

## NATIONAL ECONOMIC COMMISSION

### Topic 1: 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Midwinter Conference Held

**BACKGROUND:** The National Economic Commission held annual meetings at the 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Midwinter Conference at the Renaissance Hotel in Washington, DC from March 28 to April 3, 2008. In attendance over the course of the meetings were 40 members of the Commission, many NEC Liaisons along with Department Commanders and their Adjutants, and over 100 other guests. Highlights of the meetings are as follows:

1. PANEL 1: DEPARTMENT OF LABOR VETERANS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING (DOL-VETS) Gordon Burke Jr., Director, Operations and Programs, Pamela Langley, Chief, Employment and Training Programs (ETP) Division, Kenan Torrens, Chief, Investigation and Compliance Division, William Offutt, Executive Director, HireVetsFirst Campaign, James Arrington, Veterans Employment Specialist REALifelines
2. PANEL 2: DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS (VA) Keith Pedigo, Associate Deputy Undersecretary, Office of Policy and Program Management, Ruth Fanning, Director, Vocational Rehabilitations and Employment, Keith Wilson, Director, Education Service, Judy Caden, Director, Loan Guarantee Service, Pete Dougherty, Director, Homeless Veteran Program
3. PANEL 3: WALTER REED ARMY MEDICAL CENTER TRANSITION PROGRAMS Terry Quattlebaum, Chief, TEAMS, Dennis Stone, TecAccess, Doris Brown, AVUE, Bob Sklandy, Retirementjobs.com, Amy Reich, Cisco
4. PANEL 4: VETERAN OUTREACH RESOURCES Vince Patton, Monster.com Patricia Orsini, Director, Wounded Warrior Program on Capitol Hill, Karen Hannah, DOD HR Specialist, Thomas Cantwell, Rebuilding Together, Sue Cheng, Housing Counseling Services

### Topic 2: Shake up at The Veterans Corporation (TVC), CEO relieved

**BACKGROUND:** Centers that provide small-business counseling and training to veterans in the nation that have been underfunded by Washington-based National Veterans Business Development Corp., better known as the Veterans Corp., a nonprofit organization established in 1999. Congress appropriates money to the Veterans Corp., which in turn funds veterans programs, including the three centers. But the centers recently learned their funding for FY 2008, which started Oct. 1, was scaled back or cut altogether. **ACTION:** Veterans Corp. President and Chief Executive Walter Blackwell was relieved. For FY 2008, Congress appropriated \$1.4 million for the nonprofit, down from \$1.5 million it received in 2007. So to reach more veterans on less money, the corporation started requiring the centers to compete for grants and gave out a total of \$350,000 to eight veteran-related groups, including the Flint, St. Louis and Boston locations. The remaining money, more than \$1 million, is needed to fund the corporation's online training for entrepreneurs, its in-person counseling at the Washington office and operating costs for its staff of four people. Legislators and Congressional officials don't buy Blackwell's explanations and said the

1999 act creating the corporation is being violated. "The law clearly states that (the corporation) was to 'establish and maintain a network of information and assistance centers for use by veterans and the public,'" Kathryn Seck, spokeswoman for the U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, stated: "Creating individual programs doesn't satisfy the law's intent that (the corporation) is obligated to fund these centers." **POLICY:** The American Legion supports the restructuring of the TVC, 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 3: Small Business Task Force Hosted Veteran Business Procurement Training Conference at Annual Mid-winter Conference, Congresswoman Nydia M. Velazquez Presented Award by National Commander**

**BACKGROUND:** The American Legion hosted a Veteran Owned Small Business Workshop in partnership with the Northeast Veterans Business Resource Center, moderated by Louis Celli. **ACTION:** National Commander Marty Conatser presented Rep. Velazquez with an award in appreciation of her efforts of passing 11 veteran related bills from her committee. Presentations included: 1. The Procurement Cycle - Learn How the process works from the person who teaches the "number one rated Small Business Class" at the Defense Acquisition University (DAU). 2. Payment Issues - 2. Understanding how to get your money is critical to staying in business. 3. Procurement Vehicles 4. Projections & forecasts 5. Expert Panels 6. Set asides to get a solicitation changed to an SDVOB set aside. 7. New veteran business laws passed February 14<sup>th</sup>. Legislation introduced and how can it help. P.L. 110-186-Military Reservist and Veteran Small Business Reauthorization and Opportunity Act of 2008. .

