

JAMES D. RANGLES, NATIONAL COMMANDER, MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART

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2006 ANNUAL TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS, MARCH 9, 2006

Chairman Craig, ranking member Senator Akaka, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen:

I am James D. Randles, National Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH). It is an honor to appear before this distinguished body on behalf of the members of MOPH. MOPH is unique among veteran service organizations because our entire membership is comprised entirely of combat-wounded veterans who shed their blood on the battlefields of the world while serving America in uniform. For their sacrifices they were awarded the Purple Heart Medal.

National Service Director Jack Leonard and National Legislative Director Hershel Gober accompany me today.

This committee is extremely important to MOPH and its members. We look to you to represent the veterans of our country and to ensure that all members of Congress understand that America must keep its promises to those men and women who have served and are now serving in uniform if we are to maintain a viable military and continue to enjoy the freedoms that we have. Veterans have earned their entitlements and benefits.

I would like to begin by thanking Congress for doing the right thing by increasing the death gratuity and other benefits for the service men and women who are serving our country in uniform. This was one of our legislative goals last year. We cannot ask military personnel to put themselves in harm's way without committing to the welfare of their survivors.

ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR THE VA HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

The Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH) is on record as supporting the Independent Budget, which is developed and submitted to Congress by the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and American Veterans (AMVETS).

I am the third MOPH National Commander in a row to present as our number one priority Adequate / Assured funding for the VA Health Administration. MOPH joins our fellow VSOs in urging Congress to find a long-term solution to the annual funding crisis at the VA. The VA

deserves a system that delivers funds on time to allow for long-term planning. With the on-going War on Terror and our service members returning home from war with medical conditions requiring treatment at VA hospitals, the VA needs the capability to meet their needs. The funding problem was demonstrated last year when the need to provide \$1.5 billion in emergency supplemental appropriations for FY 2005 surfaced, and the need to amend the FY 2006 budget with an additional \$1.977 billion. MOPH supports Senate Bill 331.

THE AWARD OF THE PURPLE HEART MEDAL TO THOSE POWS WHO DIED IN CAPTIVITY

The MOPH believes that those military personnel who suffered hardships and wounds or illnesses while held in POW camps and died as a result of their interment should be considered as combat casualties and eligible for the award of the Purple Heart Medal. MOPH supports legislation that has been introduced in both houses of Congress (H.R. 2369 and S. 2157) that would authorize the award.

RETIRED PAY RESTORATION

MOPH is pleased that Congress has enacted legislation that authorizes some military retirees to concurrently receive both full military retired pay and any VA compensation to which they are entitled. MOPH's position is that ALL those eligible for concurrent receipt should receive it. MOPH supports Senate Bill 558.

COMBAT MILITARY RETIRED VETERANS

MOPH supports legislation to provide for the payment of Combat-Related Special Compensation to members of the Armed Forces retired for disability with less than 20 years of active military service. MOPH supports HR 995.

SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN (SBP) AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION (DIC)

MOPH supports legislation that will repeal the requirement for the reduction of SBP annuities by the amount of DIC compensation. Survivors of retirees who die of service connected causes and paid into SBP, and survivors of members killed on active duty, should receive both SBP and DIC without the current dollar for dollar offset. MOPH support Senate Bill 185.

STOLEN VALOR ACT OF 2005

MOPH supports S. 1998. It is unfortunate, especially with our country engaged in on-going conflicts, that there are citizens in this country who lie about the medals that they received while

serving in the military. This is not just an occurrence now and then but regrettably it is a huge problem. This legislation would provide for fines and imprisonment for those ?wannabees? that dishonor the medals for valor and the Purple Heart Medal and those brave men and women who have legitimately received these medals. MOPH urges passage of this legislation.

PROTECTING THE FEDERAL SUPPLY SCHEDULE (FSS)

The VA purchases approximately 24,000 pharmaceutical products at discounts ranging from 24 to 60 percent below drug manufacturers' most favored non-federal, non-retail customer pricing through the FSS. Efforts have been made to open the FSS to other entities which would/could have the effect of the VA losing the favorable pricing and cost the VA hundreds of millions of dollars in unbudgeted funds, funds which they do not have and would have to divert from medical services that could deny veterans treatment. MOPH supports lower priced pharmaceuticals for all Americans but not at the expense of veterans.

ASBESTOS TRUST FUND

Many of our nation's veterans were exposed to asbestos during their military service up until the mid-seventies when its use was discontinued. There is data that indicates the 26% of all mesothelioma cases, the most deadly form of this disease, are veterans. Further 16% of all other lung cases and 13% of all disabling lung disease cases again are veterans. Veterans cannot sue their employer, the U. S. Government and getting their day in court is difficult because most of the corporate manufacturers are bankrupt or no longer exist. MOPH supports Senate Bill 852 which would create a trust fund that would give just compensation to veterans. The current court system is not working for veterans.

Mr. Chairman this concludes my testimony. I will be pleased to answer your questions.

The Military Order of the Purple Heart does not receive and has not received any Federal Grants nor has any Federal Contract.