

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 6947

To establish within the Department of Veterans Affairs a Veterans Affairs History Office, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 10, 2024

Mr. TURNER (for himself and Mr. LANDSMAN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To establish within the Department of Veterans Affairs a Veterans Affairs History Office, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans Affairs Cen-
5 tennial and Heritage Act of 2024”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) On January 19, 2017, Secretary of Vet-
9 erans Affairs Robert A. McDonald signed a Memo-
10 randum of Agreement that established goals for the

1 Department of Veterans Affairs and regional leaders
2 of Dayton, Ohio, to advance a history office as a
3 community partnership.

4 (2) A report commissioned by the Department
5 determined that, “a central History Office, properly
6 staffed and resourced, can become an essential ally
7 for the Department’s senior staff at Headquarters
8 and in the field.”.

9 (3) The establishment of a History Office in the
10 Department pursuant to an executive memorandum
11 of the Department, dated April 10, 2020, is a vital
12 contribution to honoring veterans and improving the
13 understanding of how they served the United States.

14 (4) Department of Veterans Affairs Directive
15 7777, titled “Implementation of the VA History
16 Program”, was issued on February 9, 2021, and es-
17 tablished the policies, responsibilities, and manage-
18 ment directions for the Department of Veterans Af-
19 fairs History Program.

20 (5) The centennial year of the Department is
21 2030 and such year is a goal for establishing a ro-
22 bust program of ongoing history outreach activities
23 and permanent public exhibits telling the story of
24 the Department.

1 **SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HISTORY OF-**
2 **FICE.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 3 of title 38, United
4 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
5 lowing new section:

6 **“§ 325. History Office**

7 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—

8 “(1) IN GENERAL.—There is established within
9 the Department an office comprising a history pro-
10 gram and a national history center.

11 “(2) DESIGNATION.—The office established by
12 paragraph (1) shall be known as the ‘Department of
13 Veterans Affairs History Office’ (in this section the
14 ‘Office’).

15 “(b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of the Office are—

16 “(1) to collect, preserve, and provide access to
17 relevant historical records, artifacts, and cultural re-
18 sources of the Department (including those of its
19 predecessor organizations); and

20 “(2) to tell a comprehensive story of the De-
21 partment and its predecessor organizations to vet-
22 erans, government agencies, and the public.

23 “(c) CHIEF HISTORIAN AND STAFF.—The Office
24 shall be led by the Chief Historian of the Department of
25 Veterans Affairs (in this section referred to as the ‘Chief
26 Historian’) who may be assisted by such professional and

1 administrative staff as the Secretary considers necessary
2 to carry out the purposes of the Office under subsection
3 (b) and the requirements set forth under subsection (d).

4 “(d) REQUIREMENTS.—The Office shall—

5 “(1) carry out the activities set forth in Depart-
6 ment Directive 7777 (relating to implementation of
7 a Department history program), or successor direc-
8 tive;

9 “(2) assist with planning appropriate history-
10 related events leading up to the centennial of the
11 Department in 2030 (in this section referred to as
12 the ‘Centennial’) and in events after the Centennial
13 as the Chief Historian considers appropriate in the
14 context of the purposes of the Office set forth under
15 subsection (b);

16 “(3) carry out public activities and educational
17 opportunities, including print and web-based publica-
18 tions and exhibits, that increase awareness of the
19 contributions of the Department in supporting vet-
20 erans;

21 “(4) construct, renovate, repair, operate, and
22 maintain new or existing Department facilities used
23 for—

1 “(A) preservation, restoration, and public
2 access to Department historic materials, ar-
3 chives, and artifacts;

4 “(B) training on the preservation of his-
5 toric materials, archives, and artifacts; or

6 “(C) education relating to the history of
7 the Department and its predecessor organiza-
8 tions;

9 “(5) maintain facilities for access to, and stor-
10 age of, historic materials, artifacts, and archives,
11 compliant with recognized specifications for such fa-
12 cilities, which may include storage, conference, and
13 public exhibit space; and

14 “(6) conduct education and training on the
15 preservation of historical materials, archival manage-
16 ment, digitization, restoration, historical research,
17 and related subjects to assist the Department.

18 “(e) GIFTS AND BEQUESTS.—

19 “(1) AUTHORITY TO ACCEPT.—The Secretary
20 may accept, hold, administer, and spend any gift,
21 devise, or bequest of real property, personal prop-
22 erty, or money made on the condition that the gift,
23 devise, or bequest be used for the benefit, or in con-
24 nection with, the purposes and activities of the Of-

1 fice, including a gift, devise, or bequest of an im-
2 provement made pursuant to subsection (f)(3).

3 “(2) DISPOSITION OF PROPERTY.—The Sec-
4 retary may authorize the sale of donated property
5 received under paragraph (1). A sale under this
6 paragraph need not be conducted in accordance with
7 disposal requirements that would otherwise apply, so
8 long as the sale is conducted at arms-length and in-
9 cludes an auditable transaction record.

