

NATIONAL ECONOMIC COMMISSION

Topic 1: American Legion Testifies to House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

BACKGROUND: Assistant Director Ron Chamrin testified to the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity on January 17, 2007. **ACTION:** The hearing was conducted early in the second session of the 110th Congress to continue with the momentum of the first session. Recent legislative activities in relation to the Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that contain significant changes to the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) placed the hearing at an opportune time. With the final disposition of the NDAA unclear, The American Legion commented on proposed legislation in reference to the current established statutes. **POLICY:** The American Legion policy and testimony can be viewed at the following website:

<http://veterans.house.gov/hearings/Testimony.aspx?TID=12257>

Topic 2: Small Business Task Force and SBA Veterans Advisory Committee Holds Meeting

BACKGROUND: Meeting to discuss training opportunities for disabled veterans transitioning to the private sector. Deputy Director Joe Sharpe is a member of the SBA Veterans Advisory Committee. **ACTION:** Two companies have approached the American Legion Small Business Task Force hoping to provide assistance to train and hire disabled veterans. The Task Force is assessing their feasibility and capabilities and will report their findings back to Joe Sharpe. Additionally, strategy for the 2nd session of congress and discussions regarding the legislation of the expansion of Veteran Programs through the SBA were also discussed. **POLICY:** The American Legion supports that any veteran business development assistance should include funding to assist Federal agencies in reaching their 5% veteran procurement goals; seek to develop a user-friendly veteran procurement database for use by all Federal government agencies; support that the Federal government and the Department of Defense utilize its available technology to create, fund and support a veteran procurement-spending database within the Department of Defense that would finally bring veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses on equal footing with all other small business special interest groups when it comes to Federal procurement opportunities; and encourages the Congress of the United States to require a reasonable set-aside of federal procurements and contracts for businesses owned and operated by Veterans and for those Veteran businesses affected by base closings and reduction in our military forces.

Topic 3: House Seeks to Expand SBA Programs for Veterans

BACKGROUND: The House on Wednesday sent the Senate a revised version of legislation to expand Small Business Administration programs for veterans and military reservists. By 406-2, the House accepted some of the changes the Senate made earlier to the bill while making some of its own. The bill, sponsored by Rep. [Jason Altmire](#) D-Pa., would reauthorize SBA programs for veterans and reservists for two years and include

\$4.4 million to support Veterans Business Outreach Centers. It also would allow the SBA to offer loans of up to \$50,000 without requiring collateral from a loan applicant. Some 4 million veterans own small businesses, making up about 14 percent of such enterprises, while the unemployment rate for veterans is nearly double the national average. The bill would lengthen the time available to reservists to apply for disaster loans and raise the maximum loan amount. It also would establish a program to inform women veterans about available SBA resources and create a grant program to strengthen outreach to veterans. **ACTION:** Staff of the Economic Division has been fiercely advocating for passage of this bill. Phone calls and letters of support have been distributed to key members in Congress during the 1st session.

Topic 4: American Legion hosts Strategy Session for preventing Homelessness Among Veterans

BACKGROUND: The American Legion hosted a planning session on January 11, 2007 to discuss homeless veterans legislation and programs. “This is the largest and most productive gathering of advocates specifically in regards to homeless veterans in 20 years” stated one participant. Assistant Director Ron Chamrin, member of the VA Advisory Committee on Homeless veterans was a key participant. **ACTION:** Members of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Volunteers of America, Coalition for Supportive Housing, Enterprise Community Partners, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, Coalition for the Homeless, National Coalition for the Homeless, National Alliance to end Homelessness, National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness, National Association of State Workforce Agencies, National Low Income Housing Coalition, and many other VSO’s. The Homes for Heroes Act (HR 3329/ S. 1084) and Veterans Homeless Prevention Act (HR 4161/ S. 2330) and the Enhanced Opportunities for Formerly Homeless Veterans Residing in Permanent Housing Act (S 2273) were thoroughly discussed, debated, and lobbying efforts coordinated. Additionally, the Implementation of the HUD-VASH program was also discussed. **POLICY:** The American Legion seeks to assist all homeless veterans and to prevent future homelessness.

