

Warren G. King, Sr, National Commander, American Ex-Prisoners of War

Testimony of National Commander Warren G. King, Sr American Ex-Prisoners of War
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Chairman Akaka, Chairman Filner, Ranking Member Burr, Ranking Member Buyers,
Distinguished Members of the Veterans Affairs Committees and Guests:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to address the Joint Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees on behalf of the American Ex-Prisoners of War. Originally, our membership covered about 120,000 who survived captivity - now some 19,000 remain alive today. The average age is 85 years with a life expectancy of five years. Most are World War II veterans. I was a combat medic in that war, captured in December 1944 and liberated in the spring of 1945.

I am mindful today, as you are, that the Iraq - Afghanistan conflict is still continuing and casualties are returning almost daily to our military hospitals - many with extremely debilitating wounds. Americans, regardless of their views on the wars, are united in their feelings that these veterans should be provided "whatever it takes for as long as it takes" to restore them to the highest level of independent and meaningful living as possible. Americans are also aware this high level of rehabilitation has rarely been achieved after past wars. As memories of those wars fade, so does the determination to keep this promise. This concern is reflected in the Dole-Shalala Report on Iraq-Afghanistan wounded and the broader three-year Independent Commission findings just released.

What happened to World War II Prisoners of War after they were discharged from service is a classic example of this outcome. Just released POWs were briefly sent by the military to special camps for immediate dietary and stress treatments. They were then returned to military line outfits for transportation to the United States. Again they were provided brief rehabilitation and then sent to separation centers for routine discharge along with the millions of other veterans being processed. They simply were returned to civilian life as an invisible part of the 16 million WWII veteran population.

Almost by accident, thirty years after their discharges, WWII POWs became "visible" again. The publicity being accorded Vietnam POWs stimulated this awareness. Max Cleland, then VA Administrator, initiated a review of all battle statistics from WWII to obtain an actual account of how many WWII POWs there were. Belatedly, both Congress and the VA responded to this information with long overdue actions. Records of every WWII POW seen in Medical Centers or Benefit Offices were identified and presumptive medical conditions, recognized as causally related to captivity, were gradually established to facilitate treatment and disability benefits.

It has now been 60 years since the end of WWII - a very long time for the nation to fulfill its promise to these veterans! While most medical conditions causally associated with captivity have now been made presumptives and WWII POWs do receive priority care, there are two medical conditions that still deserve presumptive status. They are Osteoporosis and Diabetes. The former is directly related to bone loss due to

starvation during captivity, and the latter to the effect of prolonged stress and other factors on the body's basic defense system. These two proposed presumptives have again been introduced by Sen. Patty Murray and Rep. Gus Bilirakis with supporting evidence. We are deeply thankful to Senator Murray and Representative Bilirakis who again introduced these bills. We strongly urge your committees immediate support.

In closing, we also urge your prompt support of all legislation to help veterans returning from the Iraq-Afghanistan conflict receive the rehabilitation they need to regain an active and meaningful life in their homes and communities.