### **Topic 4: American Legion Hosted Veteran Education Meeting at Annual Mid-winter Conference**

**BACKGROUND:** The Veterans Education Meeting discussed the newly revised S. 22 bill (Senator Webb) that incorporates many of the American Legion resolutions. Attendees will also discuss the Higher Education Act provisions that would assist veterans, Higher Education Loan calculations for veterans and the GI Bill, and other veterans' education issues. **ACTION:** Presentations were by Assistant Director Ron Chamrin, Partnership for Veterans Education Update; Bob Norton, MOAA, Statement from Jim Bombard; Chair, VA Committee on Education; Mike Sozan, Legislative Director (Sen. Webb) discussed the Newly Revised S. 22 "The Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act", Brittny McCarthy; American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) discussed the Higher Education Act Veteran Friendly Provisions. Attendees were are from the National Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), the American Association of Collegiate Registrars, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, National Association of Independent Colleges and

Universities, National Association of State Approving Agencies, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, National Association of Veterans Program Administrators, Service members Opportunity Colleges, staff members of elected Congressional officials, Veteran Service Organizations, and other higher education interest groups. **POLICY:** The American Legion is an advocate for enhanced veteran education benefits and supports S. 22.

**Topic 5: American Legion Hosted Homeless Veteran Meeting and Homeless Veteran Task Force Executive Meeting at Annual Mid-winter Conference**

**BACKGROUND:** The Homeless Veteran Provider Meeting had key players in housing and homeless prevention to discuss the implementation of the new \$75 million HUD-VASH voucher and the reduction of nearly 21% of homeless veterans. This is a follow up to a landmark appropriation that came as a result of Resolution 14 at the Spring NEC in which the American Legion adopted a policy to support funding for vouchers for the HUD-VASH program be set aside and transferred to the VA Secretary from amounts made available for rental assistance under the Housing Choice Voucher program.

**ACTION:** Attendees were from the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, Volunteers of America, and Corporation for Supportive Housing, Fannie Mae, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, National Alliance to End Homelessness, National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness, National Low Income Housing Coalition, and the Council for Affordable and Rural Housing, Veteran Service Organizations and other homeless veteran interest groups.

**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 Department of Veterans Affairs (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).

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## 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 110<sup>th</sup> 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. Hare (IL) reintroduced legislation offered by his predecessor, Lane Evans, H.R. 2514, *Assured Funding For Veterans Health Care Act*, which now has **121** cosponsors. Senator Johnson has introduced a companion bill, S. 2639 which has **6** cosponsors. The "Partnership" supports these measures. **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 110<sup>th</sup> Congress and monitor these bills as they works its way through Congress.

### **TOPIC 3: Disabled Veterans' Tax in the 110<sup>th</sup> 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 for Combat Related Special Compensation. In addition, military retirees rated 100 percent service-connected disabled due to Individual Unemployability will receive full concurrent receipt without the phase-in agreed to last year beginning in October 2008. **ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to urge expanding benefits for *all* service-connected disabled military retirees in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports the full repeal of the Disabled Veterans' Tax in the 110<sup>th</sup> 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 testified before the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committees, on February 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> respectively, 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
<b>Total Medical Care</b>	<b>\$36.7 billion</b>	<b>\$38.7 billion</b>	<b>\$38.4 billion</b>
<b>Medical Services</b>	<b>\$29.1 billion</b>	<b>\$34 billion</b>	
<b>Medical Administration</b>	<b>\$3.2 billion</b>		
<b>Medical Facilities</b>	<b>\$4.1 billion</b>	<b>\$4.6 billion</b>	
<b>Medical/Prosthetics Research</b>	<b>\$480 million</b>	<b>\$442 million</b>	<b>\$476 million</b>
<b>Major Construction</b>	<b>\$1.1 billion</b>	<b>\$582 million</b>	<b>\$1.56 billion</b>
<b>Minor Construction</b>	<b>\$579 million</b>	<b>\$329 million</b>	<b>\$485 million</b>
<b>State Veterans’ Homes Construction Grants Program</b>	<b>\$165 million</b>	<b>\$85 million</b>	<b>\$275 million</b>
<b>State Veterans’ Cemetery Construction Grants Program</b>	<b>\$39 million</b>	<b>\$32 million</b>	<b>\$45 million</b>
<b>National Cemetery Administration</b>	<b>\$195 million</b>	<b>\$181 million</b>	<b>\$228 million</b>
<b>General Operating Expenses</b>	<b>\$1.6 billion</b>	<b>\$1.7 billion</b>	<b>\$2.8 billion</b>
<b>Information Technology</b>	<b>\$2 billion</b>	<b>\$2.4 billion</b>	<b>\$2.3 billion</b>

