

AMERICAN LEGION AMENDMENTS
ACT

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3988) to amend title 36, United States Code, to clarify the requirements for eligibility in the American Legion.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3988

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. CLARIFICATION OF REQUIREMENTS FOR ELIGIBILITY IN THE AMERICAN LEGION.

Section 21703(2) of title 36, United States Code, is amended by inserting “during or” after “continues to serve honorably”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and to include extraneous material on H.R. 3988 under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3988 would amend the Federal charter of the American Legion.

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Current law makes a veteran eligible to become a member of the legion if that veteran has served since “August 2, 1990 through the date of cessation of hostilities as decided by the United States Government” and was “honorably discharged or separated from that service or continues to serve honorably after that period.”

The United States Government has never issued a cessation of hostilities declaration for the Persian Gulf War. For those who are no longer serving, they have discharge papers stating that they honorably served during that period. Servicemen who have served since August 2, 1990, and are still on active duty, have no discharge papers for the period, and are not serving after the cessation of hostilities, but during that period.

The amendment would simply change the standard for qualification for membership in the legion by adding the words “during or” so that it states “continues to serve during or after that period” to make it clear that legion membership is open to active duty personnel who served during Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and all of the operations that followed in Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the House to pass H.R. 3988 to make this change in the Federal charter of the American Legion.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it is always important to respect our veterans and to provide additional assistance to them.

This bill makes a technical amendment to the membership qualifications language of the Federal charter of the American Legion. Currently, under the statute, veterans who get out of service are eligible to become members of the American Legion if they served since “August 2, 1990 through the date of cessation of hostilities, as decided by the United States Government” and “was honorably discharged or separated from that service or continues to serve honorably after that period.”

Under the charter, however, the U.S. Government has never issued a cessation of hostilities decision signifying the end to a conflict. Those who are no longer serving have discharge papers stating they served honorably during that period, so they are unaffected. However, servicemen who served since August 2, 1990, and are still on active duty have no discharge papers for the period, and serve without the benefit of a U.S. Government-issued cessation of hostilities decision.

The amendment would simply change the standard for qualification to say a veteran that “continues to serve during or after that period” will qualify for membership. This makes it clear that membership is open to thousands of active duty personnel who served during Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and all of the operations that followed in Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, thereby respecting these particular service personnel and veterans and allowing them to participate in a very important and certainly honorable organization, the American Legion.

“The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic, mutual-help, wartime veterans organization.” The 2.8 million-member American Legion is the Nation’s largest veterans organization with nearly 15,000 American Legion posts worldwide. The Legion assists our Nation’s communities through “fundraising programs, educational activities, library, and museum services, and many others.”

As has been stated, this is a technical amendment that allows thousands upon thousands of veterans and service personnel and others to join the American Legion, and I believe this will add vitality to the American Legion.

This bill makes a technical amendment to the membership qualifications language of the federal charter of the American Legion. Currently, under the statute, veterans who get out

of service are eligible to become members of the American Legion if they served since: “August 2, 1990 through the date of cessation of hostilities, as decided by the United States Government” and “was honorably discharged or separated from that service or continues to serve honorably after that period.”

Under the Charter, however, the U.S. Government has never issued a cessation of hostilities decision signifying the end to a conflict. Those who are no longer serving have discharge papers stating they served honorably during that period so they are unaffected. However, servicemen who served since August 2, 1990 and are still on active duty have no discharge papers for the period, and serve without the benefit of a U.S. government issued cessation of hostilities decision.

The amendment would simply change the standard for qualification to say a veteran that “continues to serve during or after that period” will qualify for membership. This makes it clear that membership is open to the thousands of active duty personnel who served during operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and all the operations that followed in Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan.

“The American Legion was chartered by Congress in 1919 as a patriotic, mutual-help, war-time veterans organization.” The 2.8-million member American Legion is the nation’s largest veterans organization with nearly 15,000 American Legion Posts worldwide. The Legion assists our nations communities through “fund-raising program, educational activities, library and museum services, and many others.”

As has been stated, this Amendment simply allow more veterans to join in the good works of the American Legion. This will provide additional vitality to the Legion and I urge my colleagues to support this Act.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. GEKAS).

Mr. GEKAS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time.

This is an opportunity for us to pay tribute to the American Legion that goes beyond the purpose of the bill, which is laudable, and that is to allow the legion to expand its membership by inclusion of certain categories of veterans who heretofore have not been able to qualify.

But I want to bring into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD remembrances of the American Legion as a young boy growing up in central Pennsylvania. Most of the parades and most of the patriotic functions of that era were either sponsored by or joined in by the American Legion, but that was not all. They also sponsored teenage baseball organizational sports, they also sponsored essay and oratorical contests in the high schools, and in a variety of ways went beyond their chief function of honoring the veteran, because they were part of the actual life of the community in so many different ways.

