
Appropriations Committee

SSB 5112

Brief Description: Providing public employment retirement credits and education fee waivers for veterans of the Afghanistan conflict and the Persian Gulf War II.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators Shin, Schmidt, Rockefeller, Rasmussen, Kline, Sheldon, Keiser, Doumit, Berkey, Kastama, Haugen, McAuliffe, Franklin, Johnson, Kohl-Welles, Benson and Oke).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Adds service in the Persian Gulf combat zone as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom to the armed conflicts that qualify a member as a veteran for non-interruptive military service credit in PERS 1.
- Gives authority to higher education institutions to exempt veterans of the Afghanistan conflict, or veterans who served in the second Persian Gulf combat zone, from all or a portion of the increases in tuition and fees that have occurred since the time of the conflict in which the veteran served.

Hearing Date:

Staff: Brian Enslow (786-7143).

Background:

All of Washington's state-sponsored retirement systems provide credit for interruptive military service, but only two plans provide military service credit for non-interruptive military service. Non-interruptive military service credit applies to military service rendered before or after joining the Public Employees' Retirement System Plan 1 (PERS 1) or the Washington State Patrol Retirement System Plan 1 for up to 5 years of credit after 25 years of plan membership.

While interruptive military service credit is required to be offered by all retirement plans by federal law, non-interruptive military service is not. The conflicts and types of military service credit that qualify a member of PERS 1 as a veteran for non-interruptive service credit are specifically listed in state law.

An additional state benefit available to veterans is eligibility for tuition and fee waivers from the public baccalaureate institutions and community colleges. The state higher education institutions are granted the authority by the Legislature to waive all or a portion of tuition and fees for

veterans. All waiver programs are permissive for the institutions. Currently, there are three separate statutes that provide tuition waiver authority for veterans.

Veterans of the first Persian Gulf War may be exempted from any increase in student tuition or fees that occurred after the 1990-91 academic year. To qualify for the exemption, the veteran must be a resident student and must have served in the Persian Gulf combat zone as designated by executive order of the President of the United States during 1991.

Veterans of the Vietnam conflict are eligible for a waiver of tuition increases that have occurred since October 1977. To qualify for the waiver the veteran must be a resident student and must have been on active federal service in the armed forces during the period August 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975.

A veteran enrolled in an institution on or before 1977, including veterans of both World Wars and the Korean conflict, is also eligible under statute for a full or partial tuition waiver if he or she is no longer eligible for federal education or vocational benefits.

Summary of Bill:

Military service in the Persian Gulf combat zone as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and service in southern or central Asia as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom are added to the list of criteria that qualify an individual as a "veteran" for purposes of PERS 1.

The governing boards of the state's public higher education institutions are given the authority to exempt veterans of the Afghanistan conflict, or veterans who served in the second Persian Gulf combat zone, from all or a portion of the increases in tuition and fees that have occurred since the time of the conflict in which the veteran served.

The Afghanistan conflict is defined in the bill to include all persons who served on active duty in the armed forces during or after any portion of the 2001 calendar year in southern or central Asia as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. The second Persian Gulf combat zone is defined in the bill to include all persons who served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States during or after the 2002-03 academic year in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.