

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1492

To establish the Commission on America and its Veterans.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 11, 2013

Mr. McDERMOTT (for himself, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Mrs. CAPPS, Mr. FARR, Ms. NORTON, Mr. JONES, Mr. RUSH, Ms. WILSON of Florida, Mr. RYAN of Ohio, Ms. SINEMA, Mr. ENYART, Mr. CICILLINE, Ms. BORDALLO, Mr. LOWENTHAL, Mr. VARGAS, Mr. GRIJALVA, Ms. LEE of California, and Mr. McNERNEY) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on Armed Services, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To establish the Commission on America and its Veterans.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION.**

4 There is established an independent commission in
5 the executive branch to be known as the "Commission on
6 America and its Veterans" (referred to in this Act as the
7 "Commission").

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds the following:

3 (1) After more than a decade of war, and much
4 work to help members of the Armed Forces return-
5 ing home from the battlefield, the United States
6 needs a wider and more thorough process for wel-
7 coming members back, taking care of their needs,
8 and reintegrating them into society.

9 (2) Many initiatives exist that provide help for
10 the men and women who have fought, but there are
11 gaps in our support for veterans that need to be ad-
12 dressed.

13 (3) The United States has waged wars, but not
14 all are involved in fighting those wars, and the
15 United States needs to be more deeply and regularly
16 connected with members and their experiences in
17 war and returning from war.

18 (4) Veterans contribute mightily to the society
19 of the United States but many veterans endure on-
20 going psychological trauma, challenges with employ-
21 ment, crime and dislocation, and veterans' families
22 and communities are also faced with the after-effects
23 of war in ways that need to be publicly addressed.

24 (5) The Nation needs a whole-of-society ap-
25 proach to improving the veteran's position in society,
26 and improving how we welcome veterans when they

1 return, and improving veterans' experience when
2 they come back, and do so in a way that helps vet-
3 erans, their families, and their communities.

4 **SEC. 3. DUTIES OF COMMISSION.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Commission shall—

6 (1) not later than January 31, 2014, submit to
7 the President and Congress a report suggesting
8 ceremonies and events to be held throughout the
9 United States to acknowledge the wars recently
10 fought and for the heroism displayed by members of
11 the Armed Forces and the costs in lives and injuries
12 paid by members, families, and communities;

13 (2) not later than December 31, 2014, submit
14 to the President and Congress a report on the find-
15 ings, conclusions, and legislative or other rec-
16 ommendations of the Commission with respect to
17 any deficiency in how the United States welcomes
18 back members of the Armed Forces returning home,
19 including—

20 (A) by studying the entirety of the re-
21 integration experience on the member, the fam-
22 ily of the member, and the community of the
23 member to identify any such deficiencies that
24 can be addressed to make such reintegration a
25 complete and positive experience; and

1 (B) with a particular emphasis on the ef-
2 fects of post-traumatic stress and the other so-
3 cial and health issues of members and veterans;
4 (3) not later than 120 days after the date of
5 the enactment of this Act, begin convening conversa-
6 tions throughout the United States—

7 (A) on the effect of war on members, the
8 families of members, and the communities of
9 members; and

10 (B) addressing the reintegration experience
11 and the gap between the military, veterans, and
12 civilian life; and

13 (4) beginning on the date that is 180 days after
14 the date of the enactment of this Act, and at regular
15 intervals thereafter during the life of the Commis-
16 sion, including a final report at the end of such life,
17 submit to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs rec-
18 ommendations regarding the Office of Armed Serv-
19 ices and Veterans Public Outreach established under
20 section 9, including how to best conduct an ongoing
21 interaction between members of the Armed Forces,
22 veterans, and civilians, particularly with young peo-
23 ple, in which members and veterans share their sto-
24 ries and the effect of their service and reintegration

1 experience directly with civilians and for recorded
2 history.

3 (b) INTERIM REPORTS.—The Commission may sub-
4 mit to the President and Congress interim reports con-
5 taining such findings, conclusions, and recommendations
6 as have been agreed to by a majority of Commission mem-
7 bers.

8 **SEC. 4. COMPOSITION OF COMMISSION.**

9 (a) MEMBERS.—The Commission shall be composed
10 of 18 members as follows:

11 (1) One member, who shall serve as chairman
12 of the Commission, shall be appointed by the Presi-
13 dent.

14 (2) One member, who shall serve as vice chair-
15 man of the Commission, shall be appointed by the
16 Speaker of the House of Representatives.

17 (3) Four members shall be appointed by the
18 majority leader of the Senate.

