

United States Senate

MEMORANDUM

June 15, 1974

Fifth District American
Legion Annual Convention
Banquet

Minneapolis, Minnesota

Yesterday 7/29/57

It is always an honor for me to address our veterans' groups that have served our country so devotedly, and I am especially happy to be here at you Annual Convention in light of the fact that this year marks the 55th anniversary of the American Legion.

When the American Legion was founded in Paris 55 years ago the objective was not "peace in our time," as Chamberlain fruitlessly sought back in 1938, but "peace for all time."

Peace has been a dream, an often-shattered dream, but nevertheless a worthy objective for all men. Today, American Legion members still hope for peace, perhaps even more so than those who have never known warfare.

So much has changed since World War I. The "modern" weapons and artillery used back then are now obsolete and in our military museums. Our defenses have grown a great deal more sophisticated and complex, along with our society, but the sacred commitment to the United States of America that you so valiantly displayed is shared by all our veterans, men as patriotic as any on this earth.

④ Pledge of Allegiance

④ Preamble

No one must ever forget the needs and rights of our veterans and we in the Congress have been working to develop and pass the legislation that will best serve you. The first session of the 93rd Congress saw much activity and the second session promises to be just as relevant for you.

L The benefits which are provided for our veterans and their survivors are many: disability compensation, medical care, education benefits, insurance, housing loans, burial benefits, pensions, dependency and indemnity compensation, and even clothing allowances and automobiles and other adaptive equipment for certain disabled veterans.

Veteran Affairs Comm. Sen Hartke

Over the years, Congress has passed a large body of legislation benefiting veterans and their dependents. Many of the bills which have become public law were endorsed and supported by the American Legion. I think that we have outstanding veterans programs, and we shall continue to strive to improve our existing programs and to pass legislation that will be of vital interest and importance to many veterans.

Medical Care

★ One of the primary desires of Congress - and I know this is shared by the American Legion - is to provide the best medical care program possible for sick and disabled veterans. We have passed, and the President has signed into public law, one of the most far-reaching measures in providing better medical care for veterans and for their dependents. Public Law 93-82, the Veterans' Health Care Expansion Act, which I co-sponsored, is monumental in several respects: it extends eligibility for medical care under a cost-sharing agreement, similar to the CHAMPUS program with which many of you are familiar,

Amendment

to certain wives and dependent children of veterans with total and permanent service-connected disabilities, and to widows and orphans of veterans who died as a result of a service-connected disability. This one provision alone helps carry out the mandate issued by Abraham Lincoln when he called upon the nation "...to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan..."

Other provisions of this Act place new emphasis upon the treatment of the patient as part of a family unit; it stresses home health care programs; it extends eligibility for VA outpatient care and medicines; and it establishes a sickle cell anemia screening, counseling, and medical treatment program to be administered by the VA. When the Congress held hearings on this particular bill, the American Legion testified that "...we support this Act which seeks to strengthen the independence of the VA medical system and to prevent its piecemeal destruction by enabling it to provide better, more modern care, and in a more efficient manner to eligible veterans."

Health manpower

Congress has also passed legislation which would provide better medical care not only for veterans, but also for the entire population. One of the great and urgent problems facing not only our veterans' medical care program, but also the adequate medical care for all people, is the shortage of doctors, nurses, and other health care personnel, which is at the critical stage in some areas. The Veterans' Administration is greatly involved today, in cooperation with 620 schools, in the education and training of health manpower personnel of all types. In 1972 alone, over 53,000 trainees were educated through the VA system. Last Congress, legislation was approved to provide

grants to States and VA-affiliated medical schools and other health institutions to establish eight new medical schools at VA hospitals. In conjunction with health programs, legislation was also enacted to carry out a program of exchange of medical information.

Because of the improvements in medical care on the battlefield, especially as a result of the extensive use of medical helicopters which permit wounded servicemen to be evacuated to a hospital within such a short time, many seriously wounded Vietnam-era servicemen survived who would have perished in World War II or the Korean Conflict. Thus, we shall no doubt have a larger percentage of more seriously disabled veterans from the Vietnam era than from previous wars. Presently, there are over 2.2 million veterans receiving disability compensation, the majority of cases being from World War II.

Disability comp
Public Law 93-295, which was just signed into law on May 31 of this year, increases the rates of monthly service-connected disability compensation by amounts ranging from 15% for those veterans who are 50 percent or less disabled to 18% for those veterans who are between 60 and 100 percent disabled. Payments to widows and orphans of veterans who died as a result of service-connected disabilities were also increased across-the-board by 17 percent and the allowance paid for dependents of veterans rated as 50 percent disabled or more were advanced by 15 percent.

