

# Congressman Jim Kolbe

8<sup>th</sup> District Arizona

## Statement



December 6, 2005

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### Congress Improves Veterans Benefits

As one of the few remaining combat veterans in Congress, I have a strong personal interest in those who have worn a uniform in defense of our nation. I have consistently advocated improvements in benefits for our military, retirees, and veterans, and will continue to do so.

Recently, I supported legislation that has provided two of the most significant benefits ever for military retirees, improvements to the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) and concurrent receipt.

Survivor Benefit Plan legislation passed Congress and was signed into law on October 28, 2004 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 (Public Law 108-375). Concurrent receipt legislation that will provide over \$22 billion to more than 250,000 disabled military retirees over 10 years passed Congress and was signed into law on November 24, 2003 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 (Public Law 108-136).

Congress has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to veterans; my own commitment remains as firm as ever. Arizona's Eighth Congressional District has more than 14,000 military retirees, making it the ninth largest retiree population of any Congressional district in the nation. I will continue to seek ways to assure all veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

Following is a list of key veterans legislation of the current and most recent Congresses. All of these measures are on top of the landmark comprehensive health care legislation for veterans, known as Tricare-for-Life, which Congress passed and the President signed in 2000 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-398). Under Tricare-for Life, Congress provides lifetime medical care for military retirees and their families starting October 1, 2001.

**Key Veterans Legislation Enacted into Law in 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005-2006):**

**Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2006 (HR 2528)**

- Signed into law November 30, 2005
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor
- Key Provisions:
  - ✓ Provides a total of over \$70 billion for the VA, an increase of more than \$4 billion over the prior year.
  - ✓ Veterans Medical Services are funded at \$22.5 billion, \$1.7 billion above the previous year. Over the last two years, Department of Veterans Affairs medical care spending has increased by 18%.
  - ✓ Does not institute the new annual enrollment fees or co-pays that the Administration proposed.
  - ✓ \$2.2 billion is allocated for specialty mental health care and the bill doubles funding for mental health research.
  - ✓ Veterans benefits increased by \$1.9 billion.
  - ✓ Requires a comprehensive study on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder focusing on improving mental health research, care, and access to information.

**Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2005 (S 1234)**

- Signed into law November 22, 2005.
- Congressman Kolbe cosponsored similar bill in House, HR 1220
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Provides a cost-of-living adjustment to the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation paid to certain spouses and dependent children of service-disabled veterans.

**Key Veterans Legislation Enacted into Law in 108<sup>th</sup> Congress (2003-2004):**

**Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2005 (HR 5041)**

- Signed into law as part of Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY05 (HR 4818) on December 8, 2004 (Public Law 108-447).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key Provisions:
  - ✓ Provides a total of \$65.96 billion for the VA, which is \$4.11 billion, or 6.6%, over the previous year.
  - ✓ Does not institute the new annual enrollment fees or co-pays that the Administration proposed.

- ✓ Provides total resources of \$30.3 billion for the Veterans Health Administration, nearly \$2 billion over the previous year.
- ✓ \$19.5 billion for Medical Services
- ✓ \$4.7 billion for Medical Administration
- ✓ \$3.7 billion for Medical Facilities
- ✓ \$385 million for Medical Research.

**National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 (HR 4200)**

- Signed into law October 28, 2004 (Public Law 108-375).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Eliminates by March 2008 the Social Security offset of SBP annuities for survivors of military retirees who are 62 or older.
  - ✓ Eliminates the 10 year phase-in period for full concurrent receipt for retirees rated as 100% disabled, effective January 2005.
  - ✓ Exempts all hospitalized military personnel from paying for meals while hospitalized.

**Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 2004 (S 2486)**

- Signed into law December 10, 2004 (Public Law 108-454).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Increases the voluntary contribution amount that active duty Armed Forces may make in order to receive increased monthly educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB).
  - ✓ Authorizes a pilot program that allows veterans to extend their eligibility period for using MGIB education benefits to obtain specified instruction or training.
  - ✓ Excludes veterans' education benefits from the determination of eligibility for, or the amount of, Federal education grants and loans.
  - ✓ Increases the maximum housing loan guarantee amount for which veterans are eligible.
  - ✓ Gives permanent authority to guarantee adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs) and hybrid ARMs, and to modify interest rates applicable to hybrid ARMs.
  - ✓ Extends administrative and judicial remedies for violations of veterans' preference requirements to all veterans (currently, limited to preference eligible veterans).
  - ✓ Prohibits the collection of copayments from veterans receiving hospice care from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

**Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Personnel Enhancement Act of 2004 (S 2484)**

- Signed into law December 3, 2004 (Public Law 108-445).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Simplifies and improves pay provisions for VA physicians and dentists.
  - ✓ Authorizes alternate work schedules and executive pay for VA nurses.

**Veterans Health Programs Improvement Act of 2004 (HR 3936)**

- Signed into law November 30, 2004 (Public Law 108-422).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Increases the authorization of appropriations for grants to benefit homeless veterans.
  - ✓ Improves programs for management and administration of veterans' facilities and health care programs.

**Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2004 (HR 4175)**

- Signed into law October 25, 2004.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions: increases, as of December 1, 2004, the rates of veterans' disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled adult children, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children to the same percentage as the increase in benefits provided under title II (Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance) of the Social Security Act.

**Recognizing the 60th anniversary of the Allied landing at Normandy during World War II (S J Res 28)**

- Signed into law June 15, 2004 (Public Law 108-236).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**Establishment of separate campaign medals to be awarded to members of the uniformed services who participate in Operation Enduring Freedom and to members of the uniformed services who participate in Operation Iraqi Freedom (HR 3104)**

- Signed into law May 28, 2004 (Public Law 108-234).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**A bill to require the Secretary of Defense to reimburse members of the United States Armed Forces for certain transportation expenses incurred by the members in connection with leave under the Central Command Rest and Recuperation Leave Program before the program was expanded to include domestic travel (S 2057)**

- Signed into law April 22, 2004 (Public Law 108-220).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**Department of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2004 (HR 2861)**

- Signed into law as part of Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY04 (HR 2673) on January 23, 2004 (Public Law 108-199).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key Provisions:
  - ✓ Provides a total of \$62.02 billion for the VA, which is \$3.9 billion, or 6.7%, over the previous year.
  - ✓ Fully funds the medical needs of those veterans who need it most: those with service-connected disabilities, those with catastrophic needs, and those with very low incomes. HR 2861 meets all of the medical needs for veterans in categories 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.
  - ✓ Does not institute the \$250 annual enrollment fee or \$15 co-pay for non-service connected, moderate income veterans (categories 7 and 8) that the Administration proposed.
  - ✓ Provides total resources of \$28.6 billion for the Veterans Health Administration, \$1.57 billion over the Administration budget request and \$2.9 billion, or 11%, over previous year.
  - ✓ Fully funds the Administration's request to expedite claims processing at the Veterans Benefits Administration bringing total FY04 funding at \$1 billion.

**Veterans' Memorial Preservation and Recognition Act of 2003 (HR 2076)**

- Signed into law May 29, 2003.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Creates a new Federal offense for the destruction of any structure, plaque, statue, or other monument on public property commemorating the service of any person(s) in the armed forces.

**National Defense Authorization Act for FY04 (HR 1588)**

- Signed into law November 24, 2003 (Public Law 108-136).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Establishes an outreach program to assist Tricare beneficiaries in obtaining better access to health care — understanding the specifics of the coverage, obtaining more provider information and gaining more assistance in resolving any difficulties with the program that they may encounter;

- ✓ Eliminated the offset of military retired pay and VA disability compensation for most disabled retirees through 2 programs:
  1. Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP) – true “concurrent receipt,” but not available to all retirees.
    - provides a 10-year phase-out of the offset to military retired pay due to receipt of VA disability compensation;
    - Combined disability rating must be 50% or greater;
    - Must have 20 years of service.
  2. Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC)
    - A special payment for retirees with disabilities specifically related to a combat or combat-related injury;
    - Similar to special payments paid to ex-POWs and Medal of Honor recipients;
    - Must have 20 years of service.