19 (4) Four members shall be appointed by the
20 Speaker of the House of Representatives (in addition
21 to the one member appointed under paragraph (2)).

22 (5) Four members shall be appointed by the mi-
23 nority leader of the Senate.

24 (6) Four members shall be appointed by the mi-
25 nority leader of the House of Representatives.

1 (b) QUALIFICATIONS.—

2 (1) EXPERTISE.—Members of the Commission
3 shall be appointed from among individuals who have
4 personally and professionally experienced the effects
5 of war on the Armed Forces, families, and society.

6 (2) NONGOVERNMENTAL APPOINTEES.—Mem-
7 bers of the Commission may not be an officer or em-
8 ployee of the Federal Government.

9 (3) VETERANS INCLUDED.—Not less than one
10 member of the Commission appointed under each of
11 paragraphs (3) through (6) of subsection (a) shall be
12 a veteran.

13 (4) DEADLINE FOR APPOINTMENT.—Members
14 of the Commission shall be appointed not later than
15 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

16 (c) VACANCIES.—Except as provided in subsection
17 (e)(3) with respect to a quorum, any vacancy in the Com-
18 mission shall not affect its powers. A vacancy in the Com-
19 mission shall be filled in the manner in which the original
20 appointment was made.

21 (d) COMPENSATION.—

22 (1) PAY.—Except as provided by paragraph
23 (2), members of the Commission shall serve without
24 pay.

1 (2) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—Each member shall
2 receive travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of
3 subsistence, in accordance with applicable provisions
4 under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title 5, United
5 States Code, including section 5703.

6 (e) INITIAL MEETING; RULES OF PROCEDURE;
7 QUORUM.—

8 (1) INITIAL MEETING.—The Commission shall
9 hold the initial meeting of the Commission not later
10 than 60 days after the date of the enactment of this
11 Act.

12 (2) MEETINGS.—After the initial meeting under
13 paragraph (1), the Commission shall meet at the call
14 of the chairman or a majority of members.

15 (3) QUORUM.—Ten members of the Commis-
16 sion shall constitute a quorum but a lesser number
17 may hold hearings.

18 (4) RULES OF PROCEDURE.—The Commission
19 may establish rules for the conduct of the business
20 of the Commission, if such rules are not inconsistent
21 with this Act or other applicable law.

22 **SEC. 5. POWERS OF COMMISSION.**

23 (a) HEARINGS.—For the purpose of carrying out this
24 Act, the Commission (or on the authority of the Commis-
25 sion, any subcommittee, member, or designated staff

1 thereof), may hold such hearings and sit and act at such
2 times and places, take such testimony, receive such evi-
3 dence, and administer such oaths as the Commission con-
4 siderers appropriate. The Commission shall hold not less
5 than one hearing in each of the several States and the
6 District of Columbia and may hold hearings in any com-
7 monwealth, territory, or possession of the United States
8 as the Commission determines appropriate.

9 (b) CONTRACTING.—To the extent or in the amounts
10 provided in advance in appropriation Acts, the Commis-
11 sion may enter into contracts to enable the Commission
12 to carry out the responsibilities of the Commission under
13 this Act.

14 (c) INFORMATION FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.—The
15 Commission may secure directly from any department or
16 agency of the United States information necessary to en-
17 able it to carry out this Act. Upon request of the chairman
18 of the Commission, the chairman of any subcommittee cre-
19 ated by a majority of the Commission, or any member des-
20 ignated by a majority of the Commission, the head of that
21 department or agency shall furnish that information to the
22 Commission.

23 (d) ASSISTANCE FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.—

24 (1) GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION.—

25 Upon the request of the Commission, the Adminis-

1 trator of General Services shall provide to the Com-
2 mission, on a reimbursable basis, the administrative
3 support services and other services necessary for the
4 Commission to carry out the responsibilities of the
5 Commission under this Act.

6 (2) OTHER DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES.—In
7 addition to the assistance described in paragraph
8 (1), the head of any department or agency of the
9 United States may provide to the Commission such
10 services, funds, facilities, staff, and other support
11 services as they may determine advisable and as may
12 be authorized by law.

13 (e) GIFTS.—The Commission may accept, use, and
14 dispose of gifts, bequests, or devises of services or prop-
15 erty, both real and personal, for the purpose of aiding or
16 facilitating the work of the Commission. Gifts, bequests,
17 or devises of money and proceeds from sales of other prop-
18 erty received as gifts, bequests, or devises shall be depos-
19 ited in the Treasury and shall be available for disburse-
20 ment upon order of the chairman, vice chairman, or des-
21 ignee.

