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## **TESTIMONY**

of

**RICHARD JONES**  
**AMVETS NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR**

before the

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON BENEFITS**  
**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

on

**H.R. 1460, THE VETERANS ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACT**  
**OF 2003; H.R. 1712, THE VETERANS FEDERAL**  
**PROCUREMENT OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 2003; AND**  
**H.R. 1716, THE VETERANS EARN AND LEARN ACT OF**  
**2003**

Wednesday, April 30, 2003,  
10:00 am, Room 334  
Cannon House Office Building

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony to the Benefits Subcommittee on the three bills subject to this legislative hearing. AMVETS is pleased to present our views regarding H.R. 1460, the Veterans Entrepreneurship Act of 2003; H.R. 1712, the Veterans Federal Procurement Opportunity Act of 2003; and H.R. 1716, the Veterans Earn and Learn Act of 2003.

Mr. Chairman, AMVETS has been a leader since 1944 in helping to preserve the freedoms secured by America's Armed Forces. Today, our organization continues its proud tradition, providing, not only support for veterans and the active military in procuring their earned entitlements, but also an array of community services that enhance the quality of life for this nation's citizens.

### **H.R. 1460, the Veterans Entrepreneurship Act of 2003**

H.R. 1460, introduced by Representative Renzi, seeks to provide our nation's veterans economic opportunities that allow them to create and prosper their own enterprises. Within our veterans community lays an untapped well of ready and able men and women with the abilities and work ethic to be successful given the opportunity. By funding enrollment in non-credit and non-degree business courses offered at Small Business Administration centers throughout the nation, this legislation would help veterans learn the self-employment skills necessary to run a successful business enterprise. Additionally, H.R. 1460 would liberalize certain VA practices that require disabled veterans to state an inability to work for others before becoming eligible for certain entrepreneurial services provided by VA rehabilitation programs. This change would help make entrepreneurship a more integral part of rehabilitation for disabled veterans and bolster the opportunity for disabled veterans to foster home-based businesses more readily.

H.R. 1460 would also grant discretionary authority to procurement officers to award contracts up to \$5 million for manufacturing awards and up to \$3 million for non-manufacturing awards to disabled veterans. This provision would help priorities be met and would allow disabled veteran businesses to "catch up" to more "contract-advanced" providers with long-standing ties to federal agencies. AMVETS supports H.R. 1460 and urges its passage by the full House.

## **H.R. 1712, the Veterans Federal Procurement Opportunity Act of 2003**

As the Subcommittee is well aware, in August 1999 the Congress passed Public Law 106-50, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999. The goals of 106-50 were noble, but sadly, in the nearly four years since its passage, little has been done by the executive agencies to meet these goals. As a participant in the Task Force for Veterans' Entrepreneurship, AMVETS has many concerns with the lack of implementation of Public Law 106-50. To address these and other concerns, Ranking Member Evans has introduced H.R. 1712.

To advance low-income and service-connected (rated 10 percent or greater) veterans entrance into federal contracting, H.R. 1712 would establish a new development program for these veterans that is similar to so-called "8(a)" businesses. By creating a new designation for low-income and service-connected veterans, the bill allows these veterans into federal contracting without forcing them to compete against those covered under the "8(a)" program. Further, H.R. 1712 would provide assistance, both financial and non-financial, to qualified veterans for their business creation. Under this bill, compensation received by these veterans related to their disability or military service would not be counted as income against eligibility.

The goal of awarding 3 percent of federal contracting to service-connected disabled veterans established by Public Law 106-50 has been habitually ignored by federal agencies. With this in mind, H.R. 1712 would provide "set-aside" authority to federal agencies for them to better reach the goal of at least 3 percent of their contracts awarded to service-connected disabled veterans. The bill also would eliminate "double counting." A contract to a service-connected disabled veteran would be counted as having been awarded to that single subcategory for tally in the Federal Procurement Data System. Under this system, much more realistic statistics of an agency's performance under both "8(a)" and the new designation created by this bill for service-connected disabled veterans could be established.

Finally, H.R. 1712 would place in a "lock-box" agency procurement funding that equaled the equivalent amount of the percentage goal established for service-connected disabled veteran

contracting. In short, should an agency not meet its goal of providing at least 3 percent of its prime contracts to service-connected disabled veterans, then 3 percent of its funding would be withheld and those funds could only be used to contract with eligible service-connected disabled veterans until the goals are met. AMVETS fully supports H.R. 1712 and urges its passage by the full House.

### **H.R. 1716, the Veterans Earn and Learn Act of 2003**

H.R. 1716, introduced by Chairman Smith, seeks to ensure that veterans have the best opportunity to receive valuable training for a job while employed and learning through on-the-job-training (OJT) and/or apprenticeships programs. The changes sought by H.R. 1716 would modernize VA's OJT and apprenticeship programs to reflect the needs of American business in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Current VA OJT and apprenticeship programs see limited use. For fiscal year 2001, only 4.2 percent of veterans were enrolled in an OJT or apprenticeship program. According to Department of Labor figures, over 850 occupations in the United States offer apprenticeships. For those veterans who wish not to attend a traditional classroom-based college program, these OJT and apprenticeship programs offer veterans the ability to apply their military vocation to a civilian career or train for an entirely new occupation. Several States, including Missouri and Pennsylvania, have mounted aggressive programs to place veterans in jobs offering OJT or apprenticeships, and these programs have shown encouraging results.

Enactment of H.R. 1716 would provide veterans with greater opportunities for employment by helping them obtain the professional licenses and accreditation they require to get on the job track they have chosen. AMVETS fully supports H.R. 1716 and urges its passage by the full House.

Again, thank you this opportunity to present our views, and we sincerely appreciate your vigilance in efforts to improve veterans earned benefits and services.