

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1978

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a veterans conservation corps, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 22, 2015

Mr. POLIS (for himself, Mr. CÁRDENAS, Mr. GRAYSON, Mr. HASTINGS, Mr. LOWENTHAL, Mrs. NAPOLITANO, Mr. RANGEL, Mr. VEASEY, Mr. CARTWRIGHT, Mr. ISRAEL, Mr. SARBANES, Mr. SIRES, Ms. DELAURO, Mrs. BUSTOS, Mr. DEUTCH, Mr. WALZ, Ms. KAPTUR, Mr. RUIZ, Mr. MURPHY of Florida, Mr. CLEAVER, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. GARAMENDI, Mr. MCGOVERN, Ms. SPEIER, Ms. NORTON, and Mr. NOLAN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and in addition to the Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure, the Judiciary, and Science, Space, and Technology, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a veterans conservation corps, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Conservation
5 Corps Act of 2015”.

1 **SEC. 2. VETERANS CONSERVATION CORPS.**

2 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—

3 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
4 Affairs shall, in cooperation with the Attorney Gen-
5 eral, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of
6 Commerce, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the
7 Secretary of the Interior, the Chief Executive Officer
8 of the Corporation for National and Community
9 Service, and the Chief of Engineers, establish a vet-
10 erans conservation corps to assist veterans in the
11 transition from service in the Armed Forces to civil-
12 ian life and to employ veterans—

13 (A) in conservation, resource management,
14 firefighting, law enforcement, and historic pres-
15 ervation projects on public lands and mainte-
16 nance and improvement projects for cemeteries
17 under the jurisdiction of the National Cemetery
18 Administration; and

19 (B) as firefighters, law enforcement offi-
20 cers, and disaster relief personnel.

21 (2) VETERAN ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible to
22 participate in the veterans conservation corps, a vet-
23 eran shall be unemployed.

24 (b) CONSERVATION, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, HIS-
25 TORIC PRESERVATION, AND CEMETERY MAINTENANCE
26 AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—As part of the veterans con-
2 servation corps, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs,
3 the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Com-
4 merce, the Secretary of the Interior, the Chief Exec-
5 utive Officer of the Corporation for National and
6 Community Service, and the Chief of Engineers
7 shall—

8 (A) employ veterans to carry out projects
9 described in subsection (a)(1); and

10 (B) award grants to, or enter into con-
11 tracts with, State governments, local govern-
12 ments, or nongovernmental entities to employ
13 veterans to carry out projects described in sub-
14 section (a)(1).

15 (2) PRIORITY.—In employing or awarding
16 grants or contracts to employ veterans under this
17 subsection, the Secretaries referred to in paragraph
18 (1) and the Chief of Engineers shall give priority to-
19 wards the employment of veterans who served on ac-
20 tive duty in the Armed Forces on or after September
21 11, 2001.

22 (3) COORDINATION.—The Secretary of Vet-
23 erans Affairs shall coordinate the activities of the
24 Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Com-
25 merce, the Secretary of the Interior, the Chief Exec-

1 utive Officer of the Corporation for National and
2 Community Service, and the Chief of Engineers to
3 employ veterans as part of the veterans conservation
4 corps.

5 (4) OVERSIGHT OF PROJECTS.—The Secretaries
6 referred to in paragraph (1) and the Chief of Engi-
7 neers shall each provide oversight of the projects for
8 which they employ veterans under subparagraph (A)
9 of such paragraph or award grants or enter into
10 contracts under subparagraph (B) of such para-
11 graph.

12 (c) FIRST RESPONDERS.—

13 (1) FIREFIGHTERS.—As part of the veterans
14 conservation corps, the Secretary of Homeland Secu-
15 rity shall award grants under section 34 of the Fed-
16 eral Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (15
17 U.S.C. 2229a) to hire veterans as firefighters.

18 (2) LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS.—As part of
19 the veterans conservation corps, the Attorney Gen-
20 eral shall award grants under part Q of title I of the
21 Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of
22 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3796dd et seq.) to hire veterans as
23 law enforcement officers.

24 (3) DISASTER RELIEF PERSONNEL.—As part of
25 the veterans conservation corps, the Secretary of

1 Homeland Security shall provide funds to increase
2 participation by veterans in the FEMA Corps pro-
3 gram, which is a partnership between the Corpora-
4 tion for National and Community Service and the
5 Federal Emergency Management Agency.

6 (4) PRIORITY.—In awarding grants or pro-
7 viding funds under this subsection to hire veterans,
8 the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Attor-
9 ney General shall give priority to the hiring of vet-
10 erans who served on active duty in the Armed
11 Forces on or after September 11, 2001.

12 (d) ASSISTANCE.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
14 Affairs may provide assistance to the Secretaries re-
15 ferred to in subsection (a), the Attorney General, the
16 Chief of Engineers, and the Chief Executive Officer
17 to carry out the veterans conservation corps. Such
18 assistance may take the form of a transfer under
19 paragraph (2).

