

**LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES OF THE  
JEWISH WAR VETERANS OF THE USA**

AS PRESENTED BY

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NATIONAL COMMANDER**



**BEFORE A JOINT SESSION OF THE  
HOUSE AND SENATE  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEES**

**March 6, 2014**



## NATIONAL COMMANDER DR. ROBERT E. PICKARD



Dr. Robert Pickard (Colonel, US Army Retired) of Miami, FL was elected National Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV) at its 118th Annual National Convention in Richmond, VA on August 23, 2013.

Founded in 1896 by Jewish Civil War veterans, JWV is the oldest continuously active veterans' organization in the United States. JWV serves veterans throughout the country by advocating for veterans' rights and benefits at the national, state, and local levels. JWV is dedicated to upholding America's democratic traditions and fighting bigotry, prejudice, injustice, and discrimination of all kinds.

Dr. Pickard graduated from Northwestern University in Evanston, IL and was awarded a Bachelor of Medicine degree. He received his M.D. from Northwestern University Medical School in Chicago, IL in 1965. He interned at the University of Miami at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami, Florida. Pickard served in active duty from 1966-68 during the Vietnam War and was stationed at RAF Chicksands Dispensary in the midlands of England as the Medical Officer for that AF Security Service base.

After being discharged as a Captain from the USAF, Pickard returned to the University of Miami Medical School for a residency in general surgery, later specializing in ear, nose, and throat surgery. He began his practice of medicine and surgery in South Miami and Coral Gables in 1972. Pickard joined the Florida National Guard and served a total of 22 years in active National Guard service retiring as a Colonel O6 in 2000.

Pickard comes from a JWV family. His father, Ted, was Department Commander of Illinois and his mother, Lena, was President of the Illinois JWVA.

When the Nazis threatened to march in Skokie, IL in 1978, Pickard went to Chicago to face them. Under pressure from JWV and other organizations, the Nazis ultimately decided not to march in Skokie. As a counter to the Nazis, Pickard and Past National Commander Ainslee Ferdie decided to hold their own demonstration. Pickard and Ferdie drove to the National Socialist Party of America Headquarters in Marquette Park, Chicago where they staged their own march across the street.

Like all members of JWV, Pickard devotes a great deal of energy, caring, and passion to his community. He is a life member of Post 243 in Coral Gables, FL where he has previously served as Post Commander. At the National Level, Pickard has held positions as National Adjutant, Chairman of the Vietnam Veterans Committee, a member of the National Executive Committee, and Past Editor of The Jewish Veteran. He is married to Susan Lemkin Pickard and has four daughters: Gabrielle, Annie, Teddi, and Beke.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Miller, Chairman Sanders, and Members of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs, my fellow veterans and friends, I am Dr. Robert E. Pickard, 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 issues 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 select group of over 30 military associations and veterans' organizations representing over five million active duty, reserve and retired uniformed service personnel, veterans, families, and survivors on Capitol Hill. In fact, I am very proud that our National Executive Director, Colonel Herb Rosenbleeth, who is here with me today, is the President of the Military Coalition.

On February 12, 13 and 14, our National Executive Committee members were here in Washington to meet with their Senators and Representatives as part of JWV's Capitol Hill Action Day(s). Our members prepared diligently for these important meetings and successfully presented many of JWV's legislative priorities to your colleagues, their members of Congress and congressional staff.

Mr. Chairman, on Friday, March 15th, we at JWV will celebrate our 118th birthday. For all of these 118 years, JWV has advocated a strong national defense, and 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 and supporters on issues under the jurisdiction of your committees. At the conclusion of JWV's 118th National Convention in Richmond, Virginia, our convention delegates adopted our resolutions for the 113th Congress. These mandates establish the legislative agenda for JWV during my year as National Commander.

JWV believes Congress has a unique obligation and compelling opportunity 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 Chairs and Members of both the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees for the landmark veterans' legislation enacted over the past several years. Eligibility improvement, patient enrollment, long-term care, access to emergency care, presumptive Agent Orange disability, enhanced VA/DoD sharing, improved preference rights of veterans in the federal government and other actions recognize the debt this great country owes to those who have so faithfully served.