**Military Family Tax Relief Act of 2003 (HR 3365)**

- Signed into law November 11, 2003 (Public Law 108-121).
- Congressman Kolbe cosponsored and voted in favor.
- Increases the death gratuity payable with respect to deceased members of the Armed Forces and to exclude such gratuity from gross income, and to provide additional tax relief for members of the Armed Forces

**Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (HR 2297)**

- Signed into law December 16, 2003 (Public Law 108-183).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Expands and improves certain readjustment benefits for disabled veterans, their surviving spouses and children.

**Selected Reserve Home Loan Equity Act (HR 1257)**

- Passed the House of Representatives on May 22, 2003 by vote of 428-0.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Incorporated into the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (HR 2297), signed into law December 16, 2003.
- Makes permanent the authority for Reservists to have access to VA home loans at same rates as active duty veterans.

**Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003 (S 1156)**

- Signed into law December 6, 2003 (Public Law 108-170).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Includes House-passed Veterans Health Care Facilities Capital Improvement Act (HR 1720).

- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Improve and enhance provision of health care for veterans; to authorize major construction projects and other facilities matters for the Department of Veterans Affairs; to enhance and improve authorities relating to the administration of personnel of the Department of Veterans Affairs; and for other purposes;
  - ✓ Names the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Prescott, Arizona, as the “Bob Stump Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center.”

**Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (HR 100)**

- Signed into law December 19, 2003 (Public Law 108-189).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Legislation to strengthen the rights and protections afforded military personnel called to action duty, including the provision of automatic 90-day stays for civil proceedings, protections against evictions due to nonpayment of rent, and limiting interest to 6 percent on outstanding loan balances.

**National Cemetery Expansion Act of 2003 (HR 1516)**

- Signed into law November 11, 2003 (Public Law 108-109).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Legislation to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish six new national cemeteries for veterans.

**Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003 (HR 1683)**

- Signed into law December 3, 2003 (Public Law 108-147).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Legislation to provide cost-of-living (COLA) increases for disability compensation payments for veterans.

**Columbia Orbiter Memorial Act (HR 1297)**

- Signed into law April 16, 2003 as part of Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2003 (Public Law 108-11).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Legislation to require the construction at Arlington National Cemetery of a memorial to the crew of the Columbia Orbiter.

**Enhancing Cooperation and Resource Sharing Between the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense (HR 1911)**

- Passed the House on May 21 by vote of 426-0.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Incorporated into National Defense Authorization Act for FY04 (HR 1588), signed into law November 24, 2003 (Public Law 108-136).
- Legislation to enhance cooperation and the sharing of resources between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense.

**Key Legislation Enacted into Law in 107<sup>th</sup> Congress (2001-2002):**

**Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act (HR 3447)**

- Signed into law January 23, 2002 (Public Law 107-135).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Increases spending on health programs for veterans by \$1.4 billion;
  - ✓ Lowers out-of-pocket hospitalization expenses for lower income veterans;
  - ✓ Requires the VA to establish chiropractic care programs nationwide;
  - ✓ Authorizes service dog programs for paralyzed and other severely disabled veterans;
  - ✓ Requires the VA to maintain specialized medical programs – such as for mental illness, spinal cord injuries and prosthetics – in each VA region;
  - ✓ Creates new incentive and recruitment programs to attract and retain VA nurses.

**Veterans Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2002 (HR 2620)**

- Signed into law November 26, 2001(Public Law 107-73).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Increases total spending for VA programs by \$3.2 billion (+7%) more than FY01;
  - ✓ Fully funds Veterans Medical Health Care. Total FY02 funding is \$21.3 billion, providing a \$1 billion increase over FY01, \$300 million over the President's request;
  - ✓ Provides a 16% increase in spending for the Veterans Benefits Administration to remedy the backlog of compensation claims;
  - ✓ Provides new methods and authorities for VA to recruit and retain nurses;
  - ✓ Increases accountability of the VA to protect capacity in its specialized health programs for the most seriously disabled veterans;
  - ✓ Reduces hospitalization co-payments for poor veterans;

- ✓ Creates new health care benefits, including service dogs for severely disabled veterans and a chiropractic program.

