



# NEWS from U.S. Senator Bob Dole

(R.-Kans.)

New Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 224-6521

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## DOLE LAUDS VETS' BENEFIT BILL

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) today praised legislation that has been introduced to prevent the automatic eligibility for veterans' benefits of all Vietnam era veterans whose undesirable discharges are upgraded by action of the President and the Defense Department.

A bill sponsored by Sen. Strom Thurmond (R-S.C.) to nullify the automatic benefit qualification of veterans whose discharges are upgraded is pending in the Senate Armed Services Committee. Dole is a co-sponsor of the measure.

In a statement issued Wednesday, Dole said he enthusiastically supports the Thurmond bill.

## PENTAGON REVIEW

President Carter authorized review by the Defense Department of veterans who were separated from the armed forces with undesirable, bad conduct or dishonorable discharges.

Under present law, individuals whose discharges are changed to general or honorable status as a result of the upgrading would be automatically entitled to full GI benefits, including aid for higher education, hospitalization and disability benefits. The Veterans Administration has estimated that the cost of upgrading 173,000 undesirable discharges to general or honorable would be about \$170 million in additional GI benefits.

"It is possible," Dole said, "that a deserter could be brought back into the service, have his discharge upgraded, and then be entitled to the same benefits received by those who completed honorable and faithful service."

## SAME BENEFIT STANDARDS

The Thurmond bill merely makes clear that the recipient of an upgraded discharge must meet the same benefit eligibility standards as other veterans.

"To open up the GI bill, our VA hospitals, veterans pensions and other benefits to those who left the service with less than honorable discharge, on a blanket basis, would be to thumb our noses at the millions who served honorably, Dole added. "Regardless of the advisability or unadvisability of upgrading undesirable discharges at this time, we don't want to subvert one of this nation's most cherished traditions -- that of caring for our veterans, their widows and their orphans. Eligibility for veterans' benefits should be considered on case-by-case basis."