemetery burial new Philippine Scouts (and their spouses) who so served and became U.S. citizens or lawful residents.

(Sec. 213) Extends through 2009 the authority to maintain a regional Department of Veterans Affairs office in the Republic of the Philippines.

Title III: Education Benefits, Employment Provisions, and Related Matters - (Sec. 301) Includes under the Montgomery GI Bill education program a program of self-employment on-job training consisting of full-time training for a period of less than six months that is needed or accepted for obtaining licensure to engage in a self-employment occupation or that is required for franchise ownership and operation.

(Sec. 302) Increases as of July 1, 2004, the rates of: (1) survivors' and dependents' educational assistance; and (2) assistance for correspondence courses, special restorative training, and apprenticeship training.

(Sec. 303) Makes the delimiting period of eligibility for survivors' and dependents' educational assistance with respect to a member who is involuntarily ordered to full-time National Guard duty the same period that exists for survivors and dependents of regular military personnel called or ordered to active duty (the length of such duty plus four months).

(Sec. 304) Requires cost-of-living adjustments to payments made under active-duty and veterans' educational assistance programs to be rounded down (currently, rounded) to the nearest dollar during the period after FY 2004 and before FY 2014.

(Sec. 305) Authorizes a State agency to approve entrepreneurship (business education) courses for attendance by veterans using veterans' basic educational assistance provided through the Department. Prohibits the Secretary from treating a business owner as already qualified for such purposes. Adds entrepreneurship courses to authorized programs of veterans' educational assistance. Includes as a qualified provider of such courses: (1) any small business development center under the Small Business Act; and (2) the National Veterans Business Development Corporation.

(Sec. 306) Repeals the Department of Veterans Affairs Education Loan Program. Terminates an associated Fund.

(Sec. 307) Extends through 2009 the Veterans' Advisory Committee on Education.

(Sec. 308) Amends the Small Business Act to authorize a Federal contracting officer to award a sole source contract (limited to contracts of up to \$5 million for manufacturing and \$3 million for non-manufacturing) to small businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled (qualified) veterans if: (1) the business is determined to be responsible with respect to performance of the contract opportunity and the contracting officer does not expect that two or more small businesses owned and controlled by qualified veterans will submit offers; (2) the anticipated award price of the contract will not exceed the sole source limit; and (3) the contract award can be made at a fair and reasonable price. Allows a contracting officer to restrict contract competition to qualified businesses if the officer can reasonably expect at least two such businesses to submit offers. Prohibits a procurement from being made on the basis of such authority if the procurement would otherwise be made from a different source under provisions of either the Federal criminal code governing Government procurement of prisoner products or services or the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act.

(Sec. 309) Directs the Secretary of Labor to station employees of the Veterans' Employment and Training Service or contractors at each veterans' assistance office established by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on an overseas military installation. Requires such personnel to carry out employment counseling under the Transition Assistance Program and the Disabled Transition Assistance Program for persons separating from active duty and their spouses.

Title IV: Housing Benefits and Related Matters - (Sec. 401) Authorizes the Secretary to provide adapted housing assistance to certain categories of disabled military personnel serving on active duty if the disability is the result of an injury or disease contracted or aggravated during such duty.

(Sec. 402) Increases from: (1) \$48,000 to \$50,000 the maximum authorized to be provided by the Department to certain disabled veterans for the construction of specially adapted housing; (2) \$9,250 to \$10,000 the maximum authorized for specially adapted features within a home; and (3) \$9,000 to \$11,000 the maximum authorized for automobile and adaptive equipment for such veterans.

(Sec. 403) Makes permanent (currently, expires on September 30, 2009) the authority for individuals who complete six years of service in the Selected Reserve to receive Department-guaranteed veterans' home loans.

(Sec. 404) Reinstates until September 30, 2013, certain minimum requirements with respect to the Department's vendee

loan program (the authority to finance the purchase of properties it has acquired, as guarantor, as a result of a veteran's foreclosure). Requires the Department to dispose of between 50 and 85 (currently, 65) percent of such acquired properties using vendee loans.

(Sec. 405) Revises the fee amounts charged under the veterans' home loan guaranty program.

(Sec. 406) Extends until October 1, 2012, the termination date of Department procedures for liquidation sales with respect to defaulted home loans guaranteed by the Department.

Title V: Burial Benefits - (Sec. 501) Allows States to receive the veterans' burial plot allowance of \$300 for the interment of a veteran who: (1) did not serve during a wartime period; or (2) was discharged as a result of a service-connected disability.

(Sec. 502) Makes all remarried surviving spouses of veterans eligible for burial in a national cemetery. (Currently, such eligibility is permitted only for remarried former spouses whose subsequent marriage was terminated by death or divorce.)

(Sec. 503) Makes permanent (currently, terminates at the end of FY 2004) the authority of the Secretary to make grants to States for establishing, expanding, or improving veterans' cemeteries.

Title VI: Exposure to Hazardous Substances - (Sec. 601) Directs the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs and Defense to jointly: (1) conduct a review of the missions, procedures, and administration of the Radiation Dose Reconstruction Program of the Department of Defense; (2) report review results to Congress; and (3) take appropriate action to ensure the ongoing independent review and oversight of the Program, including the establishment of an advisory board. Authorizes the advisory board to make recommendations on modifications in the missions or procedures of the Program.

(Sec. 602) Directs the Secretary, through the National Academy of Sciences (Academy) or another appropriate scientific organization, to study and report to the Secretary and Congress on the appropriate disposition of the Air Force Health Study, an epidemiological study of Air Force personnel responsible for conducting aerial herbicides spray missions during the Vietnam era.