### **Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act (HR 1291)**

- Signed into law December 27, 2001 (Public Law 107-103).
- Congressman Kolbe cosponsored and voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Authorizes more than \$3.1 billion over 5 years to expand and increase educational, housing, burial and disability benefits;
  - ✓ Boosts the MGIB college education benefit amount by record 46% over 2 years;
  - ✓ Restores lost MGIB benefits for reservists and National Guard members called up to active duty;
  - ✓ Increases Home Loan Guaranty Program;
  - ✓ Increases grants for specially adapted housing for severely disabled veterans;
  - ✓ Increases the automobile and adaptive equipment grant for severely disabled veterans;
  - ✓ Increases burial and funeral expense benefits;
  - ✓ Adds Diabetes Type II to list of service-connected conditions for Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange;
  - ✓ Adds undiagnosed conditions, such as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome and chronic multi-symptom illnesses to list of service-connected conditions for Gulf War veterans;
  - ✓ Repeals the 30-year presumptive period for respiratory cancers associated with exposure to herbicide agents.

### **Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act (HR 2716)**

- Signed into law December 21, 2001 (Public Law 107-95).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Authorizes \$1 billion to aid homeless veterans and prevent veterans from becoming homeless;
  - ✓ Authorizes 2000 additional Section 8 HUD low-income housing vouchers for homeless veterans;
  - ✓ Authorizes 10 new domicilliarities for homeless veterans programs;
  - ✓ Authorizes \$285 million for the Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program;
  - ✓ Authorizes \$250 million for the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program;
  - ✓ Requires VA to provide technical assistance to nonprofit community-based organizations seeking federal funding for homeless programs;
  - ✓ Requires the VA to provide mental health programs wherever primary care is provided;
  - ✓ Earmarks \$10 million for medical care for homeless veterans with special needs, including older veterans, women and substance abusers.

**Veterans Compensation Rate of Amendments of 2001 (HR 2540)**

- Signed into law December 21, 2001 (Public Law 107-94).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Boosts compensation payments for disabled veterans by \$2.5 billion over the next 5 years;
  - ✓ Authorizes an annual COLA for VA benefits programs, adds 3 new conditions for Gulf War syndrome, and makes numerous other changes in VA benefits.

**Veterans Survivors' Benefits Improvements Act (HR 801)**

- Signed into law June 5, 2001 (Public Law 107-14).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Adds \$100 million in new health care benefits for surviving spouses of veterans, and extends life insurance coverage to spouses and children of servicemembers;
  - ✓ Expands CHAMPVA to surviving spouses of veterans who die of a service-connected disability;
  - ✓ Expands Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) to include spouses and children of servicemembers;
  - ✓ Makes retroactive to October 1, 2000 increases in the maximum SGLI benefit for servicemembers killed in the line of duty to \$250,000.

**World War II Memorial (HR 1696)**

- Signed into law May 28, 2001 (Public Law 107-11).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Expedites the construction of the WWII Memorial and ends the delays and obstacles to its completion.

**Legislation Passed by House of Representatives:**

**Recognizing the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Veterans Administration (H Res 361)**

- Passed the House of Representatives on July 18, 2005.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment (HR 1220)**

- Passed the House of Representatives on July 14, 2005.
  - ✓ Similar bill, S 1234, signed into law November 22, 2005.
- Congressman Kolbe cosponsored and voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Increase the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans.

**The Servicemembers' Health Insurance Protection Act of 2005 (HR 2046)**

- Passed the House of Representatives on May 23, 2005.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Limits premium increases on reinstated health insurance on servicemembers who are released from active military service.

**The Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Enhancement Act of 2005 (HR 3200)**

- Passed the House of Representatives on May 23, 2005.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Enhances the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program.

**Veterans Housing and Employment Improvement Act of 2005 (HR 3665)**

- Passed House of Representatives on November 10, 2005.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Assists disabled veterans residing temporarily in housing owned by a family member in acquiring adaptations necessitated by such disability.
  - ✓ Makes permanent (currently, a pilot program) a program to make direct housing loans to Native American veterans.

**Department of Veterans Affairs Information Technology Management Improvement Act of 2005 (HR 4061)**

- Passed House of Representatives on November 2, 2005.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Ensures that the Chief Information Officer (CIO) of the Department of Veterans Affairs has the authority and control necessary for the development, approval, implementation, integration, and oversight of policies, procedures, processes, activities, and systems relating to the management of Department information technology.