22 (f) MAILS.—The Commission may use the United
23 States mails in the same manner and under the same con-
24 ditions as other departments and agencies of the United
25 States.

1 **SEC. 6. STAFF.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—

3 (1) APPOINTMENT AND COMPENSATION.—The
4 chairman, in accordance with rules agreed upon by
5 the Commission, shall appoint and fix the compensa-
6 tion of a staff director and such other personnel as
7 may be necessary to enable the Commission to carry
8 out the responsibilities of the Commission, without
9 regard to the provisions of title 5, United States
10 Code, governing appointments in the competitive
11 service, and without regard to the provisions of
12 chapter 51 and subchapter III of chapter 53 of such
13 title relating to classification and General Schedule
14 pay rates, except that no rate of pay fixed under this
15 subsection may exceed the equivalent of that payable
16 for a position at level III of the Executive Schedule
17 under section 5316 of title 5, United States Code.

18 (2) PERSONNEL AS FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.—
19 The executive director and any employee of the
20 Commission (not including members appointed
21 under section 4(a)) shall be employees under section
22 2105 of title 5, United States Code, for purposes of
23 chapters 63, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87, 89, and 90 of that
24 title.

25 (b) DETAILEES.—Any employee of the Federal Gov-
26 ernment may be detailed by the head of the department

1 or agency of the employee to the Commission without re-
2 imbursement from the Commission, and such detailee
3 shall retain the rights, status, and privileges of the
4 detailee's regular employment without interruption.

5 (c) EXPERT AND CONSULTANT SERVICES.—The
6 Commission may procure the services of experts and con-
7 sultants in accordance with section 3109 of title 5, United
8 States Code, but at rates not to exceed the daily rate paid
9 a person occupying a position at level IV of the Executive
10 Schedule under section 5315 of title 5, United States
11 Code.

12 (d) VOLUNTEER SERVICES.—Notwithstanding sec-
13 tion 1342 of title 31, United States Code, the Commission
14 may accept and use voluntary and uncompensated services
15 as the Commission determines necessary.

16 **SEC. 7. NONAPPLICABILITY OF FEDERAL ADVISORY COM-**
17 **MITTEE ACT.**

18 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Federal Advisory Committee
19 Act (5 U.S.C. App.) shall not apply to the Commission.

20 (b) PUBLIC MEETINGS AND RELEASE OF PUBLIC
21 VERSIONS OF REPORTS.—The Commission shall—

22 (1) hold public hearings and meetings to the ex-
23 tent appropriate; and

24 (2) release public versions of the reports re-
25 quired under section 3.

1 (c) PUBLIC HEARINGS.—Any public hearings of the
2 Commission shall be conducted in a manner consistent
3 with the protection of information provided to or developed
4 for or by the Commission as required by any applicable
5 law, regulation, or Executive order.

6 **SEC. 8. TERMINATION.**

7 (a) TERMINATION.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Commission shall termi-
9 nate on May 31, 2016.

10 (2) ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES BEFORE TER-
11 MINATION.—The Commission may use the 60-day
12 period preceding the date on which it terminates
13 under paragraph (1) for the purpose of concluding
14 its activities, including providing testimony to com-
15 mittees of Congress concerning its reports and dis-
16 seminating the final report.

17 **SEC. 9. ESTABLISHMENT OF OFFICE OF ARMED SERVICES**
18 **AND VETERANS PUBLIC OUTREACH.**

19 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans
20 Affairs shall establish within the Department of Veterans
21 Affairs an Office of Armed Services and Veterans Public
22 Outreach (in this section referred to as the “Office”).

23 (b) DUTIES.—The Office shall work with the Armed
24 Forces, veterans service organizations, the private and
25 public sectors, nonprofit organizations, local educational

1 agencies, and other organizations to help match veterans
2 and members of the Armed Forces with civilian audiences
3 in order for private and nonprofit organizations to conduct
4 ongoing interactions between members, veterans, and civil-
5 ians, particularly with young people, in which members
6 and veterans share their stories and the effect of their
7 service and reintegration experience directly with civilians
8 and for recorded history.

9 **SEC. 10. FUNDING.**

10 This Act shall not be construed to increase the
11 amount of appropriations that are authorized to be appro-
12 priated for any fiscal year.

13 **SEC. 11. VETERAN DEFINED.**

14 In this section, the term “veteran” has the meaning
15 given that term in section 101(2) of title 38, United States
16 Code.

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