

NATIONAL ECONOMIC COMMISSION

Topic 1: American Legion hosts 2nd Strategy Session for preventing Homelessness Among Veterans

BACKGROUND: The American Legion hosted a second planning session on February 14, 2007 to discuss homeless veterans legislation and programs. 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 2: Meetings with the staff of Rep. Pete King (NY) and Sen. John Kerry (MA)

BACKGROUND: Rep. King and Sen. Kerry have expressed his desire to introduce a comprehensive bill similar to the Servicemembers Readjustment Act of 1944. **ACTION:** Both offices are months away from drafting this bill. Assistant Director Ron Chamrin met with both offices separately to express The American Legions positions. The bill aims to encompass Education, Reintegration in to the Workforce, Affording a Home and the VA Home Loan Program, Supporting Family Members, Prevention of Homelessness, and increased Mental Health assistance (we did not comment on mental health as it falls under VA & R). We are assisting them and providing guidance on what are the top priorities and best approaches to passage of such legislation. **POLICY:** All American Legion adopted resolutions can viewed at: <http://www.legion.org/whatsnew/publicrelations/publications> They are listed at the bottom of the webpage.

Topic 3: DOL-VETS Advisory Committee Meets

BACKGROUND: The Committee convened in Denver, CO over two days to discuss and present recommendations to assist veterans gain employment and transition from the

military to the private sector. Deputy Director Joe Sharpe is an appointed member of the DOL-VETS Advisory Committee. **ACTION:** Members were briefed on the TurboTap.org transition website and the Military Spouse Career center operated by Military.com. The website reported some impressive numbers: 117 k Monthly Unique Visitors, 538 K Total Spouse eNewsletter Subscribers, 12 K New Spouse Resumes, 2.9 million Job Searches, and 660 Spouses Hired. **POLICY:** The American Legion supports full funding for DOL-VETS. Full funding will enable the program to effectively support veterans in terms of employment and protection of employment rights.

Topic 4: The Veterans Corporation (TVC)

BACKGROUND: TVC's charter called for them to do a number of things, most important of which was to create a network of resource centers for the purpose of assisting and supporting veterans who wanted to start and/or grow businesses. When TVC raised its flag in 2000 they had \$12M in "start-up capitol" dispensed over a 4 year period with the intention of getting the corporation on its feet. TVC was charged with becoming self sufficient and was supposed to be off government subsidy by the end of 2004. As 2004 drew to a close, the existing leadership recognized that all of the start-up funds were gone and that TVC was no closer to being financially independent than they were when they started. **ACTION:** The three centers have thrived over the last few years despite the lack of support, adversarial relationship and total abandonment of TVC. While on the other hand, TVC has arguably the worst reputation in history with regard to veteran programs as their reputation continues to spiral down. **POLICY:** The American Legion supports restructuring of the National Veterans Business Development Corporation, which replaces the Chief Executive Officer with a congressionally appointed Director from the Senior Executive Service, and restricting the role of the Board of Directors to fundraising, marketing and branding which will serve to increase small business opportunities to veterans.

Topic 5: Tech Expo Top Secret

BACKGROUND: Tech Expo Top Secret has approached The American Legion looking to partner and offer assistance to employ veterans in positions requiring a security clearance. Techexpo Top Secret is a producer of professional job fairs for **Security-Cleared** professionals. TechExpoUSA.com serves as an online career center, where the finest defense contractors, technology companies, consulting firms and numerous agencies of the US Government can virtually recruit and hire experienced cleared professionals. The company has consistently produced the nation's most successful hiring events in a multitude of industries with a major focus on Technology and Intelligence. **ACTION:** Techexpo Top Secret career fairs target ALL professionals with a US government security clearance, especially those with skill sets in all areas of I/T, engineering, telecommunications, aerospace, intelligence & operations. Active, transitioning & retired military personnel are always encouraged to attend. These events typically provide face-to-face interviews for hundreds of jobs that require all levels of

clearance. Some of our events, simply called Techexpo, do not require an active clearance and are open to all experienced technology & engineering professionals with at least 2 years in the industry. **POLICY:** The American Legion is researching this potential partnership.

