

VFW Urges Congress to Pass the Major Richard Star Act to Ease the Financial Burden of Medically-Retired Veterans During COVID-19 Pandemic

‘While I’m 100 percent VA service-connected for my injuries, this money is just enough to get by check to check’

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WASHINGTON – The Veterans of Foreign Wars is urging Congress to pass the Major Richard Star Act during this challenging COVID-19 pandemic to help put money back in the pockets of veterans who were forced to retire early from military service because of battlefield injury or illness.

“Retirement pay and VA disability compensation are fundamentally different benefits, granted for different reasons,” said VFW National Commander William “Doc” Schmitz. “To deny earned retirement pay from veterans who were unfortunately medically retired early because of wounds or illnesses sustained on the battlefield is an absolute injustice that must end now.”

The Major Richard Star Act would provide total offset relief to veterans who suffered combat injuries or illnesses who were medically retired with less than 20 years of service. The passage of the Major Richard Star Act would reduce the number of people still awaiting total concurrent receipt of their earned military retirement pay and VA disability compensation.

In 2004, The Military Coalition, a consortium of military associations, the VFW and other veterans’ organizations that represent more than 5.5 million service members, veterans and military families and survivors, successfully pushed Congress to authorize the concurrent receipt of retirement pay and VA disability compensation for retirees rated 50-percent service-connected disabled or greater.

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However, remaining to be approved are those rated between 10 and 40-percent service-connected disabled by VA. Those who were unable to complete 20 years of service due to injuries or illness, known as Chapter 61 retirees are also denied concurrent receipt. The Major Richard Star Act would eliminate the unjust offset for 42,000 Chapter 61 retirees who suffered injuries in combat. This is a modest segment of the approximately 450,000 military retirees who are unjustly denied their retirement pay.

Medically-retired U.S. Army soldier and Iowa National Guardsman Michael Braman is just one example of how injuries sustained on the battlefield forced a soldier to an early exit from military service limiting his full earning potential.

“I didn’t ask to leave the military,” said Braman, Junior Vice Commander, Department of Iowa VFW. “I gave 19 years and seven months of active and guard service to the Army and my nation but was medically retired early due to the numerous injuries that I received during my deployment to Afghanistan in 2003 to 2004. While I’m 100 percent VA service-connected for my injuries, this money is just enough to get by from check to check.”

Schmitz said that we can’t have our men and women who sacrificed so much in defense of this nation barely getting by.

“Michael Braman didn’t ask to get injured,” said Schmitz. “Michael faithfully served his country for 19-plus years and should be compensated for his retirement. There is no better time to right a wrong for veterans like Michael than during this national pandemic – a time where they need the money to care for their families that they have truly earned serving our great nation.”