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AUTOMOBILES FOR DISABLED VETERANS

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HEARING

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BEFORE A

SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE

UNITED STATES SENATE

EIGHTY-FIRST CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

S. 2115

A BILL TO PROVIDE AUTOMOBILES FOR CERTAIN
DISABLED VETERANS

JUNE 23, 1949

Printed for the use of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare



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AUTOMOBILES FOR DISABLED VETERANS

THURSDAY, JUNE 23, 1949

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND PUBLIC WELFARE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
Washington, D. C.

The subcommittee met at 10 a. m., Senator Claude Pepper (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Senators Pepper (presiding), Douglas, Aiken, and Morse.

Senator PEPPER. The committee will come to order, please. This is the Subcommittee on Veterans' Affairs of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare.

The first bill we will take up is S. 2115, a bill to authorize payments by the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs on the purchase of automobiles or other conveyances by certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

(S. 2115 is as follows:)

[S. 2115, 81st Cong., 1st sess.]

A BILL To authorize payments by the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs on the purchase of automobiles or other conveyances by certain disabled veterans, and for other purposes

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That, subject to the conditions hereinafter set forth, the Administrator of Veterans' Affairs is authorized and directed to provide or assist in providing an automobile or other conveyance, by paying on the purchase price of such automobile or other conveyance not to exceed \$1,600, including equipment with such special attachments and devices as the Administrator may deem necessary, for each veteran of World War II who is entitled to compensation under the laws administered by the Veterans' Administration for any of the following:

(a) Loss or permanent loss of use of one or both feet;

(b) Loss or permanent loss of use of one or both hands;

(c) Permanent impairment of vision of both eyes of the following status: Central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye, with corrective glasses, or central visual acuity of more than 20/200 if there is a field defect in which the peripheral field has contracted to such an extent that the widest diameter of visual field subtends an angular distance no greater than twenty degrees in the better eye.

SEC. 2. The benefits of section 1 shall be granted under the following conditions:

(a) That under such regulations as the Administrator may prescribe the furnishing of such automobile or other conveyance, or the assisting therein, shall be accomplished by the Administrator paying the total purchase price, if not in excess of \$1,600, or the amount of \$1,600, if the total purchase price is in excess of \$1,600, to the seller from whom the veteran is purchasing under sales agreement between the seller and the veteran.

(b) The United States shall not be liable for the repair, maintenance, or replacement of any automobile or other conveyance provided under the provisions of the first section of this Act and shall not be liable to any person by reason of any damage caused by the use of such automobile or other conveyance.

(c) No veteran shall be entitled to receive more than one automobile or other conveyance under the provisions of this Act; and no veteran who has received or

may receive an automobile or other conveyance under the provisions of the paragraph under the heading "Veterans' Administration" in the First Supplemental Appropriation Act, 1947, shall be entitled to receive an automobile or other conveyance under the provisions of this Act.

(d) The benefits provided in this Act shall not be available to any veteran who has not made application for such benefits to the Administrator within three years after the effective date of this Act, or within three years after the date of the veteran's discharge from the armed forces if the veteran shall not be discharged until on or after said effective date.

(e) Any automobile or other conveyance furnished any veteran pursuant to this Act shall be exempt from the claims of creditors, and shall not be liable to attachment, levy, or seizure by or under any legal or equitable process whatever.

(f) After enactment of this Act, any automobile or other conveyance heretofore furnished any veteran under the provisions of the paragraph heading "Veterans' Administration" in the First Supplemental Appropriation Act, 1947, as amended, shall be exempt from the claims of creditors, and shall not be liable to attachment, levy, or seizure by or under any legal or equitable process whatever.

Senator PEPPER. Our first witness on S. 2115 is Mrs. Rogers, the former chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, and a member now of that committee.

S. 2115 was introduced by Senators Thomas, Murray, Hill, Magnuson, Humphrey, Neely, Withers, Taft, Aiken, Morse, Smith, Donnell, and myself, in the Senate on the 21st of June 1949. It is identical with the bill which this committee reported out, with the subcommittee being chaired by Senator Morse, in the Eightieth Congress, with the exception that we have added on page 3 in subparagraph (e) the following language:

(e) Any automobile or other conveyance furnished any veteran pursuant to this Act shall be exempt from the claims of creditors, and shall not be liable to attachment, levy, or seizure by or under any legal or equitable process whatever.

