

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

Pilar Schiavo, Chair

SJR 17 (Choi) – As Introduced May 12, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 39-0

SUBJECT: Korean American veterans.

SUMMARY: Urges Congress and the President of the United States (U.S.) to permit states to extend burial and memorial benefits in state veterans cemeteries to Republic of Korea veterans who served in the Vietnam War and subsequently became U.S. citizens. Specifically, **this resolution:**

- 1) Urges Congress and the President of the United States to permit states to extend burial and memorial benefits in state veterans cemeteries to Republic of Korea veterans who served in the Vietnam War and subsequently became United States citizens.
- 2) Declares that the Legislature stands in solidarity with Republic of Korea veterans who served in Vietnam.
- 3) Requires the Secretary of the Senate to transmit copies of the resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, congressional leadership, each Senator and Representative from California in the United States Congress, and the author for appropriate distribution.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Authorizes the Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to make grants to states for the purpose of establishing, expanding, improving, operating, and maintaining state veterans' cemeteries. (38 U.S. Code § 2408(a)(1))
- 2) Limits eligibility for burial in a federally funded state veterans cemetery to eligible veterans and certain family members, including spouses, surviving spouses, minor children, certain unmarried adult children with disabilities, and eligible parents of certain deceased service members. (38 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) § 39.10)
- 3) Provides that a United States citizen who served honorably in the armed forces of a government allied with the United States during a war may be eligible for burial in a national cemetery if the person was a United States citizen at the time of entry into service and at the time of death. (38 C.F.R. § 38.620(d))

FISCAL EFFECT: None.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **PURPOSE OF THIS RESOLUTION.** According to the author: "Many Koreans served besides American soldiers in the Vietnam War, supporting them and fighting the same fight to protect democracy. Some of those veterans immigrated to the U.S. to pursue the American Dream, then became citizens, and have been living the remainder of their lives in this

country. I believe SJR 17 is a great way to recognize these veteran's service and bravery. This resolution only urges Congress to provide the option for these Korean American Vietnam veterans to be buried alongside the soldiers they fought with, after they passed on, a right I believe they have done more than enough to deserve."

2) BACKGROUND.

- a) **Burial Benefits.** This resolution seeks to expand state burial and memorial benefits to Republic of Korea veterans who served alongside United States forces during the Vietnam War and later became U.S. citizens. Although federal law recognizes certain allied military service for purposes of burial in Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national cemeteries, eligibility generally depends on the person having been a U.S. citizen at the time they entered that allied military service. This requirement excludes Republic of Korea veterans who served in Vietnam, later immigrated and became naturalized citizens after their service ended.
- b) **Federal Law.** Federal law has already begun to recognize allied veterans who served alongside United States forces in Vietnam. Congress enacted the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 to provide special naturalization consideration to certain Hmong and Laotian veterans who served in U.S.-backed guerrilla forces during the war and later sought to become U.S. citizens. Additionally, in 2023 Congress enacted the Korean American VALOR Act, which expanded eligibility for certain VA medical benefits to veterans of the South Korean armed forces who served in Vietnam between January 9, 1962, and May 7, 1975, subject to a request by South Korea and a reciprocity agreement reimbursing VA for the cost of care.
- c) **Other States.** State legislatures have also begun to address this issue. Pennsylvania recently enacted HB 304, which extends state-level rights, benefits, recognition, and privileges to eligible United States-resident veterans of the Korean Armed Forces who served during the Vietnam War. These federal and state efforts provide precedent for SJR 17's request that Congress clarify federal law so states may extend burial and memorial benefits to similarly situated Republic of Korea veterans without jeopardizing federal cemetery funding.
- d) **Policy Issue.** This resolution raises potential questions about extending veteran cemetery benefits to individuals who served in foreign armed forces alongside U.S. troops during wartime. Since veteran benefits typically require service in the U.S. Armed Forces, this expansion for Republic of Korea veterans may prompt concerns about where Congress should draw the line and whether other allied groups might pursue similar recognition. Importantly, it does not create new benefits; it seeks federal clarification on whether states can honor these veterans without jeopardizing federal cemetery funding. Any federal response could still enforce limits, documentation requirements, and safeguards to keep the benefit focused.

3) PREVIOUS LEGISLATION.

- a) AB 200 (Patterson) of 2019 would have permitted interment in state veterans cemeteries for certain individuals naturalized under the federal Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 and residing in California at the time of death. AB 200 was referred to but never set for hearing in the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs.

- b)** AJR 35 (Choi) of 2020 would have urged Congress and the President to permit states to extend veterans cemetery burial and memorial benefits to Republic of Korea veterans who served in the Vietnam War and subsequently became U.S. citizens. AJR 35 was held at the Assembly Desk.
- c)** AJR 10 (Choi) of 2021 would have urged Congress and the President to permit states to extend burial and memorial benefits in state veterans cemeteries, and to extend burial and memorial benefits in national cemeteries, to Republic of Korea and Republic of Vietnam veterans who served in the Vietnam War and subsequently became U.S. citizens. AJR 10 was referred to the Assembly Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs pursuant to Assembly Rule 77.2, but it was never set for hearing.
- d)** AJR 7 (Patterson), Resolution Chapter 117, Statutes of 2021, urged Congress and the President to permit states to extend burial and memorial benefits to Hmong veterans at state veterans cemeteries.
- e)** AJR 13 (Nguyen) of 2021 would have urged Congress and the President to permit states to extend burial and memorial benefits in state veterans cemeteries to Republic of Vietnam veterans who served in the Vietnam War and who subsequently became U.S. citizens. AJR 13 was referred to the Assembly Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, but it was never set for hearing.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

None on file.

Opposition

None on file.

Analysis Prepared by: Patty Patten / M. & V.A. / (916) 319-3550