

LAWRENCE SCHULMAN, NATIONAL COMMANDER, Jewish War Veterans of the USA

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Filner, Chairman Akaka, and Members of the House and Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, my fellow veterans and friends, I am Lawrence Schulman, the National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. (JWV). JWV is Congressionally Chartered and also provides counseling and assistance to members encountering problems dealing with the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other government agencies. JWV is an active participant in The Military Coalition, a group of over 30 military associations and veterans' organizations representing over five million active duty, reserve and retired uniformed service personnel and veterans on Capitol Hill.

I am accompanied today by the Chairman of our Coordinating Committee, PNC Joseph Zoldan, JWV's International Liaison and President of our National Museum of American Jewish Military History, PNC Robert M. Zweiman, the President of our Ladies Auxiliary, Norma Schreiber, the Chairman of our National Executive Committee, PNC Michael Berman, and our National Executive Director, Colonel Herb Rosenbleeth. In the audience today are those JWV members who are here to meet with their Senators and Representatives as part of JWV's Capitol Hill Action Day.

Members of the committee, it was a singular honor for me to present the JWV Medal of Merit to The Honorable Marcy Kaptur (D-OH), at our Congressional Reception yesterday evening, in recognition of her truly outstanding work for America's veterans. It was equally rewarding to JWV to have so many of you participate with us!

Mr. Chairman, next week, on March 15th to be exact, we at JWV will celebrate JWV's 112th birthday. For these 112 years, JWV has advocated a strong national defense and a just and fair recognition and compensation for veterans. The Jewish War Veterans of the USA prides itself in being in the forefront among our nation's civic and veterans groups in supporting the well-earned rights of veterans, in promoting American democratic principles, in defending universal Jewish causes and in vigorously opposing bigotry, anti-Semitism and terrorism both here and abroad. Today, even more than ever before, we stand for these principles. The Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. represents a proud tradition of patriotism and service to the United States of America.

As the National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV), I thank you for the opportunity to present the views of our 100,000 members on issues under the jurisdiction of your committee. At the conclusion of JWV's 112th National Convention in Charleston, SC, our convention delegates adopted our resolutions for the 110th Congress. These mandates establish the legislative agenda for JWV during my year as National Commander.

JWV believes Congress has a unique obligation to ensure that veterans' benefits are regularly reviewed and improved to keep pace with the needs of all veterans in a changing social and economic environment. JWV salutes the Chairmen and Members of both the Senate and the House Veterans' Affairs Committee for the landmark veterans' legislation enacted over the past several years. Eligibility improvement, patient enrollment, long-term care, access to emergency care, enhanced VA/DoD sharing, improved preference rights of veterans in the federal government and other initiatives recognize the debt this country owes to those who have faithfully served our country.

We must improve access to veterans' health care, increase timeliness in the benefit claims process, and enhance access to national cemeteries and to state cemeteries for all veterans.

NO GOVERNMENT FUNDING

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Inc. does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.

THE MILITARY COALITION

JWV continues to be a proud member and active participant of the Military Coalition (TMC). PNC Bob Zweiman, President of the National Museum of American Jewish Military History, serves on the Board of Directors of the Coalition and our National Executive Director, Colonel Herb Rosenbleeth, USA (Ret), serves as JWV's Washington representative and as Co-Chair of the Coalition Membership and Nominations Committee.

JWV requests that the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs do everything possible to fulfill the legislative priorities of the Military Coalition which are applicable to your committees. These positions are well thought out and are clearly in the best interests of our military personnel, our veterans and our nation's security.