Also, we have the following language in subparagraph (f):

(f) After enactment of this Act, any automobile or other conveyance heretofore furnished any veteran under the provisions of the paragraph heading "Veterans' Administration" in the First Supplemental Appropriation Act, 1947, as amended, shall be exempt from the claims of creditors, and shall not be liable to attachment, levy, or seizure by or under any legal or equitable process whatever.

That language was inserted in this bill because it came to the attention of some of us that automobiles which had been furnished to amputees under the act previously enacted had been seized for creditors, and there was the instance of one suit where a wife of one such veteran was suing for divorce and the judge ruled the automobile was a general asset of the husband and awarded it to the wife. We are not, of course, passing judgment upon the merits of any suit by creditors against veteran debtors, nor passing judgment on a suit by a wife against a delinquent husband.

However, we thought it should be clear that the Congress was making these automobiles available to the veterans for their personal use because of their service to their country, and that it was not intended this automobile should be a general asset of any veteran and as such subject to the claims of creditors, and that is the reason for the new language in the present bill.

Now, Mrs. Rogers, we are pleased to have you here this morning. Would you care to make a statement about this measure?

**STATEMENT OF HON. EDITH NOURSE ROGERS, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS**

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Senator Pepper. I would like to state that the bill introduced this year is even better than the bill which Senator Morse introduced last year.

As you know, our House Committee on Veterans Affairs reported out a bill unanimously, but we were not able to secure passage. I think it would be helpful to us in the House in our effort if your committee would report this bill out, so that a companion bill on our side could be reported out.

Senator PEPPER. Did you say a companion bill has been introduced?

Mrs. ROGERS. No; I mean not just like that. I introduced a bill like S. 1391, and Mr. Rankin has his name on a similar bill and others have introduced similar bills. I think if you reported this bill out, it would be very helpful to a similar bill in the House.

Senator PEPPER. The present bill provides these automobiles, or payments on automobiles up to \$1,600, which would be available to two classes of veterans who have suffered the following disabilities:

(a) Loss or permanent loss of use of one or both feet.

(b) Loss or permanent loss of use of one or both hands.

As to the loss of one or both feet, that is substantially the present law, except it says the amputation must be as high as the ankle. Do you have any comment to make?

Mrs. ROGERS. I think that is just like S. 1391 of Senator Morse's. You also state a provision for the blind, and I think that is an excellent provision.

Senator PEPPER. And you say your committee reported out of the committee a bill the same as S. 1391, which contained these provisions?

Mrs. ROGERS. As a matter of fact, it included World War I veterans as well as World War II, but we felt that the passage prospects would be better if it were for World War II. I doubt if we could secure passage of the bill for World War I.

I think the additions to the bill improve the law very much.

Senator PEPPER. The present provisions expire June 30 of this year. It is your feeling the act should be continued and broadened with the present provisions?

Mrs. ROGERS. Oh, yes; and I feel that this is better than the original bill. First, they can add to the price, is that not true; up to \$1,600 payment is provided, and then they can add more to that price themselves?

Senator PEPPER. That is right. That provision is:

Sec. 2. The benefits of section 1 shall be granted under the following conditions:
(a) That under such regulations as the Administrator may prescribe the furnishing of such automobile or other conveyance, or the assisting therein, shall be accomplished by the Administrator paying the total purchase price, if not in excess of \$1,600, or the amount of \$1,600, if the total purchase price is in excess of \$1,600, to the seller from whom the veteran is purchasing under sales agreement between the seller and the veteran.

Are there any questions of Mrs. Rogers?

Senator DOUGLAS. No questions.

Senator PEPPER. Senator Morse?

Senator MORSE. No questions.

Mrs. ROGERS. You have present one of your own men from Florida, an amputee, who will testify now.

Senator PEPPER. Thank you very much, Mrs. Rogers.

Mrs. ROGERS. Thank you.

Senator PEPPER. We will be very glad to have you here while these other men testify, Mrs. Rogers.

Now, we have with us a citizen of whom our State of Florida is especially proud, Jimmy Wilson.