Topic 5: The facts and numbers do not lie, 200,000 Homeless Veterans remain on the street each night in contrast to Bill O’Reilly denials

BACKGROUND: Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor*, host Bill O'Reilly challenged the statistics of homeless veterans and alleged that there are not many homeless veterans out there. This negative press for O’Reilly has brought attention to the plight of the homeless veteran problem. **ACTION:** There are 200,000 homeless veterans on the street each night, 1500 of them are from the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Numerous reports show that funding, programs, transitional housing, permanent housing, supportive services, and other assistance are greatly needed. The 20th Anniversary of the McKinney-Vento act recently occurred, The American Legion coordinates a Homeless Veterans Task Force, hundreds of service providers can also attest to the tragedy of every homeless veteran. The numbers are real, legitimate, and a national travesty. Congress is expected to markup legislation in the next month as a follow up of the hearing in which The

American Legion testified on December 5, 2007.
http://www.house.gov/apps/list/hearing/financialsvcs_dem/ht120507.shtml

POLICY: The American Legion coordinates a Homeless Veterans Task Force (HVTF) amongst its 55 departments. Our goal is to augment existing homeless veteran providers, the VA Network Homeless Coordinators, and the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP), Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP), Disabled Veterans' Outreach Personnel (DVOPs) and Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVERs). In addition to augmentation, we then attempt to fill in the gaps where there is no coverage. Each of The American Legion's Departments contains an HVTF chairman and an employment chairman. These two individuals coordinate activities with The American Legion's local posts within their state. The three-tiered coordination of these two chairmen and numerous local posts attempt to symbiotically assist homeless veterans and prevent future homelessness.

Topic 6: Nominations for National Economic Commission Awards for 2007 Due NOW. Record number of nominations received but there are more needed from every Department

BACKGROUND: The National Economic Commission implores each department to submit their full allotment of Nine (9) nominations for our award programs. We are striving to reach 100% participation in this program. **Deadline for submittals for National Consideration for 2007 is NOW, JANUARY 2008. Departments are strongly urged to continue submitting their nominations.** Any current member of The American Legion can nominate an employer for an award. Each department selects their department winner, that selected winner will then compete against all other departments for the National Award. The commission provides free plaques to each Department containing the awardees information. The National Winner of each category will receive a large plaque to be presented by the National Commander at the Annual National Convention. **ACTION:** Staff of the Economic Division has contacted every Department Adjutant this week offering support. By recognizing employers we hope that this will cause a competitive push of future additional employers to compete for these awards. In turn, this will promote an increase of the number of employers that provide employment opportunities for veterans. Furthermore, participation, coordination and cooperation between employers and veterans are a vital component of our commissions' mission statement. **POLICY:** Feel free to contact the National Staff for any assistance. We look forward to receiving your applications. Nomination forms can be found at: [http://www.legion.org/?section=veterans&subsection=vt_servasres&subsection2=vt award progs&content=vt award progs](http://www.legion.org/?section=veterans&subsection=vt_servasres&subsection2=vt_award_progs&content=vt_award_progs)

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January 18, 2008

Legislative Division Update

TOPIC 1: Medicare Reimbursement for VA medical care

BACKGROUND: VA is prohibited from billing Medicare for third-party reimbursements for the treatment of enrolled, Medicare-eligible veterans' nonservice-connected medical conditions. The American Legion recommends Medicare reimbursements to supplement VA annual budget. **ACTION:** The American Legion continues to lobby lawmakers to authorize VA to collect third-party reimbursements from the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). **POSITION:** The American Legion fully supports Medicare reimbursement for VA and will seek legislation in the 110th Congress.

