

**SENATE BILL REPORT**

**SB 5477**

**AS PASSED SENATE, MARCH 6, 1991**

**Brief Description:** Authorizing veterans' benefits for Women's Air Forces Service Pilots and merchant marines.

**SPONSORS:** Senators Conner, Rasmussen, Bauer and Nelson.

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS**

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators McCaslin, Chairman; Roach, Vice Chairman; Madsen, and Matson.

**Staff:** Barbara Howard (786-7410)

**Hearing Dates:** February 14, 1991

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT**

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS**

**BACKGROUND:**

For the purposes of most state benefit provisions, the term "veteran" does not include those who served with the Women's Air Forces Service Pilots (WASPs) or with the American Merchant Marine during World War II. Those two groups of individuals were acknowledged as veterans on active duty by Congress under Public Law 95-202 enacted in 1977. The WASPs became eligible with the effective date of the act (November 23, 1977). The power to declare the eligibility of veterans of the Merchant Marine was delegated to the Department of Defense. That order was promulgated on January 19, 1988.

**SUMMARY:**

An individual who had active service as a member of the Women's Air Forces Service Pilots or on a merchant vessel and who has received a certificate of release or discharge from active duty is included in the general definition of "veteran" and in the statute defining eligibility for admission to the State Soldiers' Home and Colony at Orting or the Veterans' Home at Retsil.

**Appropriation:** none

**Revenue:** none

**Fiscal Note:** available

**TESTIMONY FOR:**

The service of the crews of the merchant ships was as vital to the outcome of World War II as that of any other active duty personnel. Their mission was to provide the materiel necessary to support combat activity, including such highly dangerous cargo as petroleum and butane gas. As only one example, 100 merchant ships were sunk off the Atlantic Coast, some as close to shore as three miles. State recognition is as significant commemoration of the crews' contribution as the acknowledgment by Congress in 1977.

The women pilots in the WASPs deserve equal recognition. Ferrying the bombers across the Atlantic, they were subject to the same enemy air attacks as any other combatant.

**TESTIMONY AGAINST:** None

**TESTIFIED:** PRO: Harold Schmidt, Sequim, James Colamarino, Bellevue, American Merchant Marine Association; Richard Finnigan, Disabled American Veterans; Keith Sherman, Veterans Coalition

**HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):**

The formal identification of persons who served in the Merchant Marine and a provision prohibiting civilians from receiving veterans' benefits are revised.