



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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**HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA FOR  
KOREAN WAR VETERANS**

**House Bill 4613 as passed by the House  
First Analysis (7-10-03)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Hoon-Yung Hopgood  
Committee: Education**

***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

The Korean War began on June 25, 1950 when 135,000 men from North Korea invaded South Korea. Two days later, President Harry S. Truman deployed the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet to waters off Taiwan to prevent the spread of the conflict, as the United States advanced its foreign policy to contain the expansion of the communist form of government. That same day a U.S. squadron of F-82s shot down a North Korean Yak fighter, and a couple days later a bombardment group of 18 B-26s bombed the Heijo Airfield near the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. By July 1 the first U.S. infantry unit arrived in South Korea--the first of nearly 1.8 million men and women who would serve there--and the three-year Korean War was underway. Before the United States, North Korea, and China signed an armistice on July 27, 1953, a total of 33,665 American soldiers were to die (although some also include the 3,275 non-hostile dead for total casualties of 36,940); 92,134 were to be wounded; and 7,140 men were to become prisoners of war. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.) While the signing of the armistice ended the war, it failed to bring about a permanent peace, because the Republic of Korea (South) and the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (North) have never signed a peace treaty.

As the United States prepared for the Korean conflict, many young people enlisted in the armed services to soldier on behalf of their country. Some of them were high school students—aged 17 or 18—who left their high school studies before graduation in order to enlist. Upon return to their communities, and considerably matured by the experience of warfare, as well as by the international travel that comes of service in a war fought in Asia, the soldiers did not return to school to earn a high school diploma. Many regret they did not do so.

During the last legislative session, the Michigan legislature enacted Public Act 181 of 2001, which allows school districts to award high school diplomas to the veterans of World War II who left school in

order to enlist, and who upon their return did not enroll in high school to complete their studies. That law was adopted as part of a nationwide program called Operation Recognition, a movement led by veterans groups that has been underway since 1999 to identify veterans and award them their high school diplomas.

Recently, veterans of the Korean War launched an official three-year period of recognition, in order to identify, thank and honor those who fought. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.) In order to pay tribute to the veterans of that war who stopped their high school studies in order to fight, legislation has been introduced that would allow school districts to award high school diplomas to Korean War veterans, in the same manner that they do veterans of World War II.

***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

House Bill 4613 would amend Public Act 181 of 2001, which authorizes school district boards to award high school diplomas to World War II veterans if they left school before graduation in order to join the armed forces. The bill would amend the act so that a school district could also award a diploma to a veteran of the Korean conflict (spanning the period June 27, 1950 to January 31, 1955).

MCL 35.341

***BACKGROUND INFORMATION:***

*Korean War Three-Year Recognition.* The 50<sup>th</sup> Commemoration of the Korean War officially began on June 25, 2000. To date, events have included wreaths laid at Arlington National Cemetery and the Korean War Memorial in Washington, D.C., symposiums, dinners, and awards ceremonies. In addition, the Inchon Landing was re-enacted in Norfolk, Virginia, as well as in Inchon, Korea. Hundreds of Commemoration partners throughout

House Bill 4613 (7-10-03)

Michigan, the United States, and including groups in the allied nations (for example, in Turkey, Australia, and New Zealand) have scheduled events until the official closing ceremony on Veterans Day, November 11, 2003. Organizers of the 50<sup>th</sup> Commemoration say they hope the series of events will recognize and remember prisoners of war and those whose remains have not been recovered; recognize the contributions of women and minorities, since for the first time, the fighting force was integrated; provide the American public with a clear understanding of the lessons learned from the war; inform future generations about the U.S. military's contributions in maintaining freedom; recognize the contributions of the United Nations forces; and, ensure that the commemorative events strengthen and unify the bonds of friendship throughout the world.

*Total Korean War casualties.* In addition to the more than 36,000 U.S. soldiers who lost their lives in South Korea, casualties were suffered by Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Further, according to one source, the official number of South Koreans dead, wounded and missing was 843,572; the number of North Koreans dead, wounded or missing, 520,000; while the number of Chinese casualties was 390,000, and the number of casualties from the Soviet Union was 299.

*The first integrated force.* On July 26, 1948, about two years before the Korean War began, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9981, calling for equal treatment and opportunity for all within the armed services, without regard to race. President Truman's ultimate intent was desegregation of the armed services, although he did not explicitly order an end to segregation in the military. The different branches of the services moved toward integration in different ways, but during the Korean War the economic and social advantages of desegregation became apparent to all, creating a more effective fighting force.

*United Nations Joint Force.* In addition to U.S. troops, the war was fought by soldiers from the first joint force deployed by the United Nations. The soldiers making up the joint force came from Belgium, the British Commonwealth, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Philippines, Thailand and Turkey. Further, non-military United Nations forces came from India, Italy, Norway, and Sweden.

## **FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill would not have a substantial fiscal impact, although administrative costs for local schools districts and the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (in responding to inquiries about the program) could increase. (6-30-03)

## **ARGUMENTS:**

### ***For:***

During the 1950s hundreds of young men and women left high school and the comforts of home to serve in the United States armed forces when the nation's war effort began in Korea. Their sacrifice helped to ensure the political freedom of the people in South Korea, and shaped the course of history in the Far East. After the war, many of the veterans were unable to complete their high school studies, yet they led productive lives and helped build vital families and communities throughout their lifetimes. In recognition of their contribution, this legislation allows the school district the veteran left 50 or more years ago to award a long-delayed high school diploma. This recognition of Michigan's Korean War veterans is appropriate for it reminds us that sacrifice should be honored, and whenever possible, it also should be rewarded.

## **POSITIONS:**

The Commanders Group of Veterans Organizations supports the bill. (7-1-03)

The American Legion testified in favor of the bill. (7-1-03)

Analyst: J. Hunault

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.