SUPPORT FOR THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE

The War Against Global Terrorism requires the forward repositioning of many of the assets from the units of the National Guard. The term "repositioning" means

that the assets of the units affected are left behind where the unit last served to be made available for the next outfit to occupy that territory. The term "assets" is another way to say "weapons" and "armament." Unfortunately, that also means that the assets of the prior unit are no longer available to the unit when it returns to its home base. The end result of this command decision is the loss of capabilities of the National Guard to meet its requirement in its role as the Governor's Militia in the home state when called up for any reason, including natural disaster or civil disturbance. Clearly, the States are not responsible to supplant the federal government in purchasing replacements weapons and armaments.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA supports efforts to fully fund the National Guard so that the members and units of the Guard have the full funding and tools required to do their job in times of hostilities and natural disasters.

FULL VETERAN STATUS FOR CERTAIN GUARD/RESERVIST RETIREES

Some Guard and Reserve service members complete 20 years of qualifying service for retirement without having been called to active duty service during their careers. At age 60, they are entitled to reserve military retired pay, government health care and other benefits of service including some veterans' benefits. However, current law denies them full standing as a "veteran" of the armed forces. JWV goal:

Amend Title 38 to include in the definition(s) of 'veteran' retirees of the Guard / Reserve components who have completed 20 or more years of service, but are not considered to be veterans under the current statutory definitions.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA has sought to have the Department of Veterans Affairs funded as a mandatory budgetary item. This would ensure the level of funding necessary to fully fund the requirements of this Department. Our pleas have fallen upon deaf ears. There is a growing need for adequate funds as the men and women return from their service in Iraq,

Afghanistan and other areas of the world where we never had stationed military, in the numbers we now see, and in conditions we were not prepared to face. We renew this plea.

Furthermore, it is manifestly clear that the current classification of priorities is simply not appropriate. Our returning veterans as well as those from earlier wars and conflicts are being turned away at the door and are not being properly provided for by the VA. The VA must be available to all veterans regardless of income.

With the returning veterans comes an increase in the number of claims being filed. Waiting time for initial determination of claims is exceeding 270 days. This is a travesty of justice and wholly unacceptable. There must be a determination in a timely fashion, done correctly the first time. Moreover, as a result of what they have seen and been called upon to do, returning veterans are often in need of counseling on several levels. The availability of counselors must be assured. Following that is that the VA must not divest itself of any physical capacity by selling off its property.

Obviously, all veterans do not live close to a VA hospital or clinic. The amount paid by the VA for fee-based medical care is \$125.00 and has remained constant for many years. That level of reimbursement is woefully inadequate and must be set at a realistic amount. There are few medical providers willing to offer their services for \$125.00 and, thus, the veterans must either supplement that payment or do without treatment.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress to fund the Department of Veterans Affairs so as to fully meet the requirements of the returning veterans as well as the veterans of prior wars and conflicts so that these citizens who proudly served their Nation in its time of need are appropriately cared for in their time of need.

MANDATORY FUNDING FOR THE VA

On February 4th, the Administration requested a \$93.7 billion FY 2009 budget for the Department of Veterans Affairs. This request is 3.4 billion more than the current VA budget and includes 47.2 billion in discretionary funding, mostly for health care, and 46.4 billion in mandatory funding for compensation, pension, educational assistance, home loan guarantees, and other programs.

Sadly, this is still not the answer. There must be a comprehensive mechanism which will insure adequate care for all veterans. Further this proposal includes increased fees and co-payments which are nothing more than a tax increase on our veterans.

JWV's number one legislative priority is mandatory funding!

JWV has consistently fought for sufficient funding for VA health care and for a budget that is reflective of the rising cost of health care and the increasing need for medical services.

Despite our continued efforts, the VA is unable to provide timely access to quality health care to many of our nation's veterans, including some of our most severely disabled veterans.

Making veterans' health care funding mandatory would ensure the government meets its obligation to provide health care to all veterans and would

eliminate the year to year uncertainties about funding levels that have prevented VA from being able to adequately plan for and meet the constantly growing number of veterans seeking treatment.

JWV continues to support legislation to make VA health care funding mandatory thereby insuring there will be timely, sufficient, and predictable resources to provide the VA a stable funding stream.