\* The American Legion opposes MCCF being offset against VA medical care discretionary funding and recommend it be “scored” as a supplement to the annual appropriations.

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

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**NATIONAL SECURITY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS DIVISION  
WEEKLY REPORT, 31 March to April 4, 2008**

**Director's Notes: The 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Washington Conference.** We finished The American Legion's 48<sup>th</sup> Washington Conference excited by the successful conference, the enthusiasm and engagement of our commission members, and the lessons we learned to improve our division. We were inspired by the words of our leaders and thrilled by Lou Dobb's validation and appreciation of our organization. We thank the NS and FR Chairmen for their excellent meetings and look forward to renewed activity at the Spring NEC during the week of 4 May, 2008. We look forward as well next week to the 8 April 9:30 AM (EDT) testimony of Ambassador Ryan Crocker and General David Petraeus on the situation in Iraq and progress made by the government of Iraq in meeting benchmarks for progress and achieving reconciliation. Enjoy your weekend and reading this report.

***NATIONAL SECURITY***

**TOPIC 1: The American Legion Washington Conference. BACKGROUND:** The American Legion held its 48<sup>th</sup> annual Washington Conference on 31 March – 2 April at the Renaissance Hotel in Washington, DC. The Joint National Security Foreign Relations session had a great turn out. The National Security speakers and topics were BG Tucker, Wounded Warrior Care, Brock Bierman, Citizen Corps, and BG Zanetti, Detention centers at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The National Security Business Session was held on 2 April. Chairman Fang Wong led the session as it discussed the upcoming NEC and the Air Force Tanker resolution, the pre-Convention trip to Luke Air Force Base, the differences between CRSC and CRDP (led by guest speaker MAJ Barrell, DOD-CRSC Directorate), and an overview of all National Security Resolutions that will be up for renewal. Chairman Terence Nolan also announced the regional winners of the National Law Enforcement Officer of the Year competition. **POSITION:** The American Legion, and in particular the National Security Division, will continue to provide Legionnaires with timely and focused information on the issues affecting National Security through the Washington Conference. **ACTION:** The American Legion staff will prepare for the Spring NEC this coming 4-8 May.

**TOPIC 2: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly - New MRAPs Have Been Successful In Saving Troops' Lives and IG's Report Cites Lapses In Testing Of Body Armor. BACKGROUND:** *The Good* - Troops traveling in the military's new Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) trucks have survived attacks from the most lethal explosives in Iraq, according to military commanders and a Pentagon report. Maj. Gen. Rick Lynch, commander of Multi-National Division-Central troops south of Baghdad, said his soldiers are facing more attacks from explosively formed penetrators (EFPs). These weapons fire a molten slug of metal that can slice through armor even on tanks. MRAPs also have withstood blasts from huge improvised explosive devices (IEDs) deeply buried in roads. *The Bad* - The Army is not consistently following procedures for testing body armor, according to the Defense Department Inspector General's Office. In a recent report, the inspector general's office looked at 28 body armor contracts awarded between January 2004 and December 2006. The report found that several of the contracts did not have information on "First Article Testing," which is conducted after a contract is awarded to

see if the product meets contract specifications. “As a result, DOD has no assurance that first articles produced under 13 of the 28 contracts and orders reviewed met the required standards,” the report said. **POSITION:** The American Legion will supports the purchasing of more MRAPs in the FY 09 Defense request. The American Legion is also distressed that our comrades in the field might be getting untested body armor. **ACTION: *The Ugly*** - The American Legion will urge Congress to purchase more MRAPs in the FY 09 Defense request. The American Legion will urge Congress and military leaders to hold these contractors accountable and to ensure that our troops have the best equipment available. “Going to war with what you have” is no excuse for putting Americans in unnecessary danger due to poor oversight.