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**

For the record, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Inc. does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government. This is as it should be.

## **THE MILITARY COALITION**

JWV continues to be a proud member and active participant of the Military Coalition (TMC). PNC Robert M. Zweiman, JWV's National Chairman, serves on the Board of Directors of the Military Coalition and, again, our National Executive Director, Colonel Herb Rosenbleeth, USA (Ret), continues to serve his third term as the President of the Military Coalition and as Co-Chair of the Coalition's 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 great nation.

## **MANDATORY FUNDING**

JWV continues to maintain that the Congress has an unbreakable obligation to its veterans. Adequate VA funding must be guaranteed by the Congress. No freeze on domestic spending, no across the board cuts, no budget sleight of hand should result in inadequate funding for the VA.

## **BROKEN PROMISES**

Military personnel, veterans and their families have become increasingly angered by ongoing attacks to their hard earned pay and compensation benefits. The recent cuts to retirement cost of living adjustments blind-sided the military community, who were still reeling from the news that the Pentagon is considering closing all the commissaries in the United States.

This COLA cut is the "unkindest cut of all" since it betrays a sacred trust that every member of our armed services signed in his or her blood. When these folks sign up for military service the government (you and I) promises them that in exchange for their years of dedicated selfless service in which they might be asked to sacrifice themselves and the well-being of their families they will receive rightfully earned benefits, including retirement pay and medical care. In return, they commit themselves, body and soul. Where is our commitment to them? This betrayal of trust is a most egregious breach of faith! That portion of this off-kilter so-called "balanced budget" which arguably relieves some of the effects of sequestration might be salvageable, but this cut to the retirees must be entirely repealed.

Even though a bill that would repeal a pension cut for those in the military who retire before age 62 has been passed, there is little good feeling for the Congress or the administration. JWV strongly believes that Congress, in its unwavering commitment to our veterans should never have done this in the first place. And the new legislation maintains that cut for those joining the military after January 1 of this year. JWV will continue to fight for a full repeal of the original benefit reduction, which was established under the budget deal approved in December by Congress and the President.

The still inadequate repeal legislation, which would eliminate the cut for troops who joined the service before January 1, 2012, still needs to be overturned. One wonders, "what were they thinking?" Were they equating federal employees and military folks as equals? To even think that these two are "equal" is ridiculous and unfair. The fact is that if there were no Jewish War Veterans nor other veterans' service organizations watching every move that Congress makes,

“mistakes” such as this one would go unnoticed and veterans’ rightfully earned benefits would be the first place to cut costs, as evidenced by the present case.

Military personnel, veterans and their families deserve much better!

### **TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY**

Traumatic brain injury has been the signature wound of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Traumatic brain injury, or TBI, can occur when there is an impact to the head. TBI can be classified based on severity, mechanism (closed or penetrating head injury), or other features, e.g., occurring in a specific location or over a widespread area.

TBI causes a host of physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and behavioral effects. Prognosis can range from complete recovery to permanent disability and death.

JWV applauds the VA for implementing an integrated nationwide system of care for veterans and active duty service members recovering from TBI and polytrauma. This care consists of more than 100 VA medical centers, each offering specialized rehabilitation care by an interdisciplinary team. Due to the range in severity and complexity of injuries, veterans and active duty service members with TBI and polytrauma require a specialized model of care coordination and integration of clinical and other support services.

JWV strongly requests the Congress fully fund VA’s TBI research and costly care for these patients.