BACK-UP TO DOD

VA Hospitals must be adequately funded, staffed and equipped to perform their vital role as this nation's only back-up for DoD medical facilities. U.S. military personnel could possibly suffer casualties exceeding the capacity of the combined military medical treatment facilities.

In such a case, the VA would be vital to the nation. JWV strongly urges the Congress to fund the VA to handle this potential workload.

VA HEALTH CARE

JWV appreciates the significant increase in VA health care funding for FY 2008, the largest one-year increase in history. However, demand continues to rise, including enrollments of OIF / OEF veterans. Going forward, the VA health system needs a stable funding mechanism to ensure health care 'supply' is able to meet growing demand. JWV goals:

- Consistent with the Presidential Task Force Report on DoD - VA Health Collaboration (2003), enact full [VA health care] funding "through modifications to the current budget and appropriations process, by using a

mandatory funding mechanism, or by some other changes in the process that achieve the desired goal."

- Ensure VA is made accountable to meet its published access standards. Consider adopting VA access standards in law as a means of achieving the "full-funding" objective in future years.
- Pass VA annual appropriations bills prior to the start of each fiscal year to ensure funds provided are available for efficient use throughout the year.
- Continue to expand and upgrade polytrauma and other specialty care services for OIF / OEF veterans with multiple trauma injuries including traumatic brain injury (TBI).
- Establish permanent authority for severely injured service members to have access to both active-duty-level TRICARE and VA medical benefits for three years to help ease their transition from DoD to VA (new authority expires 2012).

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Post traumatic stress disorders are extremely serious problems facing our returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

JWV is focusing on legislation to improve programs for the identification and treatment of post-deployment mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder, in veterans and members of the Armed Forces.

JWV also recommends that the VA initially increase compensation rates up to 25 percent to take into account the quality of life and other non-work related effects of severe disabilities on veterans and their families.

PRIORITY GROUP 8 VETERANS

Since January 17, 2003, access to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care for new Priority 8 veterans has been prohibited. Hundreds of thousands of veterans have applied to receive VA health care but have been turned away because of the cost-cutting decision to limit veterans' access to VA hospitals, clinics and medications.

WOUNDED WARRIOR

JWV notes progress in 2007 in the development of a coordinated approach to "wounded warrior" care and transition. The Congressionally established Veterans Disability Benefits Commission

Report (Oct 2007) recommends a major overhaul of the disability ratings process to ensure wounded warriors receive comprehensive and fair disability ratings and benefits prior to a medical separation or retirement. JWV supports the major recommendations of the VDBC and many of the major recommendations of the Dole-Shalala Commission and other task forces which examined wounded warrior issues throughout the year. Real progress will be measured in the passage and implementation of these recommendations. JWV goals:

- DoD-VA Interagency Program Office. JWV is encouraged with the creation of a joint DoD-VA office to oversee development of a bi-directional electronic medical record. We will closely monitor the new office's progress and we urge Congress to conduct regular oversight hearings on its activities and performance.
- Establish the VA as the single authority for rating service-connected disabilities for military disability retirements and separations
- Ensure that any revision of disability rating policy and procedures between DoD and VA does not result in reduced compensation compared to current systems
- Ensure full implementation of patient recovery coordinators.
- Strengthen support for families to include authorizing VA compensation/support for family member caregivers of severely injured, including TBI patients
- Eliminate the service member's premiums for the Traumatic Service member Group Life Insurance (TSGLI) premium (Title 38)
- In accord with modern medical practice, continue to refine rating criteria and improve the care and treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Develop a DoD-VA standard description / definition of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and ensure TBI wounded warriors are properly diagnosed, treated, monitored and fairly compensated for this "signature injury" of the current conflict
- Promote research into the consequences of TBI and utilization of best practices for treatment
- Complete pilot DoD-VA single-separation physical and field a single physical exam protocol system wide.
- Speed development and implementation of bi-directional, standards-based electronic medical records between DoD-VA systems
- Oppose distinguishing between disabilities incurred in combat vice non-combat in determining military and veterans' disability compensation
- Develop a partnership between DoD, VA and civilian mental health providers to expand mental health access and treatment for treating military/veteran patients and their family members.
- Standardize and expand Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) programs at Service separation / retirement activities.
- Tailor Transition Assistance Program (TAP) services to the needs of returning Guard and Reserve active duty veterans in / near the hometown setting

