

**Korean-American**  
**Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America**  
The House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Subcommittee on Health's oversight Hearing  
Thursday, April 15, 2021

Chairwoman Brownley, Ranking Member Bergman, and Distinguished Member of the Committee



We are the Vietnam War Veterans Organization dedicated to the Vietnam veterans and their families.

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Chairwoman Brownley, Ranking Member Bergman, and Distinguished Member of the Committee

April 15, 2021

Subject: H.R. 234, the Korean American Vietnam Allies Long Overdue for Relief (VALOR) Act

Dear Honorable Members of The Committee:

My name is Alfred Chung, and I live in Encino, California. My group is Korean-American Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America. My position is Chairman of Subcommittee Foreign Affairs. Our organization is We are the Vietnam War Veterans Organization dedicated to the Vietnam veterans and their families. Thank you for allowing me to contribute on this bill. Special thanks to Congressman Takano for introducing to Congress this legislation.

On behalf of the Korean American Veterans of the Vietnam War, I want to thank you for considering H.R. 234, the Korean American Vietnam Allies Long Overdue for Relief Act (VALOR Act). If passed, Korean soldiers who participated in the Vietnam War and later became United States citizens will have access to health care services from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

#### **BACKGROUND**

In 1955, soon after the Korean War ended, the Vietnam War began when the United States supported the democratic South Vietnamese government who were fighting the pro-communist North Vietnam. This was to control the spread of communism and the political influence of the Soviet Union and China in the Asia-Pacific region.

As the war progressed, the United States called for international support both financially and militarily. While many democratic countries supported the U.S.'s fight against communism, only a few provided military troops. Of the approximately 320,000 non-U.S. troops sent to Vietnam, over 300,000 of them came from South Korea.

South Korea's large contribution was motivated by economic incentives and its desire to strengthen the two countries' already strong relations. It was seen as payback for Americans' support and sacrifices made during the Korean War. In addition, while other countries' troops were present due to mandatory military service laws, most of the Korean troops decided to go to Vietnam voluntarily.

The South Korean soldiers were generally considered to be effective in providing protection to the South Vietnamese and preventing Viet Cong advances in the areas where they were stationed. American war planners leaned heavily on South Korean forces, given their ability to carry out missions with

considerable success. In the minds of US military peers, the Koreans outperformed other allied forces in Vietnam in lethality, organization, and professionalism.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the war, at least 5,000 Korean soldiers were killed and almost 11,000 were injured.

## **THE KOREAN VETERANS IMMIGRATE TO AMERICA**

After the end of the Vietnam War, some of the Korean soldiers immigrated to the United States to pursue the American Dream: a better life for themselves and their children. Most came with little money and limited English-speaking ability. But despite these setbacks, many did well for themselves by starting or working for small businesses. They became permanent residents of the United States and later citizens.

Today, there are about 3,000 Korean Vietnam War veterans living in the United States citizens.

## **THE KOREAN AMERICAN VETERANS ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR VETERANS BENEFITS IN BOTH THE U.S. AND SOUTH KOREA**

Under current law, the Korean-American veterans are not considered members of the United States Armed Forces so they do not qualify for assistance from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Similarly, they may not qualify for state and local veterans' benefits where they live.

Almost all of the Korean-American veterans who have immigrated to the United States have had little contact with South Korea. To receive veterans benefits from the Korean Veterans Affairs Department.

We must go to Korea and apply for Veterans Benefits. In addition, they cannot participate meaningfully in South Korea's universal health care system. This has been exacerbated due to the coronavirus pandemic as South Korea imposes a mandatory quarantine period for all international visitors and will remain this way for some time. This can further limit the availability of timely and urgent medical care.

Since about 3,000 of these are currently naturalized citizens of the United States, there are Veterans benefits provided by the Korean Veterans Affairs Department, veterans hospital treatment, and veterans who can be buried in a national cemetery in Korea. We are treated as foreigners, so there are many restrictive conditions. The reason is that most of the Veterans cannot visit Korea to receive veteran benefits because we live in the US with our families and we are responsible for the livelihood of our families.

In order to receive the benefits of veteran hospital examination and treatment, we cannot cover the enormous expenses required for long-term stays and such. These Korean-American Vietnam War veterans are in a difficult situation that has been forgotten by both governments. These war veterans are aging and suffering from the twilight of a difficult life with their families caring for them from the aftereffects of war diseases.

---

<sup>1</sup> *South Korea in the Vietnam War*, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South\\_Korea\\_in\\_the\\_Vietnam\\_War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Korea_in_the_Vietnam_War) (citations omitted)

It is a universal right of war veterans, regardless of the world, that veterans want to be treated at veterans' hospitals.

### **THE VALOR ACT WILL ENSURE THAT SOUTH KOREAN VIETNAM WAR VETERANS WILL BE GIVEN EQUAL TREATMENT AS THEIR AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS**

For almost four decades, the South Korean Vietnam War veterans did not receive the same Veterans health care benefits as American soldiers. Many of them suffered the same physical and psychological effects of war including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the effects of Agent Orange and others were permanently disabled.

The VALOR act will ensure that these veterans will receive equal health care benefits as would American soldiers.

### **THE IMMEASURABLE BENEFITS OF THE LAW GREATLY OUTWEIGHS THE COSTS OF IMPLEMENTING IT**

While we are unable to produce any studies or projections of the costs of implementing the VALOR Act, we believe that the costs will have a negligible impact on government health care costs. There are only 3,000 Korean Vietnam War veterans and all of them are senior citizens. we are around 70-85 years old, so we are already getting medical health services from the government. The Congressional Budget Office will only need to carry over our treatment costs from the federal government when calculating this number when the bill is in the legislature.

On the other hand, if the law is passed, it will have a positive impact on the federal government's image both domestic and abroad. While Americans may disagree on the necessity of armed conflict, there is a consensus that those who served should be honored and compensated. In addition, this measure is likely to receive great attention and praise from the South Korean government and will strengthen already more good relations. Also, we expect the Korean government to provide active cooperation and support to us. It will also send a global message that the United States will take care of those who fight alongside them.

### **CONCLUSION**

Both South Korea and the United States participated in the Vietnam war to protect democratic governments from communism. However, the Korean soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War and later became American citizens were not given special Veterans health care benefits. This bill only requires that these veterans be given the same benefits as their American counterparts. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Alfred Chung

Chairman of Subcommittee Foreign Affairs

Korean-American Associates of Vietnam Veterans

