



Legislative Alert #113-33: SUPPORT & PASS S. 1950, the Comprehensive Veterans Health & Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014

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VETERANS

Issue Background: On 20 December 2013, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) submitted S. 944, the Veterans Health and Benefits Improvement Act of 2013, for Unanimous Consent (UC) on the Senate floor. However, a hold was placed on the UC request by Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK). In a letter, he voiced concerns about the UC request for the bill, despite recognizing the need for comprehensive Veterans legislation. On 16 January 2014, Senator Bernie Sanders (VT) introduced S. 1950, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014, which contains other SVAC approved legislation, a full fix to COLA reduction language from the December Budget deal and language of S. 944. S. 944 was a Veteran omnibus bill including provisions from numerous other Veterans bills that were approved by SVAC in 2013. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) released a report stating that the bill would expand health services offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), increase certain fees for guaranteeing home loans and enhance education and employment benefits for Veterans. The report also estimated that S. 944 is already paid for and the bill would decrease net direct spending by **\$94 million** over 2014-2023.

Action Required: Contact your Senators and urge them to cosponsor and pass S. 1950, the Comprehensive Veterans Health and Benefits and Military Retirement Pay Restoration Act of 2014, introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders (VT), which makes important improvements to health and benefit programs for Veterans by including a variety of provisions from bi-partisanly approved Veteran bills marked up by members of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC).

Details (To Be Put Into Letter):

The Senate is currently poised to consider omnibus Veterans legislation, rolling numerous previously approved bills into one, that would help improve health and benefit programs for our nation's Veterans, reported to the Senate in mid-January and bi-partisanly approved by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC). S. 1950 is a collection of previous omnibus bills seeking to improve Veterans health and education benefits as well as employment transition and homeless services. Included in S. 1950, amongst other things, are provision of a previous omnibus Veteran bill, S. 944, which includes language to amend Title 38, United States Code, to require courses of education provided by public institutions of higher education, approved for purposes of the All-

Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program and Post-9/11 Educational Assistance, to charge Veterans tuition and fees at the in-State tuition rate. Additionally, there is a provision, based on S. 629, the Honor America's Guard and Reserve Retirees Act, to recognize twenty-plus year career service in the Reserve Components of the Armed Forces by honoring such Reservists with status as Veterans under law.

Furthermore there are a number of other provisions in S.1950 addressing a wide range of Veterans issues. Included are provisions from S.6, the Putting Our Veterans Back to Work Act of 2013, which reauthorizes the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 by providing assistance to small businesses owned by Veterans and improving the enforcement of employment and reemployment rights for members of the uniformed services. Amongst other benefits and services that would be improved by this bill, there is a provision from S. 495, the Careers for Veterans Act, which would improve certain requirements/opportunities for Federal agencies to hire Veterans and States to recognize the military experience of Veterans when issuing licenses and credentials. Finally, there is also a provision which would address the Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) reduction for military retirees under age 62 which was part of December's budget deal. In a Congress that has not passed much Veteran related legislation, S. 1950 is an opportunity for the Senate to consider improving Veterans benefits and fixing a wrong from the Budget deal in the early days of the second session of the 113th Congress.

Take Action: Click the "**Take Action**" link at the top of the Alert to immediately email and/or write to your Senators and Representatives. This is the quickest and most effective method of expressing your views to Congress. You can also write and/or e-mail the 'Details' section or edit as you desire for a more personalized communication . Also, contact friends and family and urge them to use the Contact Congress feature on AUSN's website as well. Please direct any questions concerning this issue to our Director of Legislation, Anthony Wallis, at 703-548-5800 or at Anthony.Wallis@ausn.org.