LONG TERM CARE

JWV believes that VA should take its responsibility to America's aging veterans seriously and provide the care mandated by Congress. Congress should do its part and provide adequate funding to VA to implement its mandates.

MEETING THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF WOMEN VETERANS

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA reaffirms its strong position acknowledging the contribution of women in the military. The contributions of these women must be more widely recognized as must be the unique problems facing them during and after their service. In addition to the harsh realities of daily combat which all war fighters confront, the women, also, face Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in unknown numbers arising out of the horrendous sexual harassment and assaults they may suffer. While improved treatment modalities are one answer, it is better to strenuously prosecute the perpetrators of the harassment and assaults and to treat the women suffering from the harassment and assaults as victims of serious crimes.

VETERANS WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Special attention is needed in the VA health care system for veterans with mental health conditions. Internal military medical studies and external medical research indicate that the burden of combat related mental illness from OIF/OEF is high. Combat theatre veterans often return with undetected or undiagnosed emotional and mental health conditions. Veterans with serious physical wounds from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) or rocket propelled grenades (RPGs) often also have Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which may include PTSD and other mental health related symptoms. Some have labeled TBI as the "signature injury" of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflict. The VA must program and budget sufficient resources to accommodate the growing number of younger veterans with mental health conditions. JWV urges Congress to place special emphasis on adequate funding for mental health care in the VA system, including rehabilitation, research, and family counseling resources.

Mental health disorders are among the most serious problems facing our returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan.

SUICIDES

Mr. Chairman, JWV is alarmed by the number of suicides being reported among Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. The Army says its suicide rate in 2006 rose to 17.3 per 100,000 troops, the highest level in 26 years of record keeping.

According to research from the VA, 144 veterans committed suicide from the beginning of the war in Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, through the end of December, 2005. The VA study does not include those who committed suicide in the war zones or those who remained in the military after returning from a war zone. We understand that statistics from 2006 and 2007 are not yet available.

Even more alarming than the overall number is that more than half of all veterans who took their own lives after returning from Iraq and Afghanistan were members of the National Guard or Reserve.

Mr. Chairman, it is most important that mental health services be provided early to returning veterans. Getting help early can prevent PTSD and other problems from becoming chronic. JWV asks that the Congress expand VA counseling and mental health services to meet the needs of returning veterans and provide earlier treatment.

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

The number of initial claims and appealed claims for service-connected disabilities continue to rise. Coupled with pending claims for educational benefits, the VA system is now grappling with more than 860,000 claims. Late in 2007, the total number of compensation and pension (C&P) claims was 649,143 -- up 44,863 from last year. Total appeals pending were 164,700 - up 9,304 during the same timeframe. The total workload for the Veterans Benefits Administration

including education claims is currently 863,136- an increase of 33,585 over the previous year. The average processing time for an initial claim is over 270 days. JWV goals:

- Automate the VA claims processing system. Move to a paperless environment as soon as possible, and have a double back-up at two physically different secure locations.
- Invest in state-of-the-art technology and information management support
- Hire and train new claims adjudicators to replace retiring Vietnam-era workers. Compensate adjudicators at a level that will reduce chronic staff turnover.
- Establish uniform standards and procedures for rating claims
- Increase Congressional oversight of the VA claims process
- Pay well-developed claims prior to a formal decision

Current law provides that service-connected veterans rated at less than fifty percent who retire from the Armed Forces on a length of service retirement may not receive full military retirement plus disability compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs. These veterans must surrender some, if not all, of their retirement pay. This is grossly unfair and unjust. While there may be a phase in of a partial rescission of the situation, it remains unfair and unjust.

