

States Code, by requiring that VA deem any written document which expresses disagreement with a VA decision to be an NOD unless VA finds that the claimant has disavowed a desire for appellate review. This section would be effective with respect to documents filed on or after the date of enactment, and with respect to documents filed before the date of enactment and not treated by VA as an NOD pursuant to part 20.201 of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations. Furthermore, a document filed as an NOD after March 15, 2002, and rejected by the Secretary as insufficient would, at VA motion or at the request of a claimant within one year of enactment, be deemed to be an NOD if the document expresses disagreement with a decision and VA finds that the claimant has not disavowed a desire for appellate review.

PROVISION OF MARKERS FOR PRIVATELY
MARKED GRAVES

Current Law

Section 502 of Public Law 107-103, the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001, authorizes VA to furnish a government headstone or marker for the grave of an eligible veteran buried in a non-veterans' cemetery irrespective of whether the grave was already marked with a private marker. The law applies to veterans whose deaths occurred on or after December 27, 2001. Public Law 107-330 extended this authority to include deaths occurring on or after September 11, 2001.

House Bill

The House Bill contains no comparable provision.

Senate Bill

Section 204 of S. 1132, as amended, would amend the Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act of 2001 to authorize VA to furnish a government headstone or marker for the grave of an eligible veteran buried in a private cemetery, irrespective of whether the grave was already marked with a private marker, for deaths occurring on or after November 1, 1990.

TERMINATION OF AUTHORITY TO GUARANTEE
LOANS TO PURCHASE MANUFACTURED HOMES
AND LOTS

Current Law

Section 3712 of title 38, United States Code, authorizes VA to guarantee loans for the purchase of a manufactured home and a lot on which it is sited.

House Bill

The House Bill contains no comparable provision.

Senate Bill

Section 306 of S. 1132, as amended, would eliminate VA's authority to guarantee loans to purchase a manufactured home and the lot on which it is sited.

REINSTATEMENT OF VETERANS VOCATIONAL
TRAINING PROGRAM FOR CERTAIN PENSION RE-
CIPIENTS

Current Law

Section 1524 of title 38, United States Code, authorized a pilot program of vocational training to certain nonservice-connected pension recipients. The initial pilot program was in place from February 1, 1985, through January 31, 1992. Public Law 102-562 extended the program through December 31, 1995.

House Bill

Section 9 of H.R. 2297, as amended, would reinstate the VA pilot program for five years beginning on the date of enactment to provide vocational training to newly eligible VA nonservice-connected pension recipients. The program would be open to those veterans age 45 years or younger. The Department of Veterans Affairs would be required to ensure

that the availability of vocational training is made known through various outreach methods. Not later than two years after the date of enactment, and each year thereafter, the Secretary would be required to submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the House of Representatives a report on the operation of the pilot program. The report would include an evaluation of the vocational training provided, an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of the training provided, and data on the entered-employment rate of veterans participating in the program.

Senate Bill

The Senate Bill contains no comparable provision.

THREE-YEAR EXTENSION OF INCOME
VERIFICATION AUTHORITY

Current Law

Section 5317 of title 38, United States Code, directs VA to notify applicants for needs-based VA benefits that information collected from the applicants may be compared with income-related information obtained by VA from the Internal Revenue Service and the Department of Health and Human Services. The authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to obtain such information expires on September 30, 2008.

Section 6103(l)(7)(D)(viii) of the Internal Revenue Code authorizes the release of income information by the Internal Revenue Service to VA. This authority expires on September 30, 2008.

House Bill

The House Bill contains no comparable provision.

Senate Bill

Section 312 of S. 1132, as amended, would extend until September 30, 2011, the authority of the Secretary to obtain income information under section 5317 of title 38, United States Code, and the authority of the Internal Revenue Service to share income information under section 6103(l)(7)(D)(viii) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 2297, the Veterans' Benefits Act of 2003. This bill addresses an issue that I have been working on for a number of years. Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is the benefit accorded to the surviving dependents of those members of the Armed Forces who died while on active duty or of a service-connected cause.

DIC is the only federal annuity program that does not allow a widow who is receiving compensation to remarry at an older age and retain her annuity. Earlier this year, I reintroduced legislation which provides that the remarriage of the surviving spouse of a veteran after age 55 shall not result in termination of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

I was pleased that my legislation was incorporated into H.R. 2297 when it passed the House in October. The bill that we are considering today, which was worked out with the Senate, slightly modifies my original provision to provide that a surviving spouse upon remarriage after age 57 would retain DIC, home loan and educational benefits eligibility. Surviving spouses who remarried after attaining age 57 prior to enactment of the Compromise Agreement would have one year to apply for reinstatement of these benefits.

I think it is a wonderful thing if an older person finds companionship, falls in love and decides to marry. I don't think we should be discouraging such marriages by making them financially burdensome. In these circumstances,

it is often the case that both partners are living on fixed incomes, the prospect of one partner losing financial benefits as a result of the marriage is a real disincentive.

Once again, I would like to thank Chairman SMITH, Ranking Member EVANS, Benefits Subcommittee Chairman BROWN and Subcommittee Ranking Member MICHAUD for working with me to include a DIC remarriage provision in H.R. 2297.

I urge my colleagues to support the bill before us today.

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) that the House suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendment to the bill, H.R. 2297.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the Senate amendment was concurred in.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 2297.

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

There was no objection.

COMPACT OF FREE ASSOCIATION
AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2003

Mr. LEACH. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and concur in the Senate amendments to the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 63) to approve the "Compact of Free Association, as amended between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia", and the "Compact of Free Association, as amended between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands," and otherwise to amend Public Law 99-239, and to appropriate for the purposes of amended Public Law 99-239 for fiscal years ending on or before September 30, 2023, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

Senate amendments:

Strike out all after the resolving clause and insert:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS.

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This joint resolution, together with the table of contents in subsection (b) of this section, may be cited as the "Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2003".

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for this joint resolution is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title and table of contents.