### **UPGRADE VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS**

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA has the following goals for veteran’s employment, education, and training programs:

- Extend the de-limiting date for employer tax incentives under the Vow to Hire Heroes Act. Permit veterans enrolled in the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP) to complete their requirements for licensure / certification.
- Support other initiatives for employers to recruit, hire and retain veterans, definitely including returning veterans of the Guard and Reserve.  
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VRE) benefits. Establish a cost-of-living stipend for VRE participants.
- Support VA plan to reduce / eliminate veteran homelessness Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance. Authorize Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits (Chap. 33, 38 USC), to Survivors of servicemembers who died in the line of duty after 11 September, 2001 the same benefit available to their dependent children under the GySgt John D. Fry Scholarship program.
- Raise DEA (Chap. 35) rates for pre-11 Sept. 2001 Survivors to match the Montgomery GI Bill; establish a housing stipend for DEA.
- Monitor implementation of GI Bill consumer education, outcomes reporting and oversight under H.R. 4057 (112th session); monitor implementation of Presidential Executive Order 13607 on GI Bill Principles of Excellence; extend in-state tuition



rate at public colleges to all student veterans (not just state residents).

- Authorize transfer-of-benefits under the P911 GI Bill from catastrophically disabled veterans to their full-time Caregivers in cases where a transfer action did not occur prior to the veterans' medical discharge or retirement Basic Reserve GI Bill benefits. Urge proportional upgrades to the Title 10 Montgomery GI Bill (Chap. 1606, 10 USC) program to keep pace with the cost of education.
- GI Bill Integration for 21st Century Force. Urge hearings for a unified architecture for all GI Bill programs for active duty, Guard & Reserve service members under the principle of awarding benefits according to the length and type of duty performed.

### **SUSTAIN VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA advocates the following concerning the VA healthcare system:

- Extend VA advance appropriations authority to all VA discretionary and mandatory accounts.
- Extend combat veterans enrollment window from 5-10 years; provide enrollment opportunity to certain 0% S-C veterans with no private health insurance.
- Ensure full implementation of all VA Caregivers Law (P.L. 111-163) provisions, including measures supporting women veterans. Extend the VA Caregivers Act to full-time Caregivers of catastrophically disabled veterans of conflicts before Sept. 11, 2001. Align the DoD and VA definitions for caregiver support and services to include qualifying "illnesses."
- Urge investment, training and cultural awareness in the VA health system of the unique health needs of women veterans. Ensure veterans with catastrophically disabling reproductive organ injuries have access to the same reproductive services as are available in the DoD health system.
- Support programs and funding to expand / improve care, rehabilitation and research for veterans suffering from PTSD / TBI. Increase behavioral health staff and resources including outreach to address rising suicide rate in veterans
- Oppose fee hikes for currently enrolled veterans in all categories.
- Urge completion of VA strategic plan for rural veteran access to care and services
- Support better collaboration of DoD and VA to achieve real "seamless transition" of service members being released from DoD to the VA system; improve Benefits Delivery at Discharge efficiency and effectiveness. Preserve integrity and access to DoD and VA health systems for dually eligible members.
- Enact a technical amendment to establish CHAMPVA entitlement for adult children of survivors eligible for CHAMPVA as required in the National Health Care Reform Act.
- Support research on the long-term health of the progeny of veterans exposed to toxic substances.



- Urge passage of corrective legislation to authorize Medicare / Medicaid reimbursement to State Veterans' Homes to offset cost of care.

## **COMPREHENSIVE VETERANS HEALTH AND BENEFITS AND MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY RESTORATION ACT OF 2014.**

This massive omnibus bill, unprecedented in our modern experience, would create, expand, advance, and extend a number of VA benefits, services and programs that are important to the Jewish War Veterans and to our members. For example, responding to a call from JWV as a leading veteran's organization, it would create a comprehensive family caregiver support program for all generations of severely wounded, injured and ill veterans. Also, the bill would authorize advance appropriations for VA's mandatory accounts to ensure that in any government shutdown environment in the future, veteran's benefits payments would not be delayed or put in jeopardy. This measure also would provide additional financial support to survivors of service members who die in the line of duty, as well as expanded access for them to GI Bill educational benefits. A two-plus year stalemate in VA's authority to lease facilities for health care treatment and other purposes would be solved by this bill. These are but a few of the myriad provisions of this bill that would improve the lives and health of veterans—especially the wounded, injured and ill—and their loved ones.