Moreover, it appears that the newly-established Veterans Disability Commission is currently considering using non-VA income of both the veteran and the spouse as an index of disability. Even the consideration of such a proposal is obnoxious to the concept of fair reimbursement of service-connected disability. Service-connected disability is restitution for injuries suffered during one's service to this Nation and is due to the individual irrespective of any other factor and regardless of an individual's and the spouse's good fortune or income.

Current Federal Regulations require a temporary total rating for veterans receiving for authorized surgery or casting of a major joint. However, this benefit lasts only twenty-one days for a service-connected veteran undergoing a healing process including recuperation or therapeutic treatment at home even though the veteran is incapable of working or even looking for work.

It appears that approximately only fifty atomic-radiation veterans have come forth and successfully applied for benefits. This may be well due to their being unaware of the benefits due them or, more likely, because the government has deliberately set the criteria for eligibility so as to preclude from eligibility the vast majority of exposed veterans. This gross injustice must be addressed and remedied immediately before these veterans pass away without obtaining their rightful medical treatment and relief.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs to swiftly address the inequities present in the delivery of benefits and entitlements due all veterans and to as widely as possible advise of the services available to eligible veterans through coordination with the veterans service organizations and public service announcements in the various media.

EXPEDITED CLAIMS ADJUDICATION INITIATIVE

The Department of Veterans Affairs has proposed the "Expedited Claims Adjudication Initiative" whereby the veteran waives any rights of appeal in exchange for an expedited adjudication. The Jewish War Veterans of the USA demands to know why a veteran must give up the right of appeal to obtain a timely adjudication of a claim. Furthermore, what guarantee does the veteran have that the adjudication will be any more appropriate or correct because there is no right of appeal?

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA opposes any program which requires a veteran to waive the right of appeal in order to have a timely and correct adjudication of a claim.

BURIAL WITH APPROPRIATE HONORS FOR ALL VETERANS

The current policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs provides burial flags for members and former members of the Selected Reserves, only. There is no provision for members of the National Guard or Reserves other than the Selected Reserves to be honored by the presentation of a burial flag. Inasmuch as the members of the Guard and Reserve are being called upon to serve the Nation in numbers and lengths of service not seen until recently, it is indisputably appropriate that these individuals who have passed be honored in the same fashion and with the same dignity as their comrades. In addition, Congress has provided that all veterans are entitled to be buried with proper military protocol. This protocol includes the rendering of taps and a military Honor Guard. Clearly, there are not sufficient members of the military Honor Guard or qualified buglers available to render these final respects. However, often there are volunteers who could fulfill these duties and to whom only a travel stipend would be due.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Congress to amend the Burial Flag Act to provide for a burial flag for all who have served honorably regardless of the component of the military in which he/she served, and,

FURTHERMORE, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress to enact such legislation necessary to permit members of the veterans' service organizations and well qualified buglers to serve as buglers and an Honor Guard at the funeral services of veterans where a military bugler and Honor Guard is not available and for such individuals to receive a reasonable stipend to cover their costs of travel.

VETERANS' PERSONAL INFORMATION

JWV appreciates that Congress recently appropriated additional funds for VA Information Technology. The VA has elevated the Chief Information Officer and centralized management oversight of information security activities across VA operations in that office. JWV goal:

- Ensure routine internal and independent audits of VA information security policies, procedures and technologies to reduce the potential of a breach of veterans' personal information including their medical records
- Conduct oversight hearings to identify gaps in information security and appropriate corrective action as necessary

