

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6011

*As Reported By House Committee on:
State Government*

Title: An act relating to veterans.

Brief Description: Extending veteran's benefits to Desert Storm veterans.

Sponsor(s): By Senate Committee on Governmental Operations (originally sponsored by Senators Conner, Rasmussen, Bauer, Jesernig and Oke).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, February 26, 1992, DP.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
STATE GOVERNMENT**

Majority Report: *Do pass.* Signed by 10 members: Representatives Anderson, Chair; Pruitt, Vice Chair; McLean, Ranking Minority Member; Bowman, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler; R. Fisher; Grant; Moyer; O'Brien; and Sheldon.

Staff: Linda May (786-7135).

Background: A person who meets the state's definition of a "veteran" is entitled to a number of benefits. In general, a person is considered a veteran if the person has served during a period of war, or if the person has received one of the service expeditionary medals for opposed action on foreign soil.

Some 14,000 individuals from Washington were sent to the Middle East during the Persian Gulf War. These individuals will eventually receive one of the expeditionary medals and as such are covered by the existing definition of "veteran." The state already recognizes these individuals as veterans, and they are eligible for all veterans' benefits. In addition, some 6,000 individuals from Washington were in one of the branches of the service during the Persian Gulf War, although they were not stationed in the Middle East during the conflict. These individuals are not currently recognized as veterans by the state.

The federal government determines the dates that constitute "a period of war." In passing P.L. 102-25, Congress recently established that the Persian Gulf War means a period beginning on August 2, 1990, and ending at a date not as yet determined. The Persian Gulf conflict is not currently defined as a period of war in Washington State law.

Existing civil service law provides for a veteran's preference in employment. Currently this preference does not extend to people who have voluntarily retired with 20 or more years of active military service and whose military retirement pay is more than \$500 per month.

Summary of Bill: The state definition of "veteran" is modified to include the Persian Gulf conflict as a period of war. With this inclusion, a person serving in any branch of the armed services as of August 2, 1990, would be considered a veteran in the eyes of the state.

Civil service law is amended to remove the proviso that the veteran's preference in employment does not extend to people with 20 or more years of active military service.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: This change clears up the law as far as veterans are concerned. Some 20,000 people from Washington participated in military service in connection with the Persian Gulf War. Of these, 14,000 were in the Middle East and are not affected by this bill because they will be receiving one of the expeditionary medals. However, the remaining 6,000 people will not be included. These people should be included in the family of veterans. The bill is timely, fully justified, and consistent with previous legislative policy. The Department of Veterans Affairs supports this change as well as the change to the personnel statute; the latter change establishes equity for this class of veteran.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Senator Paul Conner; Beau Bergeron, Department of Veterans Affairs; and Keith Sherman, Veterans Legislative Coalition (all in favor).