(Sec. 603) Directs the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs and Defense to provide funding for FY 2004 through 2013 for the Medical Follow-Up Agency of the Institute of Medicine of the Academy for purposes of epidemiological research on military personnel and veterans.

Title VII: Other Matters - (Sec. 701) Requires veterans' benefits (other than Government life insurance) claimants who have submitted an incomplete claim application and who have been notified by the Department that additional information is required to submit the additional information within one year after such notification (but allows the Department to decide such a claim before the expiration of the one-year period). Requires the Secretary to readjudicate a claim of a qualified claimant if the request for readjudication is received within one year after the enactment of this Act.

(Sec. 702) Deems to be a prohibited assignment of veterans' benefits any agreement under which a beneficiary attempts to transfer to another person or entity the right to receive direct or indirect payments of veterans' disability compensation, pension, or DIC benefits. Allows as an agreement a loan involving the beneficiary if loan payments are made by preauthorized electronic funds transfers pursuant to the Electronic Funds Transfers Act.

(Sec. 703) Extends through 2009 the Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans.

(Sec. 704) Authorizes the Secretary, through 2009, to provide for the conduct by non-Department personnel of examinations with respect to the medical disabilities of benefit applicants. Requires a report from the Secretary to Congress on the utilization of such authority.

(Sec. 705) Adds certain criminal subversive activities offenses to those which will cause a veteran to lose the right to certain gratuitous benefits (including national cemetery burial) provided through the Department.

(Sec. 706) Extends through FY 2013 the requirement that yearly cost-of-living adjustments to rates of veterans' disability compensation and DIC be rounded down to the nearest whole dollar.

(Sec. 707) Codifies provisions of the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 1994 concerning the expeditious treatment of benefits claim cases remanded by the Board of Veterans' Appeals or the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

Actions Timeline

- **Dec 16, 2003:** Signed by President.
- **Dec 16, 2003:** Signed by President.
- **Dec 16, 2003:** Became Public Law No: 108-183.
- **Dec 16, 2003:** Became Public Law No: 108-183.
- **Dec 5, 2003:** Presented to President.
- **Dec 5, 2003:** Presented to President.
- **Nov 20, 2003:** Mr. Smith (NJ) moved that the House suspend the rules and agree to the Senate amendment.
- **Nov 20, 2003:** DEBATE - The House proceeded with forty minutes of debate on the motion to agree to the Senate amendment to H.R. 2297.
- **Nov 20, 2003:** Resolving differences -- House actions: On motion that the House suspend the rules and agree to the Senate amendment Agreed to by voice vote.(consideration: CR H11705-11722; text as House agreed to Senate amendment: CR H11705-11712)
- **Nov 20, 2003:** On motion that the House suspend the rules and agree to the Senate amendment Agreed to by voice vote. (consideration: CR H11705-11722; text as House agreed to Senate amendment: CR H11705-11712)
- **Nov 20, 2003:** Motion to reconsider laid on the table Agreed to without objection.
- **Nov 19, 2003:** Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs discharged by Unanimous Consent.
- **Nov 19, 2003:** Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs discharged by Unanimous Consent.
- **Nov 19, 2003:** Measure laid before Senate by unanimous consent. (consideration: CR S15133-15140)
- **Nov 19, 2003:** Passed/agreed to in Senate: Passed Senate with an amendment by Unanimous Consent.(text: CR S15133-15139)
- **Nov 19, 2003:** Passed Senate with an amendment by Unanimous Consent. (text: CR S15133-15139)
- **Nov 19, 2003:** Message on Senate action sent to the House.
- **Oct 14, 2003:** Received in the Senate and Read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.
- **Oct 8, 2003:** Mr. Smith (NJ) moved to suspend the rules and pass the bill, as amended.
- **Oct 8, 2003:** Considered under suspension of the rules. (consideration: CR H9305-9312)
- **Oct 8, 2003:** DEBATE - The House proceeded with forty minutes of debate on H.R. 2297.
- **Oct 8, 2003:** At the conclusion of debate, the Yeas and Nays were demanded and ordered. Pursuant to the provisions of clause 8, rule XX, the Chair announced that further proceedings on the motion would be postponed.
- **Oct 8, 2003:** Considered as unfinished business. (consideration: CR H9332-9333)
- **Oct 8, 2003:** Passed/agreed to in House: On motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill, as amended Agreed to by the Yeas and Nays: (2/3 required): 399 - 0 (Roll no. 536).(text: CR H9305-9308)
- **Oct 8, 2003:** Motion to reconsider laid on the table Agreed to without objection.
- **Oct 8, 2003:** On motion to suspend the rules and pass the bill, as amended Agreed to by the Yeas and Nays: (2/3 required): 399 - 0 (Roll no. 536). (text: CR H9305-9308)
- **Oct 8, 2003:** The title of the measure was amended. Agreed to without objection.
- **Jul 15, 2003:** Reported (Amended) by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. H. Rept. 108-211.
- **Jul 15, 2003:** Reported (Amended) by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. H. Rept. 108-211.
- **Jul 15, 2003:** Placed on the Union Calendar, Calendar No. 117.
- **Jun 26, 2003:** Committee Consideration and Mark-up Session Held.
- **Jun 26, 2003:** Ordered to be Reported (Amended) by Voice Vote.
- **Jun 25, 2003:** Subcommittee Consideration and Mark-up Session Held.
- **Jun 25, 2003:** Forwarded by Subcommittee to Full Committee in the Nature of a Substitute by Voice Vote.
- **Jun 11, 2003:** Subcommittee Hearings Held.
- **Jun 6, 2003:** Referred to the Subcommittee on Benefits.
- **Jun 2, 2003:** Introduced in House
- **Jun 2, 2003:** Introduced in House
- **Jun 2, 2003:** Referred to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.