10 “(3) USE OF MONEY AND PROCEEDS.—Any
11 money received under paragraph (1) and any pro-
12 ceeds from the sale of property under paragraph (2)
13 shall be deposited into a fund established in the
14 Treasury to support the purposes and activities of
15 the Office.

16 “(f) PARTNERSHIPS, COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS,
17 AND LEASE AUTHORITY.—

18 “(1) PARTNERSHIPS.—The Secretary may enter
19 into a partnership or cooperative agreement with an
20 organization to support the purposes set forth in
21 subsection (b).

22 “(2) LEASE AUTHORITY.—

23 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may
24 lease portions of any real property or facility of
25 the Office to a nonprofit organization for use in

1 generating revenue for the support of activities
2 of the Office and for such administrative pur-
3 poses as may be necessary for support of the
4 Office.

5 “(B) RENT.—Any rent received by the
6 Secretary under a lease under subparagraph
7 (A), including rent-in-kind, shall be used solely
8 to cover or defray the costs of carrying out sub-
9 section (b) or (d).

10 “(3) IMPROVEMENTS.—The Secretary may per-
11 mit a nonprofit organization to make improvements
12 to real property or a facility of the Office for the
13 construction of a multipurpose facility to be used for
14 historical displays for public viewing, curation, and
15 storage of artifacts, research facilities, classrooms,
16 offices, and associated activities consistent with the
17 mission of the Office.

18 “(g) INTERNAL COORDINATION GROUP.—

19 “(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—

20 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180
21 days after the date of the enactment of the Vet-
22 erans Affairs Centennial and Heritage Act of
23 2024, the Secretary shall establish an internal
24 coordinating group (in this subsection the
25 ‘Group’) to assist the Office in carrying out the

1 purposes under subsection (b) and the require-
2 ments of subsection (d) by advising the Office
3 on matters relating to operations of the Office,
4 which may include advising on matters relating
5 to the provisions of continuity and resourcing
6 for the Centennial or for development of the
7 history program or the history center described
8 in subsection (a).

9 “(B) PROCEDURES AND CHARTER.—The
10 Group shall operate in accordance with such
11 procedures as the Secretary may establish and
12 in accordance with a charter the Secretary shall
13 establish for the Group.

14 “(2) COMPOSITION.—The Group shall be com-
15 posed of the following:

16 “(A) The Deputy Secretary of Veterans
17 Affairs.

18 “(B) The Assistant Secretary for Manage-
19 ment and Chief Financial Officer, or designee.

20 “(C) The Chief Historian.

21 “(D) A senior employee selected by the
22 Secretary from each of the following:

23 “(i) The Veterans Experience Office.

24 “(ii) The Office of Congressional and
25 Legislative Affairs.

1 “(iii) The Office of Acquisition Logis-
2 tics and Construction.

3 “(iv) The Office of the General Coun-
4 sel.

5 “(v) The Veterans Health Administra-
6 tion.

7 “(vi) The Veterans Benefits Adminis-
8 tration.

9 “(vii) The National Cemetery Admin-
10 istration.

11 “(E) Such other officers and employees of
12 the Department as the Secretary considers ap-
13 propriate.

14 “(3) CHAIRPERSON.—The chairperson of the
15 Group shall be the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Af-
16 fairs.

17 “(h) NONCONFLICT.—This section shall not be con-
18 strued to affect the authority of the Archivist of the
19 United States for management of permanent records of
20 the Department.

21 “(i) DEFINITION OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION.—
22 In this section, the term ‘nonprofit organization means’
23 an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the In-
24 ternal Revenue Code of 1986 and exempt from taxation
25 under section 501(a) of that Code.”.

1 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
2 at the beginning of chapter 3 of such title is amended by
3 adding at the end the following new item:

“325. History Office.”.

4 **SEC. 4. REPORTS.**

5 (a) LONG-RANGE PLANNING.—Not later than 180
6 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
7 retary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the Committee
8 on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on
9 Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a report
10 on proposed activities of the Department of Veterans Af-
11 fairs History Office established pursuant to section 325(a)
12 of title 38, United States Code, as added by section 3,
13 leading up to the centennial described in subsection (d)(2)
14 of such section 325.

15 (b) CONTENTS.—The report submitted pursuant to
16 subsection (a) shall include plans for the following:

17 (1) Staffing and budget.

18 (2) Organization charts pertaining to the cur-
19 rent staff and location of the History Office within
20 the Department.

21 (3) Construction and renovation of facilities
22 supporting the History Office, including the Na-
23 tional Department of Veterans Affairs History Cen-
24 ter.

1 (4) Public activities to mark the centennial de-
2 scribed in subsection (a).

3 (5) Such recommendations for legislative or ad-
4 ministrative action as the Secretary may have with
5 respect to the History Office and the centennial de-
6 scribed in subsection (a).

7 (c) ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORTS.—Not later than
8 one year after the date on which the Secretary submits
9 the report required by subsection (a) pursuant to such
10 subsection and not less frequently than once each year
11 thereafter until December 31, 2030, the Chief Historian
12 of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the
13 committees described in such subsection a report on the
14 progress of the History Office.

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