STATEMENT OF JAMES W. WILSON, OF JACKSONVILLE, FLA.

Senator PEPPER. Jimmy, will you give us your initials? I have always heard you called "Jimmy."

Mr. WILSON. James W. Wilson.

Senator PEPPER. And your home is in Jacksonville, Fla.?

Mr. WILSON. Yes, sir.

Senator PEPPER. Jimmy, you do not need to stand up. You can sit down, if you care to.

Mr. WILSON. All right, thank you.

Senator PEPPER. You are going to school?

Mr. WILSON. Yes, sir; in the University of Florida.

Senator PEPPER. What course are you studying there?

Mr. WILSON. I am majoring in political science and economics.

Senator PEPPER. Now, would you care to express an opinion about this measure?

Mr. WILSON. Well, I think this is a very good measure. The boys that have gotten these cars in the past, myself included, have found them very useful, and have enabled us to avoid the problems amputees face in public transportation, especially the arm amputees; and we feel that the blind should be included, also.

As you can well imagine, a man with an arm off has a terrible time in public transportation, where much of the time a person has to stand up, and with an arm gone it is very hard to hang on while you stand.

As to the blind, we, of course, all of us understand the problems of the blind. Most of the blind would not be able to drive the cars themselves, but fortunately almost all of them have someone that could drive the car for them.

I think it is a very good bill, and I would like to see it passed.

Senator PEPPER. I presume you have a car under the present law.

Mr. WILSON. Yes, sir, I do. I have enjoyed it very much, and I think the generosity of Congress in providing these cars and the other things that you have provided in the way of advantages to us veterans, was a great thing.

Senator PEPPER. Do you, and I am asking you now as more or less speaking for all amputees, feel that this category (b) in the bill as to loss or permanent loss of use of one or both hands should remain in there? Do you feel that if the veteran has lost the use of one hand he should get the car?

Mr. WILSON. Yes, sir, I certainly do. I have lost both of my hands. Now, I do manage to get along fairly well, but I would hate to have to ride in public transportation, such as busses, where you often have to

stand up and have to hold on to something. It is a tough job, tough enough for a man with two good arms, let alone one who lost one or both arms.

Senator PEPPER. I see that Congressman Bennett from Florida has just come in.

Thank you very much, Jimmy. Is there anything else about this matter you want to say?

Mr. WILSON. No, sir; I think that what I have said, with what Congresswoman Rogers has said, will cover the matter pretty well.

Senator PEPPER. Any questions?

Senator DOUGLAS. No.

Senator PEPPER. Senator Morse?

Senator MORSE. No questions.

Senator PEPPER. Thank you very much, Jimmy. We appreciate very much your coming here and giving us your feelings and opinion about this measure.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Senator, for hearing me.

Senator PEPPER. We have another veteran here today. Will you give us your name and residence?

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM C. BARDON, OF CINCINNATI, OHIO

Mr. BARDON. William C. Bardon, of Cincinnati, Ohio.

Senator PEPPER. Do you have an automobile under the present law?

Mr. BARDON. Yes, sir. Under the present law, I have had an automobile since August of 1947. I find that without that car, and if I had to resort to public transportation, I just could not go back and forth in my work.

Senator PEPPER. What do you do at the present time?

Mr. BARDON. At the present time I am employed in the regional office at Cincinnati, Ohio.

Senator PEPPER. In the Veterans' Administration?

Mr. BARDON. Veterans' Administration; yes, sir.

Senator PEPPER. And you find a car useful in getting to and from your work?

Mr. BARDON. Well, I went to work there about 2 weeks after I was discharged. I did not get my car until about 4 months after that. And it was some time before I could get transportation, or depend on any transportation to and from. And then I had transportation in a person's automobile, and after riding with this particular party for 3 weeks, he asked me when I was going to get my automobile, because he was kind of tired of stopping to pick me up at home and then picking me up again there at the job and taking me back home again.

So, after that, I told him I would not need his assistance, I would ride a taxicab. So I rode in taxicabs for—oh, about 2½ months, before getting an automobile.

I think the bill as it is written now would be of material assistance to the veterans that are maimed, the amputees, and the blind. I know of several amputees who in addition to that are also blind—in addition to having amputations, I mean. I do not know how it is possible for them to get around without an automobile.