**Expressing the sense of Congress that a minute of silence should be observed annually at 11:00 a.m. on Veterans Day, November 11, in honor of the veterans of all United States wars and to memorialize those members of the Armed Forces who gave their lives in the defense of the United States (H Con Res 195)**

- Passed House of Representatives October 7, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**Congratulating and commending the Veterans of Foreign Wars (H J Res 108)**

- Passed House of Representatives October 7, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2004 (HR 4248)**

- Passed House of Representatives October 7, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Increases the authorization of appropriations for FY 2005 for homeless assistance to veterans furnished through the Department of Veterans Affairs.
  - ✓ Makes permanent (current law terminates on December 31, 2004) the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide sexual trauma counseling and appropriate care and services to veterans.

**Servicemembers Legal Protection Act of 2004 (HR 4658)**

- Passed House of Representatives October 7, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Amends the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to make certain improvements and technical corrections to that Act, and to improve legal protections provided to reserve component members called to active duty.

**Department of Veterans Affairs Nurse Recruitment and Retention Act of 2004 (HR 4231)**

- Passed House of Representatives September 30, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Provides for a pilot program in the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve recruitment and retention of nurses.

**Veterans Health Programs and Facilities Enhancement Act of 2004 (HR 4768)**

- Passed House of Representatives September 29, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Authorizes the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to enter into certain major medical facility leases and to transfer real property
  - ✓ To improve management of medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs

**To increase the maximum amount of home loan guaranty available under the home loan guaranty program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (HR 4345)**

- Passed House of Representatives June 24, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**Recognizing and honoring the service of those who volunteer their time to participate in funeral honor guards at the interment or memorialization of deceased veterans of the uniformed services of the United States at national cemeteries across the country (H Con Res 260)**

- Passed House of Representatives June 14, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**Budget Resolution for fiscal year 2005 (S Con Res 95)**

- Passed House of Representatives May 19, 2004.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Provides a significant increase to veterans spending, on top of increases of the past few years;
  - ✓ Total veterans spending is \$70.8 billion – an increase of 15.3% over prior year;
  - ✓ Provides \$1.2 billion over the President’s request for veterans;
  - ✓ Assumes none of the fees or prescription drug co-payment increases that the President proposed.

**National War Permanent Tribute Historical Database Act (HR 2201)**

- Passed House of Representatives May 17, 2004.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.

**Veterans Entrepreneurship and Benefits Improvement Act of 2003 (HR 1460)**

- Passed House of Representatives June 24, 2003.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
  - ✓ Certain provisions incorporated into Veterans Benefits Act of 2003 (HR 2297), signed into law December 16, 2003 (Public Law 108-183).
- Congressman Kolbe cosponsored and voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Authorizes a State agency to approve entrepreneurship (business education) courses for attendance by veterans using veterans’ basic educational assistance provided through the Department of Veterans Affairs;
  - ✓ Improve education and entrepreneurship benefits, housing benefits, and certain other benefits for veterans.

**Injured Soldiers Hospital bill (HR 2998)**

- Passed House of Representatives October 8, 2003.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
  - ✓ Provision included in Department of Defense Appropriations Act, FY04 (HR 2658), signed into law September 30, 2003 (Public Law 108-87).
- Congressman Kolbe cosponsored and voted in favor.
- Exempts members of the uniformed services from an otherwise-applicable requirement for the payment of subsistence charges while hospitalized.

**Armed Forces Tax Fairness Act (HR 1307)**

- Passed House of Representatives March 20, 2003.
  - ✓ Passed Senate.
  - ✓ Major provisions included in Military Family Tax Relief Act of 2003 (also known as the Fallen Patriots Tax Relief Act) (HR 3365), signed into law November 11, 2003 (Public Law 108-121).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Provides tax-free treatment of death gratuity benefits given to survivors of members of the military;
  - ✓ Provides tax-free treatment of dependent care benefits.

**Veterans Health Care Improvement Act (HR 2357)**

- Passed House of Representatives July 21, 2003.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Key provisions:
  - ✓ Expands VA health care services by requiring the appointment of chiropractors;
  - ✓ Extends health care services to Filipino WWII veterans residing in the United States.

