Stolen Valor Act Passes Congress!

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The national commander of America's largest and oldest major combat veterans organization is applauding Congress this week for passing the Stolen Valor Act of 2013, which now heads to the White House for the president's signature.

John E. Hamilton, a triple Purple Heart recipient who leads the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, said Congress followed the roadmap laid out by the U.S. Supreme Court when they overturned the Stolen Valor Act of 2005 last year. In their writings, the high court suggested any future legislation had to be narrower in focus than just to penalize people for simple lying, which they ruled as protected speech in a 6-3 decision.

"Now the new language is bullet-proof," said Hamilton, "because the focus is on the intent to profit from the lie, to obtain money, property or something of a tangible benefit, which is what con artists have been doing throughout history."

The VFW-supported legislation was introduced by Rep. Joe Heck and Sen. Dean Heller, both from Nevada. H.R. 258 passed overwhelmingly in the House on Monday by a vote of 390-3. The Senate passed its companion, S. 210, last night by unanimous consent.

Not every combat award is covered, but the ones most worn by wannabe heroes will be protected once the bill becomes law. Protected are the Medal of Honor, service crosses, Silver Star, Purple Heart, and combat badges such as the Combat Infantryman's Badge, Combat Action Badge, Combat Medical Badge, Combat Action Ribbon and Combat Action Medal. The maximum punishment under the bill would be a $100,000 fine and up to one year in jail for each offense.

"The VFW is very pleased with Congressman Heck and Senator Heller and all their co-sponsors," said Hamilton, who served in Vietnam as a Marine Corps rifleman. "We want all con artists to pay a very severe penalty — and a very public price — for daring to steal the valor of those too few who survived and of the great many who did not."

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