TOPIC 2: Mandatory Funding for VA medical care

BACKGROUND: The American Legion, VFW, DAV, AMVETS, Blinded Veterans Association, JWV, Military Order of the Purple Heart, PVA, and VVA have joined forces in support of change VA medical care from *discretionary* to *mandatory* annual appropriations. The goal is to help stabilize VA medical care funding by using a formula based system similar to Social Security and Medicare. In a meeting with Representative Reynolds, members from The American Legion asked the congressman to consider mandatory funding to meet our medical care obligations to returning service-members. Rep. Woolsey (CA), introduced H.R. 508 titled *Bring the Troops Home and Iraq Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2007*, which has **52** cosponsors in the House of Representatives. Section 301 asks for assured funding for veteran healthcare. In addition, Rep. Kuhl (NY) has introduced a freestanding measure, H.R. 1382, entitled the *Mandatory Funding for Veterans Act of 2007*. Finally, Rep. Hare (IL) reintroduced legislation offered by his predecessor, Lane Evans, H.R. 2514, *Assured Funding For Veterans Health Care Act*. This bill is supported by the "Partnership" and currently has **115** cosponsors. **ACTION:** On July 25, the Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform presented testimony to the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee supporting mandatory funding for VA health care programs. As a member of the Partnership, The American Legion fully supports the its statement. On October 3, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee held a similar hearing. When asked by lawmakers, VA witnesses expressed opposition to mandatory funding for VA medical care. **POSITION:** The American Legion will continue to seek legislation for assured funding in the 110th Congress and monitor this bill as it works its way through Congress.

TOPIC 3: Disabled Veterans' Tax in the 110th Congress

BACKGROUND: Two years ago, President Bush signed PL 108-136 to allow certain service-connected disabled military retirees with at least 20 years of service to concurrently receive both their military retired pay and their VA disability compensation without the dollar-for-dollar offset. This created two different programs, the Combat Related Special Compensation and the Concurrent Retirement and Disability Pay. **CRSC** allows eligible military retirees to receive both their military retirement pay and VA disability compensations without any offsets and tax-free. Initially, **CRDP** would be

phased in over a 10-year period for military retirees whose service-connected disabilities are rated at 50 percent or greater (military retirement pay is still taxable and VA disability compensation is tax-free, but there is not offset). PL 108-375 contained a provision to repeal the 10-year phase-in for eligible 100 percent service-connected disabled military retirees. For those rated 100 percent service-connected disabled based on unemployability, will receive the full benefit by 2009. Final regulations for this provision are still being promulgated. So far three bills have been introduced in the 110th Congress to repeal the Disabled Veterans' Tax. Rep. Marshall (GA) introduced HR 333, a bill that fully rescinds the tax, and includes provisions for Chapter 61 retirees; this measure has **60** cosponsors. Freshman Rep. Bilirakis (FL) has introduced HR 303 – currently with **156** cosponsors – while Sen. Reid (NV) has introduced S. 439, with **29** cosponsors. The FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act was vetoed by the President due to a provision dealing with lawsuits against the state of Iraq. This week, the House passed a revised version and the Senate will return next week. The bill should be high on their “to do” list. Under the vetoed bill, Chapter 61 military retirees with less than 20 years of military service can now qualify for concurrent receipt of their military retirement pay and their VA disability compensation without the dollar for dollar offset. In addition, military retirees rated 100 percent service-connected disabled due to Individual Unemployability will receive full concurrent receipt within out the phase-in agreed to last year. **ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to urge expanding benefits for *all* service-connected disabled military retirees in the 110th Congress. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports the full repeal of the Disabled Veterans' Tax in the 110th Congress.

TOPIC 4: Immigration Reform

BACKGROUND: The American Legion has been actively engaged in the debate over Illegal Immigration, especially with regards to the proposed “Comprehensive Immigration Reform” measure currently in the Senate. A group of bipartisan Senators and the President have been working on a measure which they contend will fix the problems at the border, and will allow those illegally here to remain, but which they contend is not “Amnesty.” President Bush personally came to the Hill with a new package that would add \$4.4 billion for fencing along the southern border. On June 28, this measure failed to get the 60 votes necessary to invoke cloture, which would shut off debate on the bill. **ACTION:** The American Legion met with various organizations that are opposed to this measure and coordinated a grassroots response. Additionally, we continue to get The American Legion's Policy Paper on Illegal Immigration (http://www.legion.org/documents/pdf/immigrationpaper_0507.pdf) into as many hands as possible both on Capitol Hill and within our grassroots community. We have also testified before the House Immigration Subcommittee on assimilation of immigrants. **POSITION:** The American Legion remains opposed to any measure that grants a de facto amnesty to those illegally in this country. We remain committed to first securing the border as a National Security concern.