JWV strongly supports the provisions in section 801 that would fully restore the cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for all Military Retirees, which were cut by the recently passed Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013. The JWV believes these cuts constituted an egregious breach of the longstanding moral contract between this great nation and the brave men and women willing to die for her. Further, we strongly believe the message it sends to future potential recruits threatens the very foundation and continuation of the highly successful all-volunteer force. Section 801 of S.1950 fixes this.

## **AGENT ORANGE**

Health issues arising from the use of Agent Orange/dioxin and other herbicides continue to haunt veterans. There continues to be a need to research the health effects of the use of these herbicides on veterans and their children and grandchildren.

There is an apparent need to reexamine and expand the list of presumptive illnesses. There is an apparent need to review the sites where these herbicides were used, such as Korea and Guam, and areas where exposure was via airborne or waterborne contamination.

There needs to be a national registry of the progeny of the veteran who exhibit physical or developmental impairments that can be associated with the veteran's exposure to herbicides.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense to more thoroughly and candidly review the use of herbicides throughout all its installations globally and the use of such herbicides by the Allies of the United States as well as the illnesses that should be deemed as presumptively service connected.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Veterans Affairs to immediately create and maintain a registry of children who exhibit physical and developmental impairments that may be traceable to their parent's and grandparent's exposure to

herbicides.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA supports continuation of the research in the health effects of herbicides and other toxins used, not only in Vietnam, but other war zones as well.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the National Academy of Science to review and replicate such studies previously performed which would not reach the level of acceptability by today's standards of scientific certainty, and Congress provides sufficient funding to effectuate the purposes of this resolution.

### **AMERICAN PRISONER OF WAR**

Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl was captured in Afghanistan on June 30, 2009. In early 2012 the media reported that the United States had engaged in preliminary talks with his captors focusing on a prisoner swap in which Sgt. Bergdahl would have been exchanged for five terrorist prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Subsequent to being captured Sgt. Bergdahl had escaped but was recaptured several days later, and Sgt. Bergdahl, now age 28 years old, has been held as a prisoner of war for more than five years.

Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl is known to be the only prisoner of war from our current War on Terrorism.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Defense to do what is necessary to obtain the release of Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl without engaging in the exchange of terrorist prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay or elsewhere.

### **BACKLOG AT THE DVA CONDEMNED**

It is reported that the backlog of cases at the Department of Veterans Affairs remains at over 270 days. There are more claims being filed for Post-Traumatic Stress flowing from the multiple deployments of today's warfighters. These claims require greater review and analysis than less complex claims. The influx of these claims has, in part, led to the backlog.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Congress to authorize the hiring and training of additional claims adjudicators and the introduction of improved electronic systems so as to reduce the backlog and time for an adjudication to be made to a reasonable period. Also, there should be a separate "lane" for PTSD claims with appropriately trained specialists to handle these claims.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA suggests that if adjudication is not made within 180 days, the applicant's disabilities should be presumptively determined to be service-connected and the applicant eligible for medical services. A determination of rating and compensation can be made at a later date.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA suggests that where there has been a partial adjudication of a claim, the veteran should be notified of such adjudication and benefits commence immediately.

## **DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BUDGET**

It appears that there will be a significant reduction by Congress to the appropriation for the activities of the Department of Defense.

There are some reports that the Army may be downsized to 380,000, the Navy may see the retirement of two carrier battle groups. The Air Force may be compelled to ground all A-10s and KC-135's. Concurrent restructuring may also occur within the Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

The logic and rationale for these downsizings and restructuring seems to be that the United States will never again require a large standing military, as all future wars will be fought against insurgents. Downsizing should never be made based on political rational.

The military planners are relying heavily on the engagement of the Guard and Reserve to supplement and/or replace the active component. Such use of the Guard and Reserve components has caused serious disruptions to the lives of the members of the Guard and Reserve.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress and the White House to realistically consider any significant downsizing to the Nation's military, both in terms of personnel and technology, and to, in fact, insure that the men and women of today's military are well-equipped, well trained and well paid.

## **FUNDING FOR STATE VETERANS' HOMES**

There are budget shortfalls in many States. The level of Federal funding to the States has shrunk to historically low levels.

The possibility of continued sequestration is looming. Funding for the States' Veterans' Homes is an attractive target for the budget-cutters.