Ron Chamrin
Assistant Director
Economic Commission
202-861-2700 x1405

Joseph Sharpe, Jr.
Deputy Director
Economic Commission
202-861-2700 x 1402
February 22, 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. The Partnership is placing emphasis on sufficiency, timeliness, and predictability of VA's annual appropriations. 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 **116** 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: President Bush signed the first FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act on January 28, PL 110-181. Under this 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. **ACTION:** A new American Legion pamphlet, entitled *The American Legion Policy on Illegal Immigration: A Strategy to Address Illegal Immigration in the United States* is available online at <http://www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/illegalimmigration.pdf> for immediate access. **ACTION:** The National Legislative Commission and Council is making their members aware of the new publication and will disseminate copies on Capitol Hill. **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 2009

BACKGROUND: In September 2007, National Commander Conatser testified before a joint session of the Veterans’ Affairs Committees. He outlined The American Legion’s funding recommendations for FY 09 for specific discretionary accounts within the Department of Veterans Affairs. The President’s budget request for FY 09 was released on Monday, Feb. 4, 2008. **ACTION:** The American Legion will testify before the Veterans’ Affairs Committees in response. The testimony is available on the Internet: <http://veterans.house.gov/hearings/Testimony.aspx?TID=13345>

Discretionary Funding Programs	Final FY 2008 P.L. 110-161	President’s Proposal FY 2009	Legion’s FY 09 Request
Total Medical Care	\$36.7 billion	\$38.7 billion	\$38.4 billion
Medical Services	\$29.1 billion	\$34 billion	
Medical Administration	\$3.2 billion		
Medical Facilities	\$4.1 billion	\$4.6 billion	
Medical/Prosthetics Research	\$480 million	\$442 million	\$476 million
Major Construction	\$1.1 billion	\$582 million	\$1.56 billion
Minor Construction	\$579 million	\$329 million	\$485 million
State Veterans’ Homes Construction Grants Program	\$165 million	\$85 million	\$275 million
State Veterans’ Cemetery Construction Grants Program	\$39 million	\$32 million	\$45 million
National Cemetery Administration	\$195 million	\$181 million	\$228 million
General Operating Expenses	\$1.6 billion	\$1.7 billion	\$2.8 billion
Information Technology	\$2 billion	\$2.4 billion	\$2.3 billion

POSITION: The American Legion fully supports the funding totals as approved by Congress for VA discretionary programs for FY 2008.

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 **58** cosponsors. **POSITION:** The American Legion fully supports a proposed constitutional amendment to prohibit the physical desecration of Old Glory.

Legislative Division
Steve Robertson, Director
(W) 202-263-2981; (H) (540) 371-0381
Cell (202) 445-1332
For Week Ending: 2-22-08

NATIONAL SECURITY/FOREIGN RELATIONS DIVISION
WEEKLY REPORT, 19-22 FEBRUARY

Directors Notes: Two meetings of importance occurred this week. We met with OSD PAO to refine planning for the National Commander's upcoming Trips. We also attended the DoD Force Health Protection and Readiness (FHP&R) Monthly VSO update. FHP&R's mission is to provide optimal health services in support of our nation's military mission by ensuring that DoD: recruits and maintains a healthy and fit force; prevents disease and injury within the force; and, treats and cares for those who become ill or injured while serving. This month VSOs were briefed by their office of Countermeasures to Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) threats and upon the existing databases it maintains for Chemical and Biological Exposure. It has three data bases:

- Mustard Lewisite Data Base (6300 names 1943-1946)
- Project 112/Shad (Shipboard Hazard and Defense Data Base (6,440 plus names-1960s)
- CD Follow-on Data Base (Approximately 10,000 names, including names from exposures at 19 different locations to over 400 compounds/agents. Locations include Edgewood Arsenal, Ft. Detrick and Dugway Proving Grounds.)

Veterans who have questions on or information about testing can call the Countermeasures call number 1-800-497-6261.

VSOs were also asked to encourage military members, veterans and their families to use FHP&R comprehensive website at www.health.mil !

Enjoy the following topics in NS/FR.

NATIONAL SECURITY

TOPIC 1: Postal Service to Offer Discount for Military Care Packages

BACKGROUND: The U.S. Postal Service will begin offering a discount Priority Mail rate March 3 and a larger box for care packages sent to military members overseas. The new flat-rate box is 50 percent larger than the current Priority Mail package and it will be delivered for \$10.95 to an APO/FPO address -- \$2 less than for domestic destinations. The new Priority Mail Large Flat-Rate Box (12" x 12" x 5 inches or 800 cubic inches) will be available in Post Offices nationwide beginning March 3, but customers can begin ordering them Feb. 20 at usps.com/supplies or by calling 800-610-8734. The \$2 discount is applied when the Priority Mail Large Flat-Rate Boxes are shipped to an APO/FPO destination. The two existing flat-rate boxes (11 x 3 x 13 inches and 11 x 8 X 5 inches), which currently retail for \$8.95 for U.S. addresses, are not available for the military discount, postal officials said. They said all flat-rate boxes can still be used for international shipping. **POSITION:** Many American Legion posts have adopted units who serve overseas and this discount will help in the support of our service members. The American Legion is pleased that the Postal Service is providing this discount. **ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to support the troops.