TOPIC 5: VA Budget for FY 2008

BACKGROUND: On June 6, the full House Appropriations Committee approved a draft bill to fund Military Construction projects and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for FY 2008. The measure was cleared by a unanimous 56-0 vote of the committee. The bill would increase VA's budget to a total of \$87.7 billion, \$9.9 billion above the FY 07 level – the largest single increase in VA's history – and \$3.8 billion above the President's request for the upcoming fiscal year. VA medical care would be funded at \$36.6 billion, \$2.2 billion more than allocated by the White House. The draft sets major construction funding at \$1.4 billion, nearly \$700 million above the President's request. This increased amount is specifically intended to address CARES construction projects. It also increases funding to VA's repair and maintenance needs to avert any incidents similar to the Walter Reed experience from happening in the VA system. On June 14, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved its version of this appropriations bill, S 1645. This version was very close to the funding levels recommended by the House.

The full House on June 15 passed HR 2642, the Military Construction, Veterans' Affairs, and Related Agencies appropriations act for FY 2008, by a vote of 409-2. On September 6, the Senate passed HR 2642 by a vote of 92-1. This measure met or exceeded the recommendations of The American Legion.

On November 1, House-Senate conferees completed work on the conference report for HR 2642. House leaders attempted to combine the MILCON/VA bill with the Labor-HHS-Education bill, but were thwarted by GOP Senate Leaders. Finally, on December 17, 18 and 19 the House and Senate passed HR 2764, a consolidated omnibus spending bill to fund the federal government for the remainder of FY 2008 – with the exception of the Defense Department, whose funding measure was enacted in mid-November. The President signed the omnibus spending bill on December 26, 2007; it is now Public Law 110-161. On January 17, the President officially requested the additional \$3.7 billion in VA funding. The chart below compares VA funding for FY 2007, as passed by House Senate conferees in early November, and as contained in the consolidated omnibus spending bill.

Discretionary Funding Programs	FY 2007 Funding	Conference Report, HR 2642	Final FY 2008 P.L. 110-161	Emergency Spending Amounts*
Total Medical Care	\$32.3 billion	\$36.7 billion	\$34.2 billion	\$2.5 billion
Medical Services	\$25.5 billion	\$29.1 billion	\$27.2 billion	\$1.9 billion
Medical Administration	\$3.2 billion	\$3.5 billion	\$3.44 billion	\$75 million
Medical Facilities	\$3.6 billion	\$4.1 billion	\$3.6 billion	\$508 million
Medical/Prosthetics Research	\$414 million	\$480 million	\$411 million	\$69 million
Major Construction	\$399 million	\$1.1 billion	\$727 million	\$342 million
Minor Construction	\$199 million	\$631 million	\$233 million	\$342 million
State Veterans' Homes Construction Grants Program	\$85 million	\$165 million	\$85 million	\$80 million

State Veterans' Cemetery Construction Grants Program	\$32 million	\$39 million	\$32 million	\$7 million
National Cemetery Administration	\$161 million	\$195 million	\$167 million	\$28 million
General Operating Expenses	\$1.5 billion	\$1.6 billion	\$1.47 billion	\$133 million
Information Technology	\$1.2 billion	\$2.0 billion	\$1.86 billion	\$107 million

** The "Emergency Spending Amounts" column – a total of \$3.7 billion – is additional spending, included in the conference report for HR 2642, the original VA-Military Construction but stripped out of the Omnibus funding bill. Adding the last two columns above will yield funding amounts approved by Congress and President Bush.*

POSITION: The American Legion fully supports the funding totals as approved by Congress for VA discretionary programs.

TOPIC 6: Flag Amendment

BACKGROUND: The American Legion remains committed to protecting Old Glory from acts of physical desecration and overturning *Texas v. Johnson* (1989). **ACTION:** Rep. Murtha (PA) has introduced H.J. Res. 12, "*The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.*" H.J. Res. 12 currently has **54** cosponsors. **POSITION:** The American Legion fully supports a proposed constitutional amendment to prohibit the physical desecration of Old Glory.

