

Mr. Carl DiGrazia, Department Service Officer, Veterans of Foreign Wars

---- STATEMENT OF
CARL DI GRAZIA, DIRECTOR
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF ILLINOIS
BEFORE THE
CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
July 6, 2005

TO: Mr. Chairman, The Honorable Senator Barack Obama

The Veterans of Foreign Wars would like to thank the Committee On Veterans Affairs for allowing to express our concerns of the Preparedness of VA Health Care for the men who are returning from Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. A large percentage of our returning military are members of the Military Reserve and the National Guard. The Department of Veterans Affairs has stated the VA Medical Centers are prepared to meet the needs of the returning troops. This service organization knows that many of the returnees have already registered with the VA Health Care System. Some of these veterans have been refused and do not understand why. 'Priority 8' veterans need to be reconsidered.

The fiscal 05 health care budget fell one billion dollars short of the cost of caring for the health of our veterans. The Senate unanimously voted for an amendment to add additional 1.5 billion to this year's budget to meet the health care needs of our veterans

from World War II to those now coming home from Iraq. There is already an amendment request for additional funds for the FY06 budget.

The Reserve Component of the military on active duty in support of the partial mobilization for the Army National Guard and Army Reserve is 124,552; Naval Reserve is 3,323; Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve is 9,691; Marine Corps Reserve is 9,469 and the Coast Guard Reserve is 576. The total of National Guard and Reserve units is 147,611.

That is 147,611 potential new VA Health Care recipients and compensation recipients. Reflecting back to 1990/91 on the veterans who fought in the Gulf War many of whom returned with a mysterious illness. Between 26 and 32 percent of the veterans who served in the Persian Gulf continue to have serious and persistent health problems. It is called undiagnosed illness. Now we have a new group of veterans coming home from a new war in the Middle East. Time will only tell us if they will have this same fate. Serious persistent health problems with no name.

HR 1220 The Veterans Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment Act was passed and we support this action.

We particularly support the authorization of a two year demonstration project to collect third party payments from insurance companies. We wholeheartedly support going after the insurance companies that renege on their payments to the government, overcharge us on our premiums and get wealthy at the expense of the disabled veteran.

Mr. Senator, the group of Americans we cannot be lukewarm about supporting are those Americans who have given up their youth, their health, their limbs and a portion of their minds for our freedom.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars strongly supports Mandatory Funding for VA Health Care by our elected representatives from Illinois. H.R. 515 and S. 331.