Senator PEPPER. You feel the law should be extended to include the blind?

Mr. BARDON. Yes, sir.

Senator PEPPER. How do you feel about the provision (b), for loss or permanent loss of one or both hands?

Mr. BARDON. I think that is good.

Senator PEPPER. You think an automobile should be given in the case of permanent loss of use of one hand?

Mr. BARDON. I think so. Even a veteran or other man with two hands, when he is on a crowded street car or other public transportation, has a time hanging on with both his hands; and if you are handicapped by loss of one or both hands, or by the loss of use of those members of the body, why, you just are not able to hang on to the proper contraption.

And then, they are sort of off-balance; usually you will see that with a member missing there is an off-balance. I have noticed that particularly, because I am in immediate contact with veterans every day, and have been for the past 27 months. I work in the Contact Division of the Veterans' Administration, and I have talked to an average of, I would say, 35 veterans a day.

Senator PEPPER. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Mr. BARDON. No, sir; I think that is all.

Senator PEPPER. Senator Douglas, any questions?

Senator DOUGLAS. No questions.

Senator PEPPER. Senator Morse?

Senator MORSE. No questions.

Senator PEPPER. We thank you very much for coming this morning and giving us the benefit of your views. We will be glad to have you sit in with us and attend the rest of the hearing. If you would like to stay just where you are, the other witnesses can sit over there [indicating].

Mr. BARDON. Thank you.

Senator PEPPER. I see Mr. Omar Ketchum of the VFW in the room. Mr. Ketchum, have you anything to say about this measure in behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars?

STATEMENT OF OMAR B. KETCHUM, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SERVICE, VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

Mr. KETCHUM. Well, Mr. Chairman, we were on record as supporting the liberalization of the awarding of cars to amputees, which included loss or loss of use of an arm or arms.

Senator PEPPER. And to include the blind?

Mr. KETCHUM. That is right, the blind. We have also asked to include veterans of World War I, although we realize that is a little more of a problem. However, we felt that the problem was the same for that veteran, even though those veterans might have made better adjustment over a period of years. The equity is involved there, and we have recommended amendment to include World War I veterans.

Senator PEPPER. Have you or any of the veterans' organizations any figures as to how many additional people that would bring in under the law with this liberalized coverage?

Mr. KETCHUM. I do not have any supporting figures; no, sir. I do not think it would be too great a number.

Senator MORSE. Such information has been furnished by you, Mr. Ketchum, or someone else, I believe.

Mr. KETCHUM. I think there is some information in the record on that; yes.

Senator PEPPER. The staff will get that information so we will have it before us when we consider this bill in executive session; that is, the data as to how much would be the additional numbers of veterans included, and the probable cost, if we were to include under this liberalized version of the act, the veterans of World War I.

Senator MORSE. I would like to say here that when we completed hearings on the bill last year, we felt that it was obvious that there would be opposition on the part of some Members of Congress to extending the benefit to World War I veterans. As the chairman of the subcommittee at that time, I took it up with some of the representatives of the veterans' organizations.

I told them that I thought we could get the other provisions of the bill through without any too great difficulty, in my judgment, but that if we tried to include veterans of World War I, that we would run into difficulties if we tried to enlarge it in that respect. And I asked them for their advice.

They are always very cooperative in these matters, I have found in my dealings with them, and the advice I received was to go ahead and get this bill through, and maybe at some future time further consideration may be given as to giving a car to the other man, the World War I man.

I say that because I think the record ought to show why the bill went through in that form.

Senator PEPPER. Thank you, Senator. And thank you, Mr. Ketchum.

STATEMENT OF HON. CHARLES E. BENNETT, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. Chairman, I only have a copy of the corresponding House bill, and I am not sure it is the same. It is the one Mrs. Rogers introduced. She and I talked about this matter at some length. I had contemplated introducing a bill myself, but I talked with her, and also with Jimmy Wilson, and I did not introduce a bill.

I believe that the present law should be extended and liberalized. To just what extent it should be liberalized, I admit my lack of ability to crystallize my own thinking; and that is the reason I never introduced a bill.