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For Week Ending: 1-18-08**

NATIONAL SECURITY FOREIGN RELATIONS DIVISION
Weekly Report dated January 18, 2008

Directors Notes. This was a busy and productive week. The Division met with representatives from: the Army Surgeon General's staff, to discuss PTSD/TBI issues, the CJCS's staff to discuss wounded warrior care and benefits issues, and the full DPMO staff of the Joint US-Russian POW/MIA Commission. National League of POW/MIA Families Executive Director, Ms. Ann Mills Griffiths, met with Joe Grassi and the Director to provide Joe is orientation on the League and to share her extensive experience thirty plus years in pursuit of the POW/MIA cause. She also gave us an update on JPAC which she just visited and when she met its new Commander, R Adm. Donna Crisp, USN. Both of these leaders have been invited to the POW/MIA update on March 31st during the 2008 Washington Conference. Finally, the revised Defense Spending Bill has passed the House and all wait for next week's Senate passage and the president's signature making it law, hopefully by the end of next week. NS/FR topics of interest follow.

NATIONAL SECURITY TOPICS

TOPIC 1: Long-Term Success In Iraq Is Vital To America's National Security

BACKGROUND: In a meeting with ambassador Ryan Crocker and General David Petraeus at Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, President Bush said, "Iraq is now a different place from one year ago. Long-term success in Iraq is vital to our friends here in the region - and to America's national security. And long-term success will require active U.S. engagement that outlasts my presidency. So at the invitation of Iraqi leaders, we're now building an enduring relationship with Iraq. This relationship will have diplomatic, economic, and security components - similar to relationships we have with Kuwait and other nations in this region and around the world. Most important, in a place where Saddam Hussein once menaced the world, the new U.S.-Iraqi relationship will strengthen a democracy that serves its people, fights terrorists, and serves as a beacon of freedom for millions across the Middle East." According to the N.Y. Times, "The Iraqi defense minister said Monday that his nation would not be able to take full responsibility for its internal security until 2012, nor be able on its own to defend Iraq's borders from external threat until at least 2018." The comments from minister Abdul Qadir "were among the most specific public projections of a timeline for the American commitment in Iraq by officials in either Washington or Baghdad. And they suggested a longer commitment than either government had previously indicated." **POSITION:** As a nation at war, The American Legion has passed Resolution 169 that states our position. The American Legion supports the Commander-in-Chief, Congress, the troops and the leadership in the Global War On Terrorism. **ACTION:** The American Legion, the nations largest veterans organization, will continue to be a leader in the veteran and military community as a voice of support and advocacy.

TOPIC 2: Some Want F-22 Buys Speeded Up

BACKGROUND: Accelerating production of Lockheed Martin's F-22 Raptor is emerging as a possible option as the Air Force determines how to maintain its overall force structure with the grounding of older-model F-15 fighter jets, a top Air Force general says. In an interview Jan. 11 with the Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Maj. Gen. Mark "Shack" Shackelford said Air Force leaders are studying the service's combat capabilities after finding structural defects in more than 40 percent of the service's 441 F-15s.

One possible course, he said, will be "should we or could we accelerate the rate at which we buy F-22s." He added, however, that it is "too early to speculate" on the ultimate decision. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports the procurement of the F-22 Raptor to the stated USAF requirement of 381 as stated in Resolution 85 from the 89th National Convention in Reno, NV. **ACTION:** The American Legion has submitted its Views and Estimates to Congress urging them to replace the aging fleet of F-15's with F-22's.

FOREIGN RELATIONS TOPICS

Topic 1: American Legion Meets with Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office

BACKGROUND: American Legion Director of the National Headquarters National Defense and Foreign Relations Division Phil Riley and Assistant Director Joseph Grassi attended a briefing given by the Department of Defense (DoD) Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office. The DoD called the meeting solely to meet with the Legion representatives and to suggest that the two organizations should work more closely together in an effort to bring more successes in POW/MIA investigations. **POSITION:** Continue to provide sufficient personnel and resources so that investigative efforts of POW/MIA situations can be broadened and accelerated. **ACTION:** The division will collaborate with the entire organization to develop initiatives that will keep this issue in the forefront of the National conscience in addition to making efforts to obtain meaningful information with the aim of recovering and accounting for all our POWs and MIAs.

