

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5477

As Passed House

Title: An act relating to veterans.

Brief Description: Authorizing veterans' benefits for Women's Air Forces Service Pilots and merchant marines.

Sponsor(s): Senators Conner, Rasmussen, Bauer and Nelson.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
State Government, April 2, 1991, DPA;
Appropriations, April 8, 1991, DPA(SG);
Passed House, April 16, 1991, 97-0;
Conference Committee Report adopted;
Passed House, 98-0.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
STATE GOVERNMENT**

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended.* 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).

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS**

Majority Report: *Do pass as amended by Committee on State Government.* Signed by 28 members: Representatives Locke, Chair; Inslee, Vice Chair; Spanel, Vice Chair; Silver, Ranking Minority Member; Morton, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appelwick; Belcher; Braddock; Brekke; Dorn; Ebersole; Ferguson; Fuhrman; Hine; Holland; Lisk; May; McLean; Mielke; Nealey; Peery; Pruitt; Rust; H. Sommers; Valle; Vance; Wang; and Wineberry.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7153).

Background: In 1988, the United States granted federal veteran status to certain members of the merchant marine who served in World War II. In 1977, the federal government had

granted similar status to members of the Women's Air Forces Service Pilots (WASPS). Currently, members of these two groups are not officially recognized as veterans by the state of Washington.

A number of benefits are available to individuals who are recognized by the state as veterans. For example, veterans meeting certain conditions may receive up to five years' service credit in the calculation of their retirement benefits. Veterans and their families in need or the families of deceased veterans in need can receive aid from the Veterans' Assistance Fund, a relief program administered at the county level. In addition, disabled veterans or veterans who were prisoners of war may receive special vehicle licenses at no charge, free state hunting and fishing licenses, and free admission to and free use of campsites in state parks.

Summary of Bill: Members of the merchant marine who served in World War II and members of the WASPS are added to the state's definition of "veteran." In order to qualify for state veteran benefits, a member of one of these groups must have an honorable discharge or a discharge for physical reasons with an honorable record. Members of the merchant marine must have been employed on an ocean-going ship during the period of armed conflict December 7, 1941, to August 15, 1945, and must have been employed by the War Shipping Administration, the Office of Defense Transportation, the U.S. Army Transport Service, or the Naval Transportation Service.

The statute concerning membership in the Soldiers' Home or Colony or the Veterans' Home is modified to include a definition of "veteran." The definition is the same as the amended definition above.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: (State Government) The companion measure to this bill was passed earlier by this committee; it is hoped that the committee will pass it again. Merchant marines are pleased that the WASPS are included in this version. Six states have authorized similar status for these groups. The bill will not provide these people with many benefits, but it does honor them. It was surprising that the other bill ran into a stumbling block in the Appropriations Committee; the bill should cost very little. The federal government has taken the step to recognize these people as veterans. It is high time that the State did the same. Most of these

people are 70 to 80 years old and can't wait much longer.
All this bill does is grant recognition.

(Appropriations) None.

Testimony Against: (State Government) None.

(Appropriations) None.

Witnesses: (State Government) Senator Conner; Harold Schmidt and James Colamarino, American Merchant Marine Veterans Association; and Keith Sherman, Veterans Legislative Coalition (all in favor).

(Appropriations) None.