As I understand the bill, when first introduced it was supposed to help the men who had come back from the service to get rehabilitated, as was the purpose of so much of the good legislation that was introduced in the Congress in the past.

I think this is a splendid idea and I think it has done a great deal of good. And now I would like to see it extended to people who are equally in difficulties and who should be helped. As to those people who are equally in difficulty and would not be helped—and to be realistic about it, some would not be helped even by getting a car—I think the fair thing then is to allow them the option to take the money and apply it, for example, to their insurance, to equalize their particular situations.

Anyone who would stand here and say that the loss of a limb or the loss even of two limbs or loss of eyesight were the only way a man could get damaged in war, is making a serious error, because we all know that there are many, many cases where there is damage, but where that damage is very hard to define.

Personally, I believe that a person who has lost his physical appearance to the extent that he is not welcome in the society of man any longer—and there are some—have probably lost the greatest thing that can be lost. There are also people who have internal difficulties. For example, I have a traumatic difficulty as the result of the war, but I know myself from my association with other veterans that I am a very happy veteran indeed, as compared to some. Some have dysentery, leprosy, and other things which to me are more disturbing; and they do not get the warmth of human kindness that comes to a person that is obviously disabled.

So, it is a very difficult thing to equalize all these things. You have to look at the complete, over-all picture. I think this particular bill, outlining the specific classes of difficulty, does do a good thing. I myself believe, however, that there should be some sort of provision in a bill—and I have not been able to draw it myself, but I believe it should be put in—which would allow people who are not really going to benefit from automobiles to get the benefit in money equivalent that he can use for doctors or other people, or that can be used by the person himself the best way he can use it, where the use of an automobile would not be of any good benefit. I think it should be equalized.

It is a very difficult thing, in drawing veterans' legislation, to fill out the gaps. There are more people than those who have lost a limb as the result of service. There are men who are in more difficulty than the men who have lost a limb. There are men with psychological difficulties.

It is hard to evaluate those things. But I do think this bill with an additional liberalization in the disposition of the automobiles themselves, is a very good thing. I do not know the exact terminology that would correct the things that should be corrected in the program, but I do believe you can write into the bill in some way a provision that people should get the automobile or, in the alternative, if the automobile is of no benefit to them, that there should be an equalizing payment rather than an automobile.

That is all I have to say, Mr. Chairman. Does anybody care to ask me any questions? [No response.]

Incidentally, I would like to say again, although I mentioned it a minute ago, that I am disabled. I was not wounded in combat. I got a disease in combat, and the United States Government was kind enough to furnish me with an automobile.

Whether it was good or not, I think it was very largely responsible for my going to Congress, because I was a poor boy when I got out of service, and the automobile was very helpful to me in getting around. I was greatly criticized by some of the newspapers for using that car in my campaign for Congress. They said it was a case of the Government subsidizing a man in his own political campaign. But there are people who would say that about anything or anybody, and it just falls off my back.

I deeply appreciate the efforts of the United States Congress and the people whom the United States Congress represents, and I appreciate deeply the warmth of their affection and desire to help.

Senator PEPPER. I suspect Jimmy is going to be up here very long. [Laughter.]

Mr. BENNETT. I suspect he is. He is in my district. [Laughter and discussion off the record.]

Senator PEPPER. Thank you very much, Congressman Bennett. We are glad to have your expressions on S. 2115. We will now turn to some other bills we have.

Mrs. ROGERS. On leaving, I want to say that for the first time in our history larger benefits were paid to a man with a lost limb than any other person.

Senator PEPPER. Thank you.

(The following telegram was submitted for the record:)

NEW YORK, N. Y., June 23, 1949.

Senator CLAUDE PEPPER,
Chairman, Veterans' Affairs Committee,
Washington, D. C.:

We respectfully urge extension of Public Law 663, Seventy-ninth Congress, which provides leg amputee veterans of World War II with automobiles. We feel that it is not the intent of the act to penalize those servicemen who because of the severity of their disability will not attain veterans' status in time to be eligible for benefits provided in Public Law 663 which expires on June 30, 1949.

NATIONAL AMPUTATION CHAPTER No. 76,
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS,
SYLVAN R. GANS, *Adjutant*.

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