

Legislative Division Update

TOPIC 1: Medicare Reimbursement for VA medical care

BACKGROUND: VA is prohibited from billing Medicare for third-party reimbursements for the treatment of enrolled, Medicare-eligible veterans' nonservice-connected medical conditions. The American Legion recommends Medicare reimbursements to supplement VA annual budget. **ACTION:** The American Legion continues to lobby lawmakers to authorize VA to collect third-party reimbursements from the Centers of Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). **POSITION:** The American Legion fully supports Medicare reimbursement for VA and will seek legislation in the 110th Congress.

TOPIC 2: Mandatory Funding for VA medical care

BACKGROUND: The American Legion, VFW, DAV, AMVETS, Blinded Veterans Association, JWV, Military Order of the Purple Heart, PVA, and VVA have joined forces in support of change VA medical care from *discretionary* to *mandatory* annual appropriations. The goal is to help stabilize VA medical care funding by using a formula based system similar to Social Security and Medicare. The Partnership is placing emphasis on sufficiency, timeliness, and predictability of VA's annual appropriations. Rep. Hare (IL) reintroduced legislation offered by his predecessor, Lane Evans, H.R. 2514, *Assured Funding For Veterans Health Care Act*, which now has **125** cosponsors. Senator Johnson has introduced a companion bill, S. 2639 which has **8** cosponsors. The "Partnership" supports these measures. **ACTION:** On July 25, 2007 the Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform presented testimony to the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee supporting mandatory funding for VA health care programs. As a member of the Partnership, The American Legion fully supports its statement. On October 3, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee held a similar hearing. When asked by lawmakers, VA witnesses expressed opposition to mandatory funding for VA medical care. **POSITION:** The American Legion will continue to seek legislation for assured funding in the 110th Congress and monitor these bills as they works its way through Congress.

TOPIC 3: Disabled Veterans' Tax in the 110th Congress

BACKGROUND: President Bush signed the first FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act on January 28, Public Law 110-181. Under this bill, Chapter 61 military retirees with less than 20 years of military service can now qualify for concurrent receipt of their military retirement pay and their VA disability compensation without the dollar for dollar offset for Combat Related Special Compensation. In addition, military retirees rated 100 percent service-connected disabled due to Individual Unemployability will receive full concurrent receipt without the phase-in agreed to last year beginning in October 2008. **ACTION:** The American Legion will continue to urge expanding benefits for *all* service-connected disabled military retirees in the 110th Congress. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports the full repeal of the Disabled Veterans' Tax in the 110th Congress.

TOPIC 4: VA Budget for FY 2009

BACKGROUND: In September 2007, National Commander Conatser testified before a joint session of the Veterans' Affairs Committees. He outlined The American Legion's funding recommendations for FY 09 for specific discretionary accounts within the Department of Veterans Affairs. The President's budget request for FY 09 was released on Monday, Feb. 4, 2008. The House Committee on Appropriations passed and sent to the full House its *Fiscal Year 2009 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs' and Related Agencies* appropriations bill on June 24, 2008. **ACTION:** The American Legion testified before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees, on February 7th and 13th respectively, in response. The testimony is available on the Internet: <http://veterans.house.gov/hearings/Testimony.aspx?TID=13345>.

Discretionary Funding Programs	Final FY 2008 P.L. 110-161	President's Proposal FY 2009	Legion's FY 09 Request
Total Medical Care	\$36.7 billion	\$38.7 billion	\$38.4 billion
Medical Services	\$29.1 billion	\$34 billion	
Medical Administration	\$3.2 billion		
Medical Facilities	\$4.1 billion	\$4.6 billion	
Medical/Prosthetics Research	\$480 million	\$442 million	\$476 million
Major Construction	\$1.1 billion	\$582 million	\$1.56 billion
Minor Construction	\$579 million	\$329 million	\$485 million
State Veterans' Homes Construction Grants Program	\$165 million	\$85 million	\$275 million
State Veterans' Cemetery Construction Grants Program	\$39 million	\$32 million	\$45 million
National Cemetery Administration	\$195 million	\$181 million	\$228 million
General Operating Expenses	\$1.6 billion	\$1.7 billion	\$2.8 billion
Information Technology	\$2 billion	\$2.4 billion	\$2.3 billion

* **The American Legion opposes MCCF being offset against VA medical care discretionary funding and recommends it be "scored" as a supplement to the annual appropriations.**

On July 17, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved the fiscal 2009 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs spending bill. The panel approved the \$119.7 billion measure 29-0. The Senate's spending measure would provide \$1 billion more than the draft measure approved June 24 by the House Appropriations Committee and a total of \$28.5 billion more than President Bush requested in his budget. The Senate legislation would provide \$72.7 billion in discretionary spending for military construction and VA operations, roughly \$3.7 billion more than the amount requested by the White House and in line with the total approved by the House panel. Roughly \$48 billion in discretionary spending would be allocated for the VA, with about \$24.7 billion provided for military construction, family housing and base realignment and closure. Under the House legislation, approximately \$47.7 billion in discretionary spending and \$46 billion in mandatory funding would be allocated for the VA, while \$24.8 billion in discretionary funding and no mandatory spending would be provided for military construction, family housing and base realignment and closure. Under the Senate version, approximately 85 percent of the VA's discretionary funding, or \$41.1 billion, would go to funding veterans' health care services, including facility maintenance and research. The measure approved by the Senate committee includes: \$526.8 million to increase the budget for medical and

prosthetic research, approximately \$84 million more than President Bush proposed; \$1.2 billion for major VA construction projects, roughly \$636 million more than the White House requested; \$1.1 billion for VA facility upkeep and repair projects, about \$300 million more than the president sought; \$350 million to increase the current income threshold for the least needy veterans (Priority Group 8). Currently, a veteran with an annual salary as low as \$28,430 would not be eligible for treatment at a VA facility; and \$250 million to start up a new health care outreach program for veterans living in rural parts of the country. **POSITION:** The American Legion fully supports the funding totals as approved by the House Appropriations Committee for VA discretionary programs for FY 2009.

TOPIC 5: Flag Amendment

BACKGROUND: The American Legion remains committed to protecting Old Glory from acts of physical desecration and overturning *Texas v. Johnson* (1989). **ACTION:** Rep. Murtha (PA) has introduced H.J. Res. 12, “*The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.*” H.J. Res. 12 currently has 70 cosponsors. On June 12 Senator Vitter (LA) introduced S.J. Res. 40 which has been referred to the Committee on the Judiciary. It does not yet have any cosponsors. **POSITION:** The American Legion fully supports a proposed constitutional amendment to prohibit the physical desecration of Old Glory.

TOPIC 6: Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act

BACKGROUND: College costs have increased substantially over the last 20 years. Recently separated veterans are seeking higher education, using their Montgomery GI Bill benefits, with an emphasis on reentering the civilian workforce. Benefits should remain commensurate with the sacrifice and service of veterans who need educational assistance. **ACTION:** Rep. Harry Mitchell (AZ) introduced H.R. 5740, the *Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act*. H.R. 5740 modernized veterans’ educational benefits by aligning them with the highest in-state cost of tuition per state. It provided a stipend for housing, books, supplies and other educational expenses. Educational benefits would increase each year to match the rising costs of college. The bill accounted for frequent mobilizations of the National Guard and Reserves by implementing a mechanism that allows benefits to be earned on a cumulative basis. Veterans who have earned education benefits may use them during and after active service. The Senate companion bill was S. 22. The Legislative Division was present at a press conference May 13 to support this measure. On June 19 the House passed H.R. 2642, the *