

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

H.C.R. 16
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Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
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Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The United States Merchant Marine is made up of a fleet of ships used for commercial transport during peace time and as an auxiliary to the United States Navy during times of war. The members of the United States Merchant Marine served the United States bravely in World War II, suffering the highest casualty rate of any branch of the military. In spite of their dedicated and heroic service, these men and women are not considered veterans under the Social Security Act, thereby denying them the financial support in their later years that is afforded to those whom they served alongside in war time.

Merchant mariners are considered military personnel in times of war and have an illustrious history of defending this country that started with contributing to American independence by disrupting the British supply chain during the Revolutionary War. The Merchant Marine ranks during World War II were filled through campaigns by the War Shipping Administration and military recruiters, served under the auspices of the military, included transferred members from other branches of the military, and were instructed by their commanders about the critical, patriotic importance of service on troop and supply ships. The delivery of tanks, aircraft, jeeps, gasoline, medicine, and food rations by the Merchant Marine to troops in every theater of World War II was integral to the Allies' victory.

Despite accolades from then General Dwight D. Eisenhower and President Franklin D. Roosevelt for the vital military contribution and service in every invasion from Normandy to Okinawa, the merchant mariners were excluded from the GI Bill of Rights enacted in 1945, and for 43 years the United States government denied them benefits ranging from housing to health care until Congress awarded them veterans' status in 1988--too late for 125,000 mariners to benefit, roughly half of those who had served; moreover, these merchant mariners continue to be denied veterans' benefits under the Social Security Act.

The Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2005 appropriately honors the service of World War II merchant mariners and attempts to rectify the previous denial of financial benefits by providing a monthly monetary benefit, from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, for each Merchant Marine World War II veteran, or surviving spouse, and bestowing veteran status upon them under the Social Security Act, qualifying these brave individuals for Social Security veterans' benefits.

RESOLVED

That the 80th Legislature of the State of Texas hereby respectfully urge the Congress of the United States to support the Belated Thank You to the Merchant Mariners of World War II Act of 2005, and that the Texas secretary of state forward official copies of this resolution to the president of the United States, to the speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate of the United States Congress, and to all the members of the Texas delegation to the congress with the request that this resolution be officially entered in the Congressional Record as a memorial to the Congress of the United States of America.