Topic 2: Violence in Kenya After Elections

BACKGROUND: Violence has erupted this week, after incumbent [Mwai Kibaki](#) was declared winner of the country's [presidential elections](#) that took place on [December 27, 2007](#). The anger stems from reports that the vote counting was rigged by the electoral commission in Kibaki's favour. Kibaki was [sworn in](#) in a hastily conducted ceremony at Nairobi State House which was perceived as an attempt to preempt demands for a vote recount. Supporters of Kibaki's opponent, [Raila Odinga](#), went on a rampage in several parts of the country, burning shacks, shops and cars. Simultaneously, it has been alleged that Kenyan police fatally fired upon demonstrators. Reports by international observers about manipulations and admissions by members of the electoral commission that their staff obviously provided them with incorrect figures have further fuelled this anger. The violence has been directed mainly against [Kikuyus](#), belonging to the same ethnic group as Kibaki. The violence against Kikuyus occurred mainly in areas like the Nairobi Slums, [Nyanza Province](#), the [Rift Valley](#) and the Coast where opposition against Kibaki is particularly strong. The ethnically diverse Nairobi slums have also seen violence by

Kikuyu dominated groups—amongst them the infamous [Mungiki](#)—against neighbours hailing from western parts of Kenya. A [BBC](#) reporter saw 43 bodies with gunshot wounds in a mortuary in the opposition stronghold of [Kisumu](#). A witness said armed police shot protesters at a rally. There have been running battles in the [Nairobi](#) slums. As many as 600 deaths have been reported due to the violence since the elections took place. Kenya, long one of the most stable and economically developed nations in East Africa, descended into chaos, according to one news report. Odinga said that, despite the violence, he would be prepared in a new government to work with, but not under, Kibaki. He called on the president to negotiate on power-sharing and to set a date for new elections. Former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan had planned to arrive in Kenya on Tuesday to mediate the dispute, but he postponed the effort for a couple of days because he was hit with the flu, his office said. It said Annan will try to make the trip as soon as possible. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports productive international relationships. This support includes advocating for necessary international relations, treaties and alliances, in order to protect the citizens of this country, and its democratic way of life. **ACTION:** We will continue to monitor this situation and communicate with the U.S. Department of State in an effort to share concerns and possible solutions.

Topic 3: Iraq Progress Report from Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)

BACKGROUND: This week the Department of State's Lou Lantner, who is the leader of Embedded PRT Baghdad 4 gave a report on his observations. Lanter is home-based about 25 miles south of the city of Baghdad at an Army base. He and his team are embedded with the 3rd Combat Brigade of the 101st Airborne. "I'm the Team Leader -- my deputy, who is an Army reservist lieutenant colonel, is with me, as well as our USAID representative. We are the management corps and we work alongside the brigade commander, who is a full colonel. We have three of our team in the city of Mahmudiyah at a forward operating base. And then we have three people in the city of Yusufiyah, which is in the -- again, Mahmudiyah Qada. Yusufiyah is the center of agriculture and I am lucky to have two Army reservists as well as a regular Army officer who's a veterinarian in Yusufiyah." On the economic side, economic development, the PRT works with the Iraqis to reestablish some of the businesses that had been going on before five years ago or so, including a ready-made clothing factory as a state-owned enterprise. Then there is a fully state-owned enterprise, which is a metal and bicycle factory. And these factories are on relatively good campuses and they are adjacent to one another. Buildings are in relatively good shape and most of the buildings are unoccupied by people. They have -- some have machinery still in them. In the case of the ready-made clothing, they could employ about 700 people and they did employ 700 people seven years ago, and they have about 50 people employed right now. And the same -- the numbers are a little higher for the bicycle -- excuse me, for the metal and bicycle factory, where they have about 50 or 60 people working now and they could have 1,200 people working. "So we're looking -- we're trying to assist them in deciding what would it take in addition to orders for production -- what would it take to get those factories operating again. And our people and my team members in Mahmudiyah, two of whom are city planners, a city manager, and one business specialist, along with the brigade engineer, look at the buildings and look at the machinery to see what shape the machinery is in, and we come up with a plan and we assist the managers of the plants, of the factories, in