## ***FOREIGN RELATIONS***

### **TOPIC 1: POW/MIA Progress Evaluated at Washington Conference Joint Session**

**Background:** The American Legion Foreign Relations Commission hosted this year’s Washington Conference Joint Session POW/MIA update last Monday. A multitude of concerns were address by The Legions distinguished guest speakers who provided expert insight on the progress being made and the current state of affairs in POW/MIA matters. The expert panel was comprised of Ambassador Charles A. Ray, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for POW/Missing Personnel Affairs (DPMO); Johnie Webb, Deputy to the Commander for Public Relations and Legislative Affairs Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC); and Ann Mills Griffiths, Executive Director, National League of POW/MIA Families.

Ms. Griffiths conveyed that family members, veteran organizations and other POW/MIA supporters throughout the country consistently opposed steps to improve economic and political relations with Vietnam until their leadership made the decision to cooperate fully to resolve the POW/MIA issue. The League supported a policy of reciprocity – steps by the U.S. to respond to efforts by Vietnam to locate and return remains and provide case-specific archival documents. In the League’s view, important leverage was lost without commensurate results during the normalization process. She expressed that one way of viewing what the U.S. knows and what Vietnam can do is by looking at what Vietnam has not, but could have done. At the end of the war, U.S. intelligence and other data confirm that roughly 200 missing Americans were last known alive or reported alive in close proximity to capture. Vietnam knows that these are highest priority cases, directly related to the live prisoner issue, but has accounted for far less than half of these Americans by returning identifiable remains. In all but about 30 of these cases, joint field investigations have reportedly been sufficient to confirm death. If true, remains of these Americans logically should be the most readily available for return (other than those who died in captivity in South Vietnam) since they were in captivity or on the ground near Vietnamese forces.

Members of the audience were very interested to hear about DPMO’s recent announcement that the remains of a U.S. serviceman, missing in action from the Korean War, have been identified and will be returned to his family for burial with full military honors. He is U.S. Army Sgt. Harry J. Laurence of Cleveland, Ohio. He will be buried April 9 in Arlington National Cemetery near Washington, D.C.

The Legionnaires in attendance also showed keen interest regarding DNA Donors and how new bio-tech advances can be utilized to find POWs and MIAs. According to a DPMO release, "Many DoD groups external to DPMO play critical roles in achieving the fullest possible accounting. They bring together many different specialties and perform the majority of our fieldwork. Mitochondrial (mt) DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) are cells of living people that are used in analyzing short loops of genetic code. This type of genetic sequencing provides additional scientific detail to lend support for remains identification. Families should provide a blood sample to help establish a comprehensive family database. To provide a blood sample, families should contact DPMO. For additional information on the Defense Department's mission to account for missing Americans, visit the DPMO web site at <http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo> or call (703) 699-1169. **POSITION:** The American Legion's position is that the U.S. Government needs to pursue the fullest possible accounting of our POWs/MIAs by maintaining a sufficient staff and resources so that investigative efforts can be broadened and accelerated. **ACTION:** The American Legion continues to exert the maximum effort to account for all U.S. POWs / MIAs.