The rates of compensation were last increased in August 1972 and the dependency and indemnity compensation payments for survivors had not been increased since January 1972. It was therefore incumbent upon us to support our disabled veterans by making certain that their compensation is adequate to meet with increased costs of living.

★ An increase in the non-service-connected pension program has also been enacted into Public Law 93-177. When Congress was considering pension legislation, it was necessary to bear in mind the original intent of this program. Veterans pensions were never intended to be a form of bonus or reward for persons with military service, but rather initiated for the purpose of providing financial assistance to war veterans who became totally and permanently disabled for employment purposes as a result of disabilities not related to their military service, and who are in need. In view of the need concept of this program, it has always contained an income limitation for the payment of benefits. This is in contrast to the compensation program. Veterans who are disabled by injury or disease incurred in or aggravated by active service in the line of duty are eligible for compensation, regardless of outside income.

However, we in Congress have received a lot of mail from those veterans on the pension rolls who have suffered a reduction in their veterans pensions due to increases in their Social Security benefits. I am confident that this situation will soon be resolved. Both the House and the Senate are currently working in cooperation with the Veterans Administration to devise a viable solution to this problem.

★ One of the most devastating results of the Vietnam conflict is a medical problem that is basically different from anything resulting from previous wars -- and that is drug abuse. It is clearly evident that a major drug abuse problem exists in the military service, among our ex-servicemen and in our general society. Because of our concern for not only the welfare of veterans but also in the interest of the general public and in an effort to protect society from criminal abuse by drug users, the previous Congress considered legislation dealing with this problem. Although this bill did not receive final action in the 92nd Congress, it has already passed the Senate this Congress and I am hopeful that the House will act on it shortly. Briefly, ★ S. 284, the Veterans Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Rehabilitation Act, which I co-sponsored, provides for a fully-funded, comprehensive drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation program for addicted veterans, regardless of the nature of discharge or finding of service-connection in the usual sense, required for eligibility for certain VA medical treatment. The bill places particular emphasis on providing highly individualized, community-based treatment. This treatment will cover many modes of care, both in-house and contract services. The bill would also provide a wide range of vocational and educational counseling and rehabilitative services and job replacement assistance for all addicted veterans.

A collateral purpose of the bill is the provision of readjustment counseling at VA facilities for other than dishonorably discharged veterans, as well as a broadening of the eligibility for basic VA hospital care and medical services for service-connected disabilities to veterans with undesirable discharges.

There has been a great deal of confusion as to who is eligible for treatment, leading to calls for amnesty and changes in the discharge policies of the Armed Forces. With the enactment of this bill, this confusion will be cleared up and there would be no reason for disrupting the discharge policies of the Armed Forces because this legislation would authorize the Veterans Administration to treat any serviceman or ex-serviceman with an addiction problem regardless of the type of discharge he holds.

GI Bill
 Another major area of concern of all of us is the education program for veterans. Many of you were fortunate enough to take advantage of the original GI Bill. In fact, since the inception of this program, over \$25 billion has been spent training over 15 million veterans and servicemen. The incomes of those veterans who have received GI Bill education benefits have averaged from \$1,000 to \$1,500 a year more than those who did not. On this basis, it can be estimated that the trained and educated veterans have paid additional income taxes in excess of \$1 billion a year. I would call that a good investment for all of us.

GI Bill Educ
 Both the House and Senate are currently attempting to improve the existing GI Bill to make it more comparable with the benefits provided to World War II and Korean Conflict veterans. The House has already passed the Veterans' Education and Rehabilitation Amendments of 1974 by an overwhelming vote of 382 yeas to 0 nays. This bill, H.R. 12628, increases the educational assistance allowance under all veterans and dependents education programs by 13.6%. It extends the delimiting period in which time veterans must complete their programs from 8 to 10 years. It also equalizes the disability requirement for

eligibility to receive vocational rehabilitation from 30 percent, as is presently the law for Vietnam-era veterans, to 10%, as the requirement for World War II and Korean veterans. This bill amends the eligibility for Reservists to receive GI Bill benefits by providing that the initial 6 months of active duty for training be counted for educational training purposes for those Reservists who subsequently serve on active duty for 12 months or more. It also provides up to 6 months educational assistance to pursue refresher training to be commenced within 12 months after discharge.