TOPIC 2: Turkish Army Launches Land Offensive Into Iraq

BACKGROUND: Turkey's military has said it had launched a cross-border land offensive backed by fighter jets into northern Iraq on Thursday evening to hunt down Kurdish PKK guerrillas. Turkish television reported, without citing sources, that 10,000 troops had entered Iraqi territory. NTV said troops had moved 10 km (6 miles) inside Iraq. The European Union and the United States have in the past raised concern that a major cross-border offensive could destabilize the region, though have not criticized recent small-scale cross-border raids over the past two months. In Baghdad, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said his government was not aware of any Turkish ground offensive. Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki called on his Turkish counterpart on Thursday evening to respect Iraq's borders after renewed shelling. President Jalal Talabani accepted an invitation from Turkish President Abdullah Gul to visit Turkey. **POSITION:** The American Legion is concerned about the Turkish incursion into Iraq and how it will effect the security of the region. While Turkey must maintain its right to defend itself it must also respect Iraq's borders. **ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to follow the developments of this event.

Foreign Relations

TOPIC 1: Leadership Change in Pakistan; U.S. Relations Need Defining

Pakistan's two main opposition parties announced Thursday they would form a new government together after their victory over President Pervez Musharraf's allies in elections this week. Asif Ali Zardari of the Pakistan People's Party (the same party of slain former premier Benazir Bhutto) and the Pakistan Muslim League-N led by Nawaz Sharif made the announcement at a joint news conference after meeting in Islamabad. "We have agreed on a common agenda. We will work together to form a government together in the center and in the provinces," Sharif said. Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari said "we intend to stay together and be together in the parliament ... We intend to strengthen Pakistan together." Sharif said the two parties had agreed in principle on restoration of judges purged by Musharraf when he declared emergency rule late last year -- an issue that many see as a possible source of discord between the parties. "In principle there's no disagreement on restoration of the judiciary. We will work on the modalities in parliament," said Sharif, who has previously demanded the immediate reinstatement of the detained ex-Chief Justice Iftikhar Mohammed Chaudhry. The two party leaders did not make explicit whether they would push for Musharraf's ouster. They won a comfortable majority in parliament in Monday's election, but fell short of the two-thirds majority in parliament required for the president's impeachment.

But Sharif reiterated his desire for the U.S.-backed president to go. "I think the nation today has given out its verdict and that verdict is amply clear and it is from every nook and corner of Pakistan," Sharif said. **POSITION:** The American Legion believes that the following objectives should be incorporated into U.S. Foreign Policy: Recognition that the U.S. has great and multiple responsibilities as a leader of the Free World; Dedication to achievement of world peace with freedom, secured by a peace through strength posture; Support for a global fight on multiple fronts to end the scourge of terrorism; Support for democracy and human rights in other countries when such is consistent with U.S. national interests and national power. Also, The American Legion supports foreign policies that specifically target diplomatic, economic and educational programs to

promote greater and peaceful democratic reforms in countries within the Arabian Gulf, the Middle Eastern Region and Southwest Asia. **ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to monitor and study the matter along with interacting with the Department of State in an effort to build resolutions that strengthen America's security and efforts leading to the defeat of America's enemies.

TOPIC 2: Serb Protestors Attack U.S. Embassy

In a display of seething resentment, Serbs protested U.S. support for an independent Kosovo by burning U.S. Flags and attacking the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade, Serbia. According to one news report, "Serbs consider Kosovo as the heartland of their culture." State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said Serbian security "wasn't adequate," at the embassy. He also said the U.S. government warned Serbia's leaders it would hold them personally responsible for the damage. **POSITION:** The American Legion strongly supports the United States Department of State and the many vital functions it performs for the American public around the world. The Department of State is the first line of defense of the nation in combating the myriad of security threats that face America from abroad. Department of State officers and country teams are also the first lines of offense in the cultural and ideological struggle faced globally beyond the nation's borders. **ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to monitor and study the matter along with interacting with the Department of State in an effort to build resolutions that strengthen America's standing in the world.