## **TOPIC 2: Energy Independence Dominates Commission Business Meeting**

**Background:** For more than three decades, Americans have been hearing about an assortment of energy plans from politicians and none have taken root on a national and truly meaningful scale. Many critics of energy independence have the ear of our elected officials and claim that energy independence would have negative trade implications. Proponents would submit that new trade might be cultivated by a new energy policy. Also, the opponents to energy independence argue that a self-sufficient America promotes the ideas of isolationism and protectionism. The proponents of energy independence understand that isolationism is unrealistic and true patriots will defend and protect the U.S. with every last breath. The facts remain: The U.S demand for energy, along with the rest of the world, is increasing by the day. During the Foreign Relations Business Meeting held at the Washington Conference this week, Commission Chairman Mike Helm led commission members in a discussing the possible solutions to the current questions surrounding the all important subject of energy and how this issue relates to foreign relations. The discussion included a good exchange between the Chairman and the commission members that covered many facets of the issue including whether or not the commission should urge the U.S. Government to expeditiously enact legislation that promotes the research and development, implementation, utilization of all conventional and alternative fuels not connected to OPEC or OAPEC. Also, incentives for American companies to produce in other friendly nations as well as domestically and, provide the legislation and policy guidance for US industry and state infrastructure changes necessary to facilitate the usage of alternative energy sources and fuels were discussed. Commission members agreed to review these ideas and return to the next meeting with concrete positions. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports a global fight on multiple fronts to end the scourge of terrorism. **ACTION:** The Foreign Relations Commission will work to construct a proposed resolution for possible committee consideration at the Spring NEC.

### **TOPIC 3: Newly Proposed Resolution Involving Russian Veterans Group Receives A Good Response from Foreign Relations Commission Members**

An important topic covered in the Washington Conference Foreign Relations business meeting was a proposed resolution which, if adopted, would establish a formal collaboration between The American Legion and the War Veterans Committee (WVC). The WVC is a group recognized by the Commonwealth of Independent States, also known as countries of the former Soviet Union. The American Legion and the WVC are encountering difficulties on a number of issues. Many concerns on both sides overlap each other. The American Legion is under the impression that it's' Resolution No. 24 (2006) that defines support for U.S.-Russia Joint Commission to pursue the mission for full POW/MIA accountability is losing steam. The WVC has expressed its interest to the American Legion in sharing important information on POW/MIA information regarding both sides. In return the WVC is asking The Legion to help them learn about establishing an organizational structure, management, membership rules, dues regulations, veterans' benefits and organizational budgets. The hope is that this will lead to discovery and closure for POWs/MIAs connected to missions in Korea and Viet Nam and others.

Other highlights from the meeting included a review of the following items: The American Legion's support of the U.S. State Dept.'s GWOT-Related Programs; Fiscal Year 2009 Federal Budget Foreign Relations Views and Estimates; Tension over NATO membership between Macedonia and Greece; and an overview of the Foreign Relations Commission Priorities Report. **POSITION:** The American Legion's position is that the U.S. Government needs to pursue the fullest possible accounting of our POWs/MIAs by maintaining a sufficient staff and resources so that investigative efforts can be broadened and accelerated. **ACTION:** The American Legion continues to exert the maximum effort to account for all U.S. POWs / MIAs. A vote on the proposed Resolution involving cooperation with the WVC is planned for the Spring NEC.

### **TOPIC 4: NATO Backs Bush on Missile System; Secretary Rice Calls it a "Breakthrough"**

NATO Allies gave President Bush strong support this week for a missile defense system in Europe and urged Moscow to drop its angry opposition to the program. The unanimous decision strengthened Bush's hand for weekend talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said it was "a breakthrough document on missile defense for the alliance." This was Bush's final meeting with the members of the 26-nation alliance, and White House officials described it as a day of freewheeling talks in which leaders got off script and gathered to debate the wording of the statement. The leaders refused to grant Ukraine and Georgia membership into NATO; however, they said they would look at the issue again in December. The nations of Albania and Croatia were invited to join the alliance. Macedonia was turned down at the insistence of Greece, which says the country's name implies a territorial claim to a northern region of Greece, also called Macedonia. **POSITION:** The American Legion is dedicated to the achievement of world peace with freedom, secured by a peace through strength posture. **ACTION:** The American Legion Foreign Relations Division will continue to study and monitor NATO and the impending membership of countries around the world.

## **NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION**

### **TOPIC 1-Disabled Veterans Sports Clinic**

**BACKGROUND:** 450 wounded and disabled veterans, almost a quarter of whom fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, took part this week in the Veterans Administration's 22nd annual Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Aspen, Colorado's Snowmass Village. Lisette Mondello, the assistant secretary of Veterans Affairs for public and intergovernmental affairs, said the clinic is an important part of the healing process for Dinkel and other wounded veterans. Mondello added, "This is a rehabilitative event" that is "about taking someone who's had a catastrophic injury and saying, 'Your life isn't over. Deputy VA Secretary Gordon H. Mansfield and Robert T. Reynolds, "national commander of Disabled American Veterans, opened the clinic on Sunday night. The clinic is open to US military veterans with disabilities "ranging from spinal cord injuries and orthopedic amputations to visual impairment and neurological conditions. Veterans who receive health care at a VA medical facility get first priority to attend. Wounded veterans will learn to ski, rock climb, drive snowmobiles, and scuba dive at the clinic

