

**SENATE BILL REPORT**

**SB 5843**

**AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS,  
MARCH 4, 1991**

**Brief Description:** Creating the veterans' award fund.

**SPONSORS:** Senators Thorsness, L. Smith, McCaslin, Oke, McDonald, Erwin, Amondson, Metcalf, Roach, West and Rasmussen.

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS**

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5843 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chairman; Roach, Vice Chairman; and Matson.

**Staff:** Martin Lovinger (786-7443)

**Hearing Dates:** March 4, 1991

**BACKGROUND:**

The people of the State of Washington have recognized the sacrifices of the men and women who served in the military in World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and in Vietnam by authorizing the payment of compensation in the form of an award. It is felt that those who serve in the current hostilities in the Persian Gulf deserve the same recognition. It is also recognized that no government funding is currently available for such an award. It is felt that the people of Washington would enthusiastically give a voluntary donation to fund a one-time award, as opposed to supporting a tax increase for this purpose.

**SUMMARY:**

The original bill was not considered.

**EFFECT OF PROPOSED SUBSTITUTE:**

A veterans' award fund is created in the State Treasury. The fund will be administered by the State Treasurer and the Department of Veterans Affairs. The sum of \$300,000 is appropriated to finance the initial costs of the fund. The Director of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall employ those necessary to carry out the provisions of the act. One person will be appointed as veteran's award program administrator. All employees of this program are to be paid by warrants drawn upon the fund. The program administrator is required to plan and direct a statewide voluntary fundraising drive to fund the award program. A Desert Storm Service Award

Commission of 12 members is to be appointed to provide overview and guidance.

Only persons who were residents of the state of Washington for one year prior to entry into service or recall to duty are eligible for the award. The specifics of the application process are set forth. The award is \$50 for each month of service beginning with August 2, 1990 up to a maximum of \$600. For those who served in the Persian Gulf there is an additional \$50 per month with a maximum award up to \$1,200. There is an automatic \$1,200 award to the survivors of those who die or are missing in action and presumed dead. In addition, \$500 will be paid to help defray funeral expenses upon the death of a person qualified to receive the award.

In lieu of a cash award, those eligible could apply the amount toward tuition at any state or private school within the state. The institutions accepting this arrangement will be reimbursed at the time the award would otherwise be made.

Awards will only be made if funds are available. A priority for payment of awards on a monthly basis is established. Highest priority is awards for deaths resulting from hostile actions followed by burial compensation, in-theatre service, and all other claims. All claims must be made within a one year time period after the termination of the crisis. Claims can be filed by guardians or institutions on behalf of physically or mentally incompetent eligible persons. Persons who receive other than honorable discharges are not eligible to receive awards. No awards will be made prior to January 2, 1992.

**Appropriation:** \$300,000

**Revenue:** none

**Fiscal Note:** available

**TESTIMONY FOR:**

There is a need to send the right message for a job well done to the volunteers who serve in the armed forces upon their return from the Persian Gulf. The amount of service time and sacrifice is far greater than the 41 days of actual fighting. The Department of Veterans Affairs is best able to administer this program.

**TESTIMONY AGAINST:**

There is a poor track record for bills based on voluntary public subscription. Participation is often motivated by guilt. An award program should be funded by taxation or a bond issue. The responsibility for such an award should be on the Legislature not the public. The form of the funding sets a dangerous precedent. There is a history of problems in public subscription programs even where the program is popular.

**TESTIFIED:** Gerrit Kuiken, veteran (pro); Bill Merifield, Veteran's Coalition and Order of the Purple Heart (con); Dan Grimm, State Treasurer (pro)