

## Statement on Signing Veterans Benefits Legislation *November 2, 1994*

Today I am pleased to sign into law H.R. 5244, the "Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1994" and H.R. 3313, the "Veterans Health Programs Extension Act of 1994." These bills address important areas of concern for our Nation's veterans.

The primary purpose of H.R. 5244, the "Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1994," is to authorize compensation to Persian Gulf War veterans suffering from disabilities resulting from undiagnosed illnesses possibly incurred during service in the Persian Gulf theater of operations.

Some of our Persian Gulf War veterans are suffering from illnesses that cannot be diagnosed based upon current available scientific and medical data. The lack of a diagnosis at this point, however, should not stop us from providing an expeditious and compassionate response to these veterans' needs. Our Nation is keenly aware of its responsibility to the brave men and women who so capably served our country during the Persian Gulf conflict. This legislation is designed to address their needs.

The Act authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to compensate Persian Gulf War veterans who suffer chronic disabilities from undiagnosed illnesses that became manifest during or within a specified time after their service in the Gulf region. It also requires the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and implement a uniform and comprehensive medical evaluation protocol for veterans of the Persian Gulf conflict suffering from unexplained illnesses. I am pleased to say that this protocol has already been established. VA medical centers and facilities are currently providing appropriate medical assessment, diagnoses, and treatment to Persian Gulf War veterans.

This Act will help to further our investigation into the adverse health consequences that may be associated with service in the Persian Gulf, including potential risks to the family members

of our veterans, by requiring the VA to evaluate the health status of spouses and children of Persian Gulf War veterans. It also requires the VA to implement an outreach program for Persian Gulf War veterans, including a newsletter and a toll-free telephone number to provide information concerning available benefits.

The "Veterans Health Programs Extension Act of 1994," H.R. 3313, will extend the VA's authority to operate a number of veterans programs and activities. Significantly, this Act will extend the VA's authority to provide Persian Gulf War veterans with hospital, nursing home, and outpatient medical care for disabilities possibly incurred from exposure to toxic substances or environmental hazards during service in the Persian Gulf. It also extends the VA's authority to provide Vietnam veterans with hospital and nursing home care for disabilities, which may have resulted from exposure to dioxin. The Act also extends the VA's authority to provide priority health care services for disabilities possibly related to exposure to ionizing radiation during nuclear testing or during certain service in Japan following World War II. Finally, the Act also authorizes appropriations of \$379.4 million for major medical facility construction and repair projects and 15.8 million for major medical facility leases for the VA.

Because of the important benefits that this legislation will provide to our Nation's veterans and their families, I am very gratified to sign these two bills into law.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,  
November 2, 1994.

NOTE: H.R. 5244, approved November 2, was assigned Public Law No. 103-446, and H.R. 3313, approved November 2, was assigned Public Law No. 103-452.