TOPIC 3: Bush Pledges 1 Million Schoolbooks for Liberian Children

On the final stop of his five-nation Africa tour, President Bush told the Liberian people that the United States stands with them and will help them recover from decades of civil war. As part of that effort, he pledged 1 million textbooks for Liberian schools and locally made school desks and seating for 10,000 Liberian schoolchildren. In remarks on the parade grounds at the Barclay Training Center in Monrovia February 21, Bush said, "The people of the United States will stand with you as you rebuild your country." The center is an operations and training base for the Liberian military. The United States is working with the Liberian government to restructure and professionalize Liberian security forces. Since the end of the country's civil war, the United States has helped Liberia revitalize its economy, strengthen good governance and the rule of law and deliver basic services. The United States also has provided more than \$750 million in direct support and funds a quarter of the costs of U.N. peacekeeping operations in Liberia. Bush credited Liberia with making progress because of the "iron will" of Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first freely elected woman president in Africa, who Bush said has "opened up a new relationship" between the United States and Liberia. Bush also thanked the Liberian people for their "courage, steadfastness and enduring faith in the power of freedom." The American and Liberian people, Bush said, are fighting the scourge of diseases such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, working to remove the burden of debt and to educate the children of Liberia. Additionally, Bush said the United States, in concert with others, is working to "build a new armed forces that will be a source of security for the Liberian people instead of a source of terror." **POSITION:** The American Legion is dedicated to the achievement of world peace with freedom, through strength posture and recognizes that The United States has great multiple

responsibilities as a leader of the Free World. The American Legion also supports a global fight on multiple fronts to end the scourge of terrorism and maintains a determined opposition to international terrorism. **ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to encourage U.S. government to improve its international efforts on all fronts of diplomacy. America needs to take actions that emphasize its wish to build new and meaningful international relationships which promote peace, justice and democracy. This is the mission of the Department of State. The American Legion will continue to promote the Department of State as the government's first and sustaining arm for achieving strong defense, security and peace.

Phillip D. Riley
Director
National Security-
Foreign Relations
Division (Week ending:
2/22/08)
(W) 202-263-2984

NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1- DoD and VA Senior Oversight Committee Transition

BACKGROUND: U.S. Senator Daniel Akaka is urging the Co-Chairmen of the DoD and VA Senior Oversight Committee to develop a transition plan as the current administration completes its final year. The Senior Oversight Committee was formed in the wake of the Walter Reed Scandal last year to facilitate cooperation between DoD and VA. The DoD and VA Senior Oversight Committees, chaired by Deputy DoD Secretary England, and VA Deputy Secretary Mansfield, have been working together to implement many of the recommendations of various studies, as part of an effort to provide a seamless transition from military service to veteran status.

POSITION: The American Legion supports improved communication between DoD and VA.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor the intergovernmental relationship between DoD and VA, in addition to working with each department.

TOPIC 2: VA/DOD PTSD Diagnosis

BACKGROUND: VA Sec James Peake has agreed that veterans who are diagnosed as having PTSD on active duty should be recognized as having PTSD for VA purposes. This decision will end VA's former requirement that veterans diagnosed with PTSD on active duty provide additional evidence of exposure to specific stressors during their service in order to establish their diagnosis of PTSD at the VA. Secretary Peake has also directed VA regional offices to immediately schedule examinations for such veterans in order to determine the severity of their PTSD for VA compensation purposes.

POSITION: The American Legion supports the recognition of an active duty PTSD diagnosis as sufficient for VA purposes.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor the needs of America's veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

TOPIC 3: Missing in America Project Update

BACKGROUND: The Missing in America Project (MIAP) and The American Legion are continuing their collaboration to identify the abandoned cremated remains of America's Veterans. This week, MIAP appointed Heidi Voight, Miss CT 2006, a member of The American Legion Riders, as the National MIAP Spokesman. MIAP also interred cremains of veterans at the Redding, California VA Cemetery this week. MIAP has been featured in several news stories in the state of California and will be having upcoming articles in American Funeral Director Magazine as well as Legion Magazine. The American Legion also mailed brochures to the Michigan MIAP Coordinator and spoke to The American Legion Dept. of Kansas Adjutant about the program this week.

POSITION: The American Legion supports the Missing in America Project through Resolution 24 at our 2007 National Convention.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue our close working relationship with MIAP to ensure a proper burial for all our veterans.

TOPIC 4: VA Rural Health National Advisory Committee

BACKGROUND: Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake announced the creation of a special Rural Health National Advisory Committee to advise him and the senior leaders of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) about health care issues affecting veterans in rural areas. This advisory committee is to ensure the Department remains responsive to the health care needs of rural veterans. The committee will consist of members familiar with rural health issues and will come from the federal, state and local sectors, academia and veterans service organizations.

POSITION: The American Legion supports the creation of the Rural Health National Advisory Committee

ACTION: The American Legion will monitor the progress and recommendations of the Committee

**NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND
REHABILITATION COMMISSION
Peter S. Gaytan, Director
(202) 263-2983
Week Ending 02/22/08**