BLINDED VETERANS

Mr. Chairman, the number of service personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with a vision-related injury is currently approximately 2,300. Walter Reed Army Medical Center alone has treated more than 620 moderate to severe eye injured patients.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA highly commends Representative John Boozman (R-AZ) for introducing critical legislation aimed at improving the care of American troops affected by combat eye trauma. Mr. Boozman, himself an optometrist, has introduced H.R. 3558, the "Military Eye Trauma Treatment Act of 2007," which would create a Center of Excellence and Registry within the Department of Defense (DoD) specifically devoted to the prevention, diagnosis, mitigation, treatment, and rehabilitation of military eye injuries. The Center would have particular relevance for service personnel returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The legislation will

require that all service members returning with TBI be screened for vision dysfunction and provided with early diagnosis, treatment, and long-term care.

The eye injury registry would contain up to date information on each serious eye injury received by any member of the armed forces while serving on active duty. It would include input from optometrists and ophthalmologists from both DoD and VA and would allow for the electronic exchange of diagnostic information and eye surgical procedures between the two departments. Mr. Chairman, JWV strongly urges the full and immediate support of the Congress for H.R. 3558.

FILIPINO VETERANS

As in the past, the Jewish War Veterans supports passage of the "Filipino Veterans Equity Act" (HR 760). Chairman Bob Filner introduced this bill last year, following the introduction of the Senate companion by Senator Daniel Inouye. This important legislation would restore all the benefits that were promised to Filipino World War II veterans only to be rescinded by the 1946 Congress. The bill had hearings in February and April, and both the House Veterans Affairs Committee and the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee reported the bill out of committee during the summer. Currently, the bill is awaiting floor votes in both houses.

Unfortunately, while the Congress waits, more of these brave soldiers pass on without official recognition of their selfless service to the United States during World War II. Out of the approximately 200,000 Filipinos who had been called to serve, only 18,000 remain. These men were drafted into service by President Roosevelt as U.S. nationals and stood shoulder to shoulder with soldiers from the

United States in some of the most grueling battles of the war, including the infamous Bataan Death March.

This bill recently lost a champion with the passing of Congressman Tom Lantos (D-CA). His leadership on this bill was evident in his cosponsorship of the bill, as well as his testimony submitted to the House Veterans Affairs Committee. In his testimony, he declared, "As those of us get older who can remember World War II, it is long past time to provide equal treatment to all veterans and pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007."

We ask the Congress for full and immediate support of HR 760!

HOMELESS VETERANS

Historically, a number of fighters in U.S. wars have become homeless. In the post-Civil War era, homeless veterans sang old Army songs to dramatize their need for work and became known as "tramps," which had meant to march into war, said Todd DePastino, a historian at Penn State University's Beaver campus who wrote a book on the history of homelessness.

After World War I, thousands of veterans-many of them homeless- camped in the nation's capitol seeking bonus money. Their camps were destroyed by the government, creating a public relations disaster for President Herbert Hoover.

Today veterans make up a disproportionate share of homeless people, representing roughly 26 percent of the homeless, but only 11 percent of the civilian population 18 years and older. The number of OEF / OIF veterans who are homeless is on the rise including homeless female veterans. JWV goals:

- Strengthen reenlistment, pre-separation and Transition Assistance Program (TAP) services.
- Expand PTSD diagnostic and treatment services prior to and after separation

- Upgrade MGIB reimbursement rates to cover the average cost of a four-year public college / university education or equivalent job training programs
- Expand VA outreach and intervention programs directed at homeless veterans

JWV asks the Congress to fully fund all homeless programs and enhance community-based efforts. Require that homeless programs funded by the federal government offer a continuum of services to include: outreach, medical and rehabilitation treatment, long-term sheltered transitional assistance, and employment assistance. JWV is a member of the National Homeless Veterans Coalition!

THE INDEPENDENT BUDGET

JWV appreciates and supports the outstanding contributions of those who develop "The Independent Budget." For decades JWV has signed on as a Supporting Organization. The following Guiding Principals of "The Independent Budget" are worth repeating.