Any reduction in the level of funding for veterans' homes would be a detriment to the health and well-being of the men and women residents of the homes.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress and the States to fully fund the costs of the veterans' homes so as to provide a healthy and safe environment to the residents but to provide, as well, an environment that is mentally and physically stimulating beyond being merely healthy and safe.

## **HOMELESS VETERANS**

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA has long endorsed creative and proactive programs to end homelessness among America's veteran population. The number of homeless Iraq and Afghanistan veterans has been set at no less than 150,000.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) has stated that the number of homeless veterans has tripled since 2006. The DVA estimated that 70% of these veterans have had combat exposure

with resulting psychological difficulties. The DVA estimates that some 13% of the homeless are women veterans.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA implores the Department of Veterans Affairs and the States to develop and implement new and innovative programs to transition the homeless veterans back into mainstream society.

## **INCREASED COORDINATION BETWEEN DOD AND DVA**

There appears to be a span of time between when a service member is discharged from the military he/she begins to receive benefits from the Department of Veterans' Affairs. During this hiatus in receiving benefits the physical and mental condition of the new veterans may seriously degenerate.

This hiatus is not the fault of the veteran or due to any action or inaction on the part of the veteran. The veteran may suffer permanent significant injury or illness during this time frame.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Departments of Defense and Veterans

Affairs to insure that every member of the military with issues of injury and/or illness be immediately seen at a Department of Veterans' Affairs facility so as to guarantee a continuity of care and treatment.

## **MEDICAL SERVICES FOR WOMEN VETERANS BY DVA**

There are unique medical needs for women veterans. These include but are not limited to vitamins and medications.

The nature and extent of services offered at certain community-based veterans outreach clinics do not adequately address the full spectrum of women veterans' needs. This gap in services singularly causes great consternation among women veterans as there is disparate treatment between them and their male colleagues.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide gender-specific services, medications, vitamins, and prosthetics wherever and whenever appropriate. There should be a data integration between the two departments.

## **TREATMENT OF MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA BY THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**

The need to treat Military Sexual Trauma (MST) does not end with the discharge of the victim from the military. The victim of MST requires continuous and intensive mental health counseling to allow the process of healing to commence and/or progress, and without such ongoing counseling a victim may regress and may be in danger of injuring himself/herself or others, physically or psychologically.

There may often be a hiatus between services being provided from the point of discharge and the point the Department of Veterans Affairs begins to provide such essential services due to a bureaucracy which, apparently, does not assume the responsibility of providing the required services in a timely and appropriate fashion.

The protocols now in place require the designation of MST coordinator but where such designation is given to a nurse as a collateral duty so that the employee views the additional duties as secondary to the person's primary functions.

Such an attitude and assignment of duties significantly reduces the employee's attention to the role as MST coordinator which diminishes the priority placed on assisting MST victims thereby negatively impacting the services provided to MST victims. They should do so.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA demands that the Department of Veterans

Affairs require that each DVA facility appoint a MST coordinator whose primary function and duty is to insure that MST victims receive all necessary services promptly and fully.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA demands that every victim of MST be identified before he/she is discharged by the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs commence providing services to these victims without any hiatus between discharge and the onset of DVA services.

The Jewish War Veterans demands that the Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledge and provide services for those victims of MST who now seek services after having completed their military service several to many years prior to their applying for benefits without the onerous burden of needing to prove that their current complaints arose out of or during their military service.

### **MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA WITHIN THE MILITARY**

Military Sexual Trauma (MST) appears to be more frequent than in prior conflicts. A recent study indicates that 53 percent of MST incidents are male-on-male.

The President has said, “Sexual assault is a despicable crime, and one of the most serious challenges facing the Department (of Defense).” There is the perception among victims, whether valid or not, that the military does not fully and properly investigate report of sexual assault.

Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice a victim’s entire history of sexual activity is subject to discovery and may be brought before a tribunal by a defense attorney to impute immodesty and promiscuity thereby victimizing the victim yet again. The Department of Defense does not provide victim advocates to victims of MST. They should do so.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Defense to immediately take such steps to correct the current mentality in the military, including but not limited to aggressively investigating allegations of MST, aggressively prosecuting those brought before a tribunal, provide rape counselors and provide a “Shield Law” within the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

### **POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

The statistics being released by various sources appear to show a significant percent of veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder arising out their service. This latest group of sufferers joins those who suffer from PTSD from prior wars.

Not only must the Department of Veterans Affairs continue to treat the veterans but the Department must reach out to the families of the veterans to give them the ability to cope with the veterans’ PTSD and the tools to assist the veterans readjust to a civilian environment. These services are best provided as close to home as feasible.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon the Department of Veterans Affairs to offer counseling to the veterans and their families at every Community Based Outreach Center and where there is not an Outreach Center within 30 minutes of a veteran in need, to offer a complete array of services through contract providers.

## **PROVIDING SERVICES TO THE VICTIMS OF MAJOR NADAL HASAN**

The victims of the shots fired by Major Hasan, the shooter at Ft. Hood, have not received satisfactory benefits.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA calls upon Congress and the military to provide services equivalent to those given to warfighters killed or injured in the line of duty to the victims, and their families, of the shooting so as to assist them both physically and mentally recover from their wounds.

## **CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR RECIPIENTS**

The Jewish War Veterans commends all of those selected to receive this award. They are receiving the recognition that they deserve for their heroic efforts on behalf of our great country.

## **NAMING OF VA HOSPITAL FOR TIBOR RUBIN**

JWV advocates naming the Long Beach, California, VA Medical Center in honor of Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Tibor Rubin. Rubin has been both a patient and a volunteer at that facility.

## **GOLD STAR MOTHERS NATIONAL MONUMENT**

The Gold Star Mothers suffered the loss of a child due to hostile action. The loss of a child by a parent marks the greatest loss any individual may be called upon to suffer.

This terrible loss was made in the defense of the United States of America, our ideals and way of life. There is long due the symbol honoring the sacrifice of the Gold Star Mother.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA supports the creation of a lasting memorial in the greater Washington, DC area that will properly honor the sacrifices of the Gold Star Mothers.

## **WOMEN IN COMBAT ARMS**

Women currently comprise a significant percent of the total military force. For many years women were not permitted to serve in an area where there was combat.

In Iraq and Afghanistan women have suffered being wounded and killed in action in greater numbers and percentages than in any prior conflicts. The combat arms have long been a source of promotion to higher rank within the military.

Permitting women in combat arms carries with it certain inherent risks to their wellbeing. These same risks are not so obvious in other military specialties.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA encourages the Department of Defense to open to women all military specialties, within their physical capabilities.

## **DOD MISSION IN DANGEROUS TIMES**

The Department of Defense is facing large cuts in the near future. JWV believes this nation must maintain adequate force levels and adequate equipment levels. Military readiness does not come cheaply. Our military personnel should all have a reliable benefits package that will never be

reduced.

Today's active-duty service members and those who serve in the National Guard and Reserve components have volunteered to stand watch in this nation's defense. Yet few stand watch for them. Basic benefits of their service, from retirement to TRICARE, are under assault. The defenders of the country need to be able to focus on defending this country. They must not worry their benefits will be pulled out from beneath them while they are focused on more pressing concerns such as terror plots, IEDs, and insurgents seeking to undermine hard-fought gains. Less than one half of one percent of our population is currently serving in the military. They must not be forgotten!

The Congress must insure that DoD is funded to meet all its missions including possible overseas threats from Iran, North Korea, and even China.

### **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 again strongly urges the Congress to fund the VA to fully handle this potential workload.

### **MEETING WITH SECRETARY SHINSEKI**

On Tuesday, February 11, I met with Secretary Shinseki and discussed a wide range of important veteran issues, ranging from medical care to claims processing, mental health issues and homelessness.

JWV praises Secretary Shinseki for making progress in the work of the VA, but we believe there is still much to be done.

### **CONCLUSION**

Chairman Miller and Chairman Sanders, our great nation must care for its veterans. 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 very diligently 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.