developing their plan for getting their factories operating again.” Checkpoints are a relatively new concept in terms of employment, Lantner reported. He discussed “concerned local citizens (CLCs)”, who are for the most part, former Iraqi army people and who are unemployed right now. And they have been screened after they apply for these positions and they are in what might be compared to a neighborhood watch here in the states. “So it’s a self-directed -- it’s under the direction of the Iraqi army, but the units are on their own at these checkpoints. And they have their own weapons. We don’t arm them. We’ve been – some of the stories in Iraq have talked about the U.S. Army and the State Department arming local militias. It’s not the case. We haven’t armed anybody on this. But they do have their own weapons and they manage these checkpoints and that’s one big reason why security has reached better levels than it was a year ago because we have these CLCs and we have quite a few checkpoints.” Another program that the PRT is coordinating is the Chicken Run Project. In the past three months, The PRT has seen the number of poultry farms in the region go from three to seven. “We want to see that number in the next twelve months go to more than 100 and we’re on track to have that realized,” Lantner said. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports productive international relationships. This support includes advocating for necessary international relations, treaties and alliances, in order to protect the citizens of this country, and its democratic way of life. Also, The American Legion fully supports the President of the United States, the United States Congress and the men, women and leadership of our armed forces as they are engaged in the global war on terrorism; and urges all Americans and freedom-loving peoples everywhere to stand *united* in their support of the global war on terrorism, and *united* in their support of the troops who are engaged in protecting our values and way of life. **ACTION:** We will continue to monitor this situation and communicate with the U.S. Department of State in an effort to share concerns and possible solutions. Also, The American Legion will continue to support all efforts to defeat our enemies in the War on Terror and will continue to monitor situations to ensure that the military receives necessary support regarding all facets of the mission.

Approved By: Philip D. Riley, Director

NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: Bush Approves VA Contingency Funding

BACKGROUND: This week President Bush approved \$3.7 billion in emergency funding for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Congress included the provision for the additional funding in the omnibus spending bill it passed in December to fund most federal government agencies in 2008. The emergency funding provision required the president's approval before any money can be sent to the VA.

Much of the money is earmarked to expand services at VA hospitals, build new facilities and conduct research. Another portion is designated to hire more claims processors to cut down a nationwide backlog of more than 600,000 benefits claims. With the additional \$3.7 billion, the VA will experience an overall increase of \$11.8 billion since Democrats took control of Congress last year

POSITION: The American Legion supports the VA Contingency Funding and signed the letter with nine other veterans' organizations to President Bush on this matter.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor the ongoing budget battles in Congress and fight for appropriations for our veterans.

TOPIC 2: Commission On The Future For America's Veterans Meets in DC

BACKGROUND: The Commission on the Future for America's Veterans is an independent, autonomous body tasked with charting a clear course to a new era of veterans programs and services. Members are not appointed by government, nor does it represent the views of individual stakeholder organizations. The Commission analyzes data and trends affecting the future for America's veterans with the support of professional staff, a respected research institute, and expert working groups from academia, industry and the public policy arena.

POSITION: The American Legion supports the goals of the Commission and continues to work with members of the Commission.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor the progress of the Commission.

TOPIC 3: Hearing on Veterans Health Care Legislation

BACKGROUND: The American Legion Deputy Director of Health Care testified on January 18, 2008 before the Senate Sub Committee on Health on the following proposed legislation:

H.R. 2790 - Director of Physician Assistant Services –The American Legion has no specific official position on this bill. We do however, support the impact it seeks to have if the PA advisor was full time instead of part time, to include a great impact on rural areas.

H.R. 3458 - Pilot Program on Traumatic Brain Injury Care in Rural Areas - The American Legion supports this bill.

H.R. 3819 - Veterans Emergency Care Fairness Act of 2007 - The American Legion supports this bill.

H.R. 4107 - Women Veterans Health Care Improvement Act - The American Legion has no specific official position on this bill. However, we do support adequate health care, to include special needs care such as Military Sexual Trauma and funding for women and all veterans.

H.R. 4146 - Emergency Medical Care for Veterans in Non-VA Facilities - The American Legion supports this bill

H.R. 4204 - Veterans Suicide Study Act - The American Legion supports this bill.

H.R. 4231 - Rural Veterans Health Care Access Act of 2007 - The American Legion supports this bill.

H.R. 4053 - Mental Health Improvements Act of 2007 - The American Legion supports this bill.

POSITION: See above

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor the progress of these important bills

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Week Ending 01/18/07