20 (2) TRANSFERS.—Except as otherwise provided
21 in this subsection, of amounts appropriated or other-
22 wise made available to the Secretary of Veterans Af-
23 fairs to carry out this section, the Secretary of Vet-
24 erans Affairs may transfer such amounts as the Sec-

retary considers appropriate to carry out the veterans conservation corps to the following:

(A) The Attorney General.

(B) The Secretary of Agriculture.

(C) The Secretary of Commerce.

(D) The Secretary of Homeland Security.

(E) The Secretary of the Interior.

(F) The Corporation for National and Community Service.

(G) The Chief of Engineers.

(3) ASSISTANCE FOR CONSERVATION, RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, HISTORIC PRESERVATION, AND CEMETERY MAINTENANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS.—

(A) APPLICATION.—If a Secretary referred to in subsection (b)(1) or the Chief of Engineers or the Chief Executive Officer seeks assistance under paragraph (1) to employ a veteran to carry out a project under subparagraph (A) of subsection (b)(1) or to award a grant or contract to carry out a project under subparagraph (B) of such subsection, such Secretary or the Chief of Engineers shall submit to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs an application therefor at such time, in such manner, and con-

1 taining such information as the Secretary of
2 Veterans Affairs may require.

3 (B) SELECTION.—The Secretary of Vet-
4 erans Affairs shall, in consultation with the
5 steering committee established under subpara-
6 graph (C), award assistance under this para-
7 graph in accordance with such criteria as the
8 steering committee establishes.

9 (C) STEERING COMMITTEE.—

10 (i) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of
11 Veterans Affairs shall establish a steering
12 committee—

13 (I) to establish selection criteria
14 for the awarding of assistance under
15 paragraph (1) to employ a veteran to
16 carry out a project under subpara-
17 graph (A) of subsection (b)(1) or to
18 award a grant or contract to carry out
19 a project under subparagraph (B) of
20 such subsection; and

21 (II) to provide the Secretary of
22 Veterans Affairs with advice on
23 awarding assistance under this sub-
24 section with respect to projects de-
25 scribed in subsection (a)(1) and car-

1 rying out the requirements of the vet-
2 erans conservation corps under sub-
3 section (b).

4 (ii) COMPOSITION.—The steering com-
5 mittee shall be composed of the following:

6 (I) The Secretary of Veterans Af-
7 fairs.

8 (II) The Secretary of Agri-
9 culture.

10 (III) The Secretary of Com-
11 merce.

12 (IV) The Secretary of the Inte-
13 rior.

14 (V) The Corporation for National
15 and Community Service.

16 (VI) The Chief of Engineers.

17 (iii) CHAIRPERSON.—The chairperson
18 of the steering committee shall be the Sec-
19 retary of Veterans Affairs.

20 (iv) ADVISORY INPUT.—The Secretary
21 of Defense, the Secretary of Labor, and
22 the Chief Executive Officer of the Corpora-
23 tion for National and Community Service
24 may provide advice to the steering com-
25 mittee.

1 (4) ASSISTANCE FOR FIRST RESPONDERS.—Not
2 more than 10 percent of amounts appropriated or
3 otherwise made available to the Secretary of Vet-
4 erans Affairs to carry out this section may be trans-
5 ferred to the Attorney General and the Secretary of
6 Homeland Security to employ veterans under sub-
7 section (c).

8 (e) REPORTING FRAMEWORK.—The Secretary of Vet-
9 erans Affairs shall establish a reporting framework to reg-
10 ularly monitor and evaluate the veterans conservation
11 corps to ensure proper oversight and accountability of the
12 veterans conservation corps.

13 (f) OUTREACH.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
14 shall ensure that veterans employed under the veterans
15 conservation corps are aware of benefits and assistance
16 available to them under laws administered by the Sec-
17 retary of Veterans Affairs.

18 (g) DONATIONS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
19 may solicit, accept, hold, administer, use, and dispose of,
20 in furtherance of the purpose of this Act, donations of any
21 money or property, real, personal, or mixed, tangible or
22 intangible, received by gift, devise, bequest, or otherwise.
23 Donations accepted under this subparagraph shall be used
24 as nearly as possible in accordance with the terms, if any,
25 of such donation.

1 (h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

2 (1) IN GENERAL.—There is available without
3 further appropriation to the Secretary of Veterans
4 Affairs to carry out this section, \$600,000,000 for
5 the period of fiscal years 2016 through 2020.

6 (2) LIMITATION.—Of amounts appropriated or
7 otherwise made available to carry out this section,
8 not more than five percent may be spent to admin-
9 ister the veterans conservation corps.

10 (i) DEFINITION OF VETERAN.—In this section, the
11 term “veteran” has the meaning given the term in section
12 101 of title 38, United States Code.

○