- Veterans must not have to wait for benefits to which they are entitled.
- Veterans must be ensured access to high-quality medical care.
- Veterans must be guaranteed timely access to the full continuum of health-care services, including long-term care.
- Veterans must be assured burial in state or national cemeteries in every state.
- Specialized care must remain the focus of the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA).
- VA's mission to support the military medical system in time of war or national emergency is essential to the nation's security.
- VA's mission to conduct medical and prosthetic research in areas of veteran's special needs is critical to the integrity of the veteran's health-care system and to the advancement of American medicine.
- VA's mission to support health professional education is vital to the health of all Americans.

MEMORIAL FOR .DISABLED VETERANS

JWV fully supports the construction of the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial on the mall in Washington, DC.

Today a new generation of men and women face hostile action around the globe with the risk of returning home severely wounded. As did their comrades from World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam conflict, and the Gulf War, today's disabled veterans deserve a commemorative structure in a prominent location in our Nation's capitol.

VETERANS EDUCATION

JWV is most grateful to Congress for adopting one of our top goals for veterans in the FY 2008 defense authorization: 10-year post-service readjustment benefits for National Guard and Reserve veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan -- and others who have served on active duty on "contingency operation" orders. Congress also

approved MGIB "buy up" for reservists, accelerated payments, and an option for discharged reservists to recover their lost MGIB benefits under Chapter 1607, 10 USC by rejoining the Guard or Reserve. Now additional upgrades are needed to fully match the MGIB with the needs of all warriors who serve in the 21st century. JWV strongly recommends enactment of a total force approach to the MGIB so that benefits will match the conditions of service today and better accomplish recruitment and readjustment outcomes, as Congress intended. JWV goals:

- Raise MGIB rates to the average cost of a four-year public college or university education
- Authorize month-for-month MGIB entitlement for reservists who serve multiple active duty periods of service (up to 36 months active duty)
- Restore basic reserve MGIB benefits for drill service to 47-50% of active duty benefits
- Integrate reserve and active duty MGIB laws in Title 38.
- Establish entitlement to the MGIB for all service entrants and permit currently serving members who declined enrollment a one-time option to the MGIB
- Extend the post-service usage period for MGIB benefits earned on active duty to 15 years or more
- Authorize upfront reimbursement of tuition or training coursework
- Authorize MGIB enrollment option for officers commissioned from a service academy or ROTC Scholarship program in exchange for a service extension agreement
- Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance (DEA) benefits, Chapter 35, 38 USC. Ensure that eligibility for Chapter 35 education benefits be extended to all survivors equitably, i.e., active duty spouses; link future improvements in Chapter 35 benefits for DIC widows and children with any upgrades to the MGIB.

CONCURRENT RECEIPT

JWV strongly believes that disabled veterans should be permitted to receive both military retirement benefits and VA disability compensation.

JWV knows that these programs have unique intents and purposes: military retirements benefits are intended to compensate for years of service, while VA disability compensation is intended to provide for disability or death attributable to military service.

JWV demands that Congress make it permissible to receive both benefits concurrently.

HOMELAND SECURITY

On January 15th of this year, PNC Paul Bernstein of JWV appeared before key personnel of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. PNC Bernstein, who is a civil engineer with special expertise in the security of airports, seaports, bridges, and other transportation infrastructure, presented information from his substantial experience. JWV is proud to be a leader in this vital topic.

In addition to being the back-up for DoD, VA medical facilities are the nation's primary medical resource for Homeland Security. Should there be another

catastrophic terrorist attack, especially in more than one location as occurred on 9/11; the VA would be utilized by the Department of Homeland Security.

Already, VA hospitals are preparing to handle mass casualties as well as victims of chemical, biological or radiological attack. JWV urges the Congress to fully recognize this mission of the VA and to fund the VA accordingly.

