



Veterans Legislation passed by Senate Democrats in the 113th Congress

FY2015 NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Signed into law on December 19, 2014

The NDAA enhanced resources for mental health assessments and suicide prevention for service members. The NDAA required the DOD to provide a person to person mental health assessment for active duty and selected reserve members each year and, through 2018, a person to person mental health screening once during each 180 day period in which a member is deployed. The NDAA also authorized an additional \$14.8 million for the U.S. Special Operations Command Behavioral Health and Warrior Care Management Program. [House – Senate Joint Explanatory Statement to FY15 NDAA, [12/2/14](#)]

IMPROVING VETERANS ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE - THE VETERANS ACCESS, CHOICE, & ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2014

Signed into law on August 7, 2014.

Senate Democrats passed bipartisan legislation to address the crisis of veterans being forced onto long waiting lists for healthcare, improving Veterans access to medical care and strengthening the VA so that it will have more needed resources, nurses, and doctors to give our men and women in uniform the care they deserve. The Veterans Access, Choice, & Accountability Act of 2014 immediately addressed wait-time backlogs at the VA by expanding access to care, hiring more health professionals, and expanding VA's physical infrastructure to accommodate more patients. The bill would allow veterans who are unable to secure a timely appointment to seek care at a non-VA health care providers at no cost to Veterans through a \$10 billion "Veterans Choice Fund", address the shortage of doctors and nurses by providing \$5 billion for VA to hire more physicians and medical staff, and invest in upgrading and expanding VA's facilities so that they can better serve a growing influx of Veterans who need medical attention. [Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, [Senate Vote 254, 7/31/14](#)]

VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2013

Signed into law on November 21, 2013.

Senate Democrats made sure America's veterans received the cost-of-living increase they need and deserve. The Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2013, an annual adjustment passed by Congress, ensures that veterans' benefits continue to provide meaningful assistance that keeps pace with

inflation. Senate Democrats fought to end the practice of rounding down the COLA to the nearest whole dollar – thus putting more money into veterans’ pockets. [[P.L. 113-52](#)]

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EXPIRING AUTHORITIES ACT OF 2013

Signed into law on September 30, 2013.

Senate Democrats continued supporting the nations’ dedicated veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Expiring Authorities Act of 2013, among other things, provided specially adapted housing assistance for disabled veterans who have difficulty moving about their homes, authorized funding to help disabled veterans train and compete in the Paralympics and authorized the Secretary of Labor and Secretary of Veterans Affairs to support homeless veterans programs. [[H.R. 1412](#)]

ALICIA DAWN KOEHL RESPECT FOR NATIONAL CEMETERIES ACT

Signed into law on December 20, 2013.

Senate Democrats worked to protect the sanctity of Arlington National Cemetery and VA National Cemeteries. The Alicia Dawn Koehl Respect for National Cemeteries Act would provide authority for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of the Army to reconsider decisions to inter the remains or honor the memory of certain individuals at VA National Cemeteries or Arlington National Cemetery when, upon written notice of a conviction, they find an individual has committed: a Federal capital crime, a State capital crime, or a Federal or State crime causing the person to be a tier III sex offender for purposes of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act. VA and the Army would also be provided authority to reconsider an interment when they receive information that a person may have committed a Federal capital crime or a State capital crime but was not convicted of such crime by reason of such person not being available for trial due to death or flight to avoid prosecution. [[S. 1471](#)]

HELPING HOMELESS VETERANS ACT OF 2013

Passed the Senate on November 6, 2013.

Senate Democrats worked to protect veterans and their family members who are homeless as a result of domestic violence. The Helping Homeless Veterans Act expands the definition of a homeless veteran to include a veteran or veteran’s family member who became homeless because that person escaped domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking or other life-threatening situations in their homes. The bill would also extend VA’s ability to provide referral and counseling services, as well as treatment programs for seriously mentally ill and homeless veterans, and certain legal services for these veterans. [[S. 287](#)]

FOR VETS Act of 2013

Signed into law on August 9, 2013.

The Senate continued its support for America’s veterans by helping local organizations with high membership of veterans secure excess federal property. The FOR VETS Act, also known as the Formerly Owned Resources for Veterans to Express Thanks for Service Act authorizes the transfer of federal surplus property to states that can then donate that property to certain local organizations whose membership is largely made up of veterans. [[P.L. 113-26](#)]

STOLEN VALOR ACT OF 2013

Signed into law on June 3, 2013.

The Senate ensured that there would be penalties for those who frequently claim to have serviced in the military. The Stolen Valor Act created penalties including fines and imprisonment for individuals who fraudulently claim to have served in the military in order to obtain money, property, or some other tangible benefit as a result of the claim. [[P.L. 113-12](#)]

HELPING HEROES FLY ACT

Signed into law on August 9, 2013.

The Senate continued its support for America's brave veterans by providing expedited airport security screening for certain veterans and their families. The Helping Heroes Fly Act directs the Department of Homeland Security to develop a plan that will allow severely injured or disabled members of the Armed Forces and veterans, as well as their accompanying family members to use a streamlined security screening process before boarding domestic or foreign passenger aircraft. [[P.L. 113-27](#)]

THE AGRICULTURE REFORM, FOOD AND JOBS ACT OF 2013

Senate Democrats passed the Farm Bill, which includes specific provisions to help veterans start careers as farmers and ranchers. The bill dedicates \$85 million to the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program, a competitive grant program, and for the first time, requires the Department of Agriculture to make veterans a priority. The Farm bill also includes provisions to provide outreach and technical assistance to veteran farmers and includes conservation program opportunities for veterans. [[P.L. 113-79](#)]

MILITARY RETIREMENT AND PAY RESTORATION

Senate Democrats restored the full Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA) for military retirees because men and women of our Armed Forces deserve the full compensation and benefits that they have earned through service to their country. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 included a modification to the annual COLA for working-age military retirees' pensions that would have modified the annual COLA for military retirees under age 62 by making the adjustments equal to inflation minus 1 percent. Once retirees reached age 62, their pensions would have been recalculated to the level they would be at if they had always received a full COLA, and those retirees would receive full COLAs in the future equal to the traditional adjustment. The FY14 Omnibus restored full COLA adjustments for disabled military retirees and their survivors. The Military Retirement and Pay Restoration Act grandfathered in and protects all current servicemembers and military retirees from the COLA reduction. This legislation made the COLA modification prospective to the retired pay of all servicemembers who join the military after January 1, 2014. [[DPCC Fact Sheet](#); [Vote 281](#); [P.L. 113-67](#); [Vote 53](#); [P.L. 113-82](#)]