**Resolution Recognizing and Supporting the Goals and Ideals of the Year of the Korean War Veteran (H Con Res 212)**

- Passed House of Representatives July 21, 2003.
  - ✓ No action taken in Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Declares to the nation and the world that the American people will never forget our veterans or those who served our nation during the Korean War and requests the President to issue a proclamation calling on the people of the United States to observe the Year of the Korean War Veteran with appropriate ceremonies and activities to thank, honor, and welcome home our Korean War veterans.

**Veterans Health Care Facilities Capital Improvement Act (HR 1720)**

- Passed House of Representatives 417-0 on October 29, 2003.
  - ✓ Senate incorporated provisions into Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003 (S 1156), signed into law December 6, 2003 (Public Law 108-170).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out construction projects for the purpose of improving, renovating, establishing, and updating patient care facilities at Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers.

**Veterans Health Care Improvement Act of 2003 (HR 2357)**

- Passed House of Representatives July 21, 2003.
  - ✓ Senate incorporated provisions into Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003 (S 1156), signed into law December 6, 2003 (Public Law 108-170).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Establish standards of access to care for veterans seeking health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

**Health Care for Veterans of Project 112/Project SHAD Act of 2003 (HR 2433)**

- Passed House of Representatives September 10, 2003.
  - ✓ Senate incorporated certain provisions into Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003 (S 1156), signed into law December 6, 2003 (Public Law 108-170).
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide veterans who participated in certain Department of Defense chemical and biological warfare testing to be provided health care for illness without requirement for proof of service-connection.

**Restore the operation of the Native American Veteran Housing Loan Program (HR 2595)**

- Passed House of Representatives September 10, 2003.
  - ✓ No action taken by Senate.
- Congressman Kolbe voted in favor.
- Restores the operation of the Native American Veteran Housing Loan Program during fiscal year 2003 to the scope of that program as in effect on September 30, 2002.

**Other veterans legislation cosponsored by Congressman Kolbe:**

**109<sup>th</sup> Congress:**

**Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act of 2003 (HR 269)**

- Provides open enrollment period for servicemembers who entered the service prior to MGIB's enactment.

**Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2003 (HR 303)**

- Provides full concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability pay.

**Resuming Education After Defense Service Act of 2005 (HR 772)**

- Makes eligible for basic educational assistance under the Montgomery GI Bill a member of the Selected Reserve who serves on active duty for at least two years aggregate (current law requires two years consecutive).

**Montgomery GI Bill Second Chance Act of 2005 (HR 3195)**

- Establishes an annual "open season" to allow active duty military personnel who did not participate in the MGIB program at the start of their service to sign up.

**108<sup>th</sup> Congress:**

**Increase the military death gratuity from \$12,000 to \$50,000 (HR 5055)**

**Honoring the members of the United States Armed Forces who served in the Vietnam War, and expressing the appreciation of the House of Representatives for the service and sacrifice of all veterans of the Vietnam era (H Res 840)**

**To facilitate the operation, maintenance, and capital improvement of Camp Navajo, Arizona, by the Arizona Army National Guard (HR 3824)**

**Retired Pay Restoration Act of 2003 (HR 303)**

- Provides full concurrent receipt of military retired pay and VA disability pay.

**Former Prisoners of War Special Compensation Act of 2003 (HR 850)**

- Establishes a three-tiered special monthly pension: those who were detained 30-120 days would receive \$150 per month, those detained 121-540 days would receive \$300 per month, and those detained for 540 or more days would receive \$450 per month;
- Compensates former POWs without violating the terms of any treaties.
- Treats all former POWs equally; it does not create separate classes of POWs depending on the war, theater of operations, or other factors.

*Congressman Jim Kolbe*  
*December 6, 2005*

**Montgomery GI Bill Enhancement Act of 2003 (HR 879)**

- Provides open enrollment period for servicemembers who entered the service prior to MGIB's enactment.

**To name the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Prescott, Arizona, as the "Bob Stump Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center" (HR 2806)**

- Congressman Kolbe lead sponsor.
- Incorporated into Veterans Health Care, Capital Asset, and Business Improvement Act of 2003 (S 1156), signed into law December 6, 2003 (Public Law 108-170).

###