The Senate Veterans Affairs Committee has also been hard at work to report out a bill. I am especially pleased that the bill which the committee has announced it will recommend to the Senate includes a number of key provisions which I have long advocated be enacted into law. Several of these have been adapted from a bill which I co-authored, S. 2789, which was introduced last December. These include:

- ☆ --A new program of direct tuition assistance, which is essential if we are to equalize the vast differences in tuition costs from State to State and within each State;
- ☆ --A substantial increase in monthly subsistence payments to keep pace with the soaring cost of living;
- ☆ --A 2-year extension of eligibility to allow more than 300,000 veterans to pursue their education beyond this June; and
- ☆ --An additional 9 months of entitlement to allow veterans up to five academic years of education instead of the present 4-year limit.

All of these provisions are of critical importance in our continuing effort to provide the Vietnam-era veteran with anything approaching a decent opportunity for education and training.

Also in line with education benefits, temporary legislation was enacted to allow those Post-Korean Conflict veterans whose GI Bill entitlement would expire on May 31st of this year to continue their eligibility for one month, giving the Congress time to work out a solution to the problem of extending the delimiting period for another two years.

★ Another major consideration during this session of the 93rd Congress is the budget for the Veterans Administration for fiscal year 1975. The Veterans Administration provides the whole range of benefits and services to the country's 29.1 million veterans, the 65.8 million members of their families, and the 3.8 million survivors of deceased veterans.

An appropriation of \$13.4 billion was requested for fiscal year 1975, an increase of \$353 million over 1974. It is interesting to note that the Veterans' Administration share of the total 1975 budget is 4.5%.

Included in the budget request are the following provisions:

- ★ --Compensation payments for service-connected disabilities and death totaling \$3.9 billion to 2.6 million veterans and survivors of deceased veterans;
- ★ --Pension payments totaling \$2.9 billion to 2.3 million disabled veterans and survivors of deceased veterans in financial need;
- ★ --Education and training assistance to 2 million veterans and 76 thousand sons, daughters, wives and widows of deceased or seriously disabled veterans;

- ☆ --Housing credit assistance for guaranteed loans of over \$9 billion;
- ☆ --Life insurance protection, totaling more than \$86 billion for 8,502,000 veterans and active-duty servicemen.
- ☆ --Inpatient hospital, nursing home or domiciliary care for 1,189,000 persons, including 1,065,000 in VA hospitals;
- ☆ --Veteran outpatient medical care totaling 13,799,000 visits;
- ☆ --Dependent medical care totaling 16,800 hospital patients and 1,175,000 outpatient visits, for the dependents of 100% service-connected disabled veterans and veterans who died as a result of a service-connected disability.
- ☆ --Funding of the National Cemetery System in the amount of \$17.7 million for operations and \$5 million for construction.
- ☆ --Burial benefits of \$156 million, including \$39.4 million for plot allowances;
- ☆ --A record VA facilities construction appropriation of \$276 million.

What now stands ahead? What can we in Congress do? What can the American Legion do?

Just a year ago, our Nation, encouraged over the cease fire in Southeast Asia, was indeed joyful over the repatriation of 596 prisoners of war, some of whom had been held by North Vietnam and the Viet Cong for years. The enthusiastic welcome given them on their return to their homeland was a fitting manifestation of gratitude and appreciation for service rendered as members of the Armed Forces of the United States during time of war.

But we must not forget the almost 7 million other Vietnam-era veterans. For many of these veterans, 2 1/2 million of whom served in the Indochina Theater, readjustment to peace has proven no less traumatic than adjustment to war. While the returning POW's have been received with ringing accolades, there is growing evidence and concern that other veterans have been ignored and even neglected.

Despite claims that our veterans are being provided easy transition to civilian life, it is significant to note that a smaller slice of the Federal budget is going to help veterans now than went to them 10 years ago.

We cannot replace the time these men lost in Vietnam. But we can do much to improve their health, their jobs, and their hopes. The Vietnam veteran of today faces grave difficulties in returning to civilian life. For, in addition to the dislocation which accompanies any such change in one's life, he also faces a contracting job market and accelerating costs of education and training which pose enormous obstacles to his reintegration into the mainstream of the life of the nation. We would do grave injustice to these young men and women who risked life and limb in service to their nation if we were to forget their sacrifices, now that our involvement in the war we asked them to fight has come to an end.

As you know, the system of veterans' benefits is most complex and the needs of our veterans vary greatly, from the young veterans returning to civilian society after Vietnam to our older veterans who need increased attention in their later years. We in the Congress need your help. Together with your work and dedication we shall provide for our veterans. The least this nation can do is to further insure that your needs are met, and make certain that your security and well-being are taken care of with the same whole-hearted support you displayed for the cause of this country -- our peace and free way of life that we enjoy because of men like you.

Thank you.



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