**POSITION:** The American Legion supports rehabilitation and recovery programs for our wounded and disabled heroes.

**ACTION:** The American Legion supports efforts across the nation to help wounded and disabled veterans.

### **TOPIC 2: TBI Veterans Center**

**BACKGROUND:** Glenn Minney, an Iraq war veteran, told a congressional subcommittee Tuesday that his experiences with a post-traumatic visual problem have shown him there is still not a seamless transition between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense in helping wounded veterans. VA and Defense were directed by Congress last year to create a Military Eye Center for Excellence and registry to go along with a Traumatic Brain Injury Center of Excellence and a Mental Health Center of Excellence but the projects have yet to move forward.

**POSITION:** The American Legion has testified on the need for greater funding, research, and care for TBI veterans.

**ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to monitor the TBI issue accordingly.

### **TOPIC 3: Naming of New VA National Cemeteries**

**BACKGROUND:** Jacksonville VA National Cemetery will be the name of the 569-acre burial site to be built north of Jacksonville International Airport and about five miles from Interstate 295. The initial 50-acre phase of the cemetery is expected to be completed by the end of the year. Alabama's newest national veterans' cemetery will be named Alabama VA National Cemetery. The cemetery will be dedicated in mid-summer.

**POSITION:** The American Legion supports the creation of VA National Cemeteries within a 75 mile radius of 150,000 veterans with provisions made for traveling time.

**ACTION:** The American Legion will continue its' close working relationship with the VA's National Cemetery Administration.

### **TOPIC 4: The American Legion Mid-Winter Conference**

**BACKGROUND:** The American Legion this week held begin its' annual Mid-Winter Conference. With K. Robert Lewis (CT), Chairman, National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, as the Presiding Officer, and National Commander Martin Conatser extending greetings and remarks. Award presentations were made to the VAVS Worker of the Year Award, Bernard Monroe and SIMTEX Enterprises USA. Special remarks were made by Dr. Gerald Cross, Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Health, Department of Veterans Affairs.

For the CLAIMS AND PENSION PANEL, The Honorable James P. Terry, Chairman, Board of Veterans Appeals, Department of Veterans Affairs; Bradley G. Mayes, Director, Compensation and Pension Service, Department of Veterans Affairs; Arnold Russo, Director, Appeals Management Center, Department of Veterans Affairs; Kathy Nysten, President, National Association of Department Service Officers; The American Legion; spoke. Rita Navarrete, VA&R Chairperson, American Legion Auxiliary and the Honorable Harry Walters, President, Veterans Coalition, Inc. spoke afterwards.

Charlie Huebner, Chief of Paralympics, U.S. Olympic Committee spoke of the great strides our wounded heroes make when involved in rehabilitative sports.

For the SEAMLESS TRANSITION PANEL, Lucille B. Beck, PhD, Chief Consultant, Rehabilitation Services, Department of Veterans Affairs; Kristin A. Day, LCSW, Chief Consultant, Care Management and Social Work Service, Department of Veterans Affairs; Sgt. Steven R. Clark, Heroes to Hometown, Department of Defense; and Lynda C. Davis, PhD spoke.

For the TBI and MENTAL HEALTH PANEL, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Department of Defense, Thomas R. Kosten, MD, Research Director, Department of Veterans Affairs; Philip A. DeFina, MD, Founder, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Scientific Officer, International Brain Research Foundation; Michael Selzer, MD, PhD., FRCP, Director of Rehabilitation Research and Development, Department of Veterans Affairs, and Colonel Charles W. Hoge, MD, Director of the Division of Psychiatry and Neuroscience, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research spoke.

**POSITION:** The American Legion will continue with successful Mid-Winter Conferences and the new panel discussions.

**ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to follow up as necessary from the results of the Washington conference.

**NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION**

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**Week Ending 04/04/08**