Then the other portion of the American Legion that sticks hard to my memory is that during the time I served in the Armed Forces myself,

there were two refuges for us in the various bases in which we served, and in particular, I remember in Fort Knox, Kentucky, the USO was always there on the weekends for the purpose of providing extra services and relaxation for the veterans who were serving or the members of the Armed Forces who were serving at Fort Knox, and also the American Legion always had some kind of hostmanship-type of function to welcome the soldiers who were stationed at Fort Knox.

So for a whole series of remembrances for this Member, we support the bill and hope that many more veterans will be joining the ranks of the American Legion in the next several years.

Mr. GILMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 3988, the American Legion Amendments Act. I urge my colleagues to support this timely measure.

This legislation amends the charter of the American Legion to revise eligibility for the organization to those individuals who have served honorably in the Armed Forces during or after specific periods. Presently, service members are only eligible if they have served during specific periods, including designated windows for World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Lebanon/Grenada, Panama, and Desert Storm. Because the window governing Desert Storm has not closed, under current law, Desert Storm veterans are not eligible to join the American Legion. This measure corrects this problem.

The American Legion was founded and chartered by Congress in 1919. Its first major accomplishment was the creation of the U.S. Veterans Bureau, which was the precursor to the Veteran's Administration. Significant accomplishments of the Legion include the enactment of the G.I. bill, and the establishment of the cabinet-level department of Veterans Affairs.

The Legion also led the fight for an investigation into the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam, the investigations into gulf-war illnesses among Desert Storm veterans, and for the constitutional amendment to prohibit physical desecration of the American flag.

Like its fellow veterans service organizations, the American Legion offers valuable service to its membership, including, but not limited to: seeking discharge upgrades, record corrections, education benefits, disability compensation matters and pension eligibility. The Legion also has a long and distinguished history of community service.

Given our current war on terrorism, I believe it is appropriate for Congress to recognize, expand and promote the efforts of our veterans service organizations. For this reason, I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. CULBERSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3988.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof)

the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

AMVETS CHARTER AMENDMENT ACT

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3214) to amend the charter of the AMVETS organization.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3214

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. AMENDMENTS TO AMVETS CHARTER.

(a) NAME OF ORGANIZATION.—(1) Sections 22701(a) and 22706 of title 36, United States Code, are amended by striking “AMVETS (American Veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam)” and inserting “AMVETS (American Veterans)”.

(2)(A) The heading of chapter 227 of such title is amended to read as follows:

“CHAPTER 227—AMVETS (AMERICAN VETERANS)”.

(B) The item relating to such chapter in the table of chapters at the beginning of subtitle II of such title is amended to read as follows:

“227. AMVETS (AMERICAN VETERANS) 22701”.

(b) GOVERNING BODY.—Section 22704(c)(1) of such title is amended by striking “seven national vice commanders” and all that follows through “a judge advocate,” and inserting “two national vice commanders, a finance officer, a judge advocate, a chaplain, six national district commanders.”.

(c) HEADQUARTERS AND PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS.—Section 22708 of such title is amended—

(1) by striking “the District of Columbia” in the first sentence and inserting “Maryland”; and

(2) by striking “the District of Columbia” in the second sentence and inserting “Maryland”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. SENSENBRENNER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 3214, the bill currently under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Wisconsin?

There was no objection.

Mr. SENSENBRENNER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 3214 would amend the Federal charter for the American Veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam to American Veterans to more accurately reflect the membership of AMVETS. AMVETS membership now includes not only veterans

from those three wars, but also anyone who served honorably after 1940, and the National Guardsmen and Reservists.

At the AMVETS annual convention in 1998, the delegates voted for an official name change from American Veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam to American Veterans to more accurately reflect the membership. Additionally, AMVETS has voted to change the structure of their governing body. This bill contains language to reflect the structure change in the statute.

Finally, because AMVETS has moved the location of their headquarters from the District of Columbia to Lanham, Maryland, the “Headquarters and principal place of business” section of their charter needs to be changed to indicate that they are now located in Maryland. In order for these changes to be recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the AMVETS Federal charter must be amended, and this bill does that.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the House to pass H.R. 3214, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, the legislation that we have before us, H.R. 3214, would amend the Federal charter of the American veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam to reflect changes made at its 1998 convention. It is extremely important to ensure that we respond to the request of these valiant and heroic servicemen and women.

Their original charter, received in 1947, has been amended by Congress over the years to give membership to Korean War veterans and Vietnam veterans, and to reflect other changing characteristics of the organization.

In 1998, at the AMVETS annual convention, the delegates voted for an official name change of American veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam to “American Veterans” to more accurately reflect the membership of AMVETS. Additionally, AMVETS voted to change the structure of their governing body. The organization also voted to change the location of their headquarters from the District of Columbia to Lanham, Maryland. Therefore, the “Headquarters and principal place of business” section of their charter needs to be changed to indicate that they are now located in Maryland.

In order for these changes to be recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the AMVETS Federal charter must be amended. This bill will accomplish that and allow them to continue to do the service that they do on behalf of the American people and as well to continue to honor the veterans who participate in this organization.

I support H.R. 3214 as it would amend the Federal charter of the American Veterans of