



Alaska State Legislature

Representative Matt Claman

Session: State Capitol, Rm 118 Juneau, AK 99801 Phone: 465-4919

Interim: 1500 W. Benson Blvd., Anch, AK 99503 Phone: 269-0130

House Bill 194

"An Act relating to members and veterans of the uniformed services, including the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps."

Sponsor Statement:

House Bill 194 brings alignment between the federal definition of "veteran" under Title 38: Veterans Benefits, and the state definition of "veteran" as it applies to persons who provided active duty service in the uniformed services of the United States. Currently, the state consistently defines "veteran" as service in the armed services only. This does not recognize the full-time active duty military service of the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service (USPHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps (NOAA), which, under by U.S. Code Title 38, are recognized as uniformed services and are entitled to veterans benefits.

Officers from the USPHS and NOAA (previously known as the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey) have served throughout Alaska since the early 1900's. Like in the armed forces, each USPHS and NOAA serving officer has deployed by orders to the needed mission. Today, USPHS Officers currently serve from Ketchikan to Kotzebue providing services to Alaska's native communities ranging from offering health care to water sanitation engineering. NOAA Officers lead surveying and mapping operations throughout Alaska, improve the navigation over coastal and Arctic waters, and operate vessels conducting fishery research and assessment in state and federal waters. Each officer, regardless of service, is on orders directing the nature of their deployment and their duty stations. This is no different than officers serving in the armed forces.

Upon leaving the service, whether by resigning the commission or retiring in grade, the officers have earned their federal veterans benefit. Many of these officers that have had duty in Alaska have chosen to stay, contributing to our work force and economy by building businesses, providing medical services, or continuing to offer their expertise in public service. This bill offers the opportunity for the state of Alaska to recognize their previous service and the veteran status they have earned.