BENEFITS FOR MERCHANT MARINES

During World War II, members of the Merchant Marine faced the daily potential of hostile fire from enemy surface ships and submarines. While their pay was greater, the dangers were no less than those in the military. Moreover, the United States could not have fought and won without their service.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA supports extending to members of the Merchant Marine who served during WWII and who can prove service under hostile fire, all benefits and entitlements available to other veterans.

SPINAL CORD DYSFUNCTION

Spinal cord injuries are one of the most devastating of all injuries, war-related or otherwise. The VA must be able to provide the highest quality medical care and related services to all spinal cord injured veterans.

JWV urgently asks the Congress to authorize substantial recruitment incentives and adequate retention bonuses for the VA to attract sufficient board certified physicians and spinal cord injury nurses. It is well documented that adverse patient outcomes occur with lower level of nurses.

The VA must be able to full these highly specialized physician and nursing positions.

POW-MIAS

Mr. Chairman, there are still 1,763 US personnel listed by the Department of Defense as missing and unaccounted for from the Vietnam War. The most recent identifications, though now months ago, brought to 820 the number of US personnel returned since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. JWV commends Executive Director Ann Mills Griffiths of the National League of Families for her continuous outstanding work over many years.

On behalf of the National League of Families, JWV asks your assistance on the following.

The National League of Families has sought an underwater survey since 1994. Scheduling for this important survey has still not been agreed upon. Mr. Chairman, JWV asks that you and the members of this joint committee, do everything possible to have an underwater survey conducted off the long coast of Vietnam.

SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

The Global War on Terrorism requires the deployment of the National Guard and the Reserve components of the military in numbers not witnessed since World War II. The men and women activated leave behind families and jobs in order to fulfill their military obligation. They have been required to serve for periods that approach some twenty-four months. Their absences place tremendous stress and strain upon the family as children grow older and mature without the presence of a

parent. The remaining parent's role as a parent changes radically from a parent with joint custodial duties to a parent with sole parenting obligations and responsibilities. In most cases, the family income has precipitously dropped with the military income going into the bank rather the civilian income. When the absent parent returns from the military, he/she is much changed but so is the family unit that he/she left behind. One way to assist both the family and the service member is to provide family counseling to the family unit while the service member is away rather than waiting until he/she returns home. There needs to be counseling, and, if required, therapy as to the change in parental roles, finances and social issues. There needs to be peer counseling and peer support groups. There should be social interaction among the families. All of these necessary support groups, counseling sessions, and therapeutic modalities have economic costs. However, the failure to pay the economic costs far exceeds the costs in terms of damage to the family and the work sites.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA urges the federal and state governments to expend any such sums as may be required in order to support the families of our war fighters with counseling,

therapy and peer group activities before activation, during deployment and when the service member returns home.

DISABLED VETERANS TAX FAIRNESS

For thousands of disabled retired veterans, VA decisions on their appealed claims can take years to resolve. In the event of a favorable decision, these disabled veterans may only file amended tax returns for three prior years. The Senate passed 5-year 'look back' legislation in December 2007 and the enabling legislation has been referred to the House. JWV goal:

- Enact 'look back' legislation to lift the three-year statute of limitations for filing amended tax returns in the case of disabled veterans who have not received timely disability determinations from the VA.

CONCLUSION

Chairman Filner and Chairman Akaka, on behalf of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, we sincerely thank you for scheduling our presentation at a time when our National Executive Committee members will be present.

Mr. Chairman, our country is sending thousands of brave young men and women off to war. Our country must, therefore, pay for the costs involved.

At our annual national conventions our members work diligently to develop our legislative priorities. Our dedicated resolutions chairman, PNC Michael Berman, works hard to develop our resolutions and to bring them before our convention delegates. Following further fine-tuning by our convention delegates, our resolutions are finalized, and become our legislative priorities for the coming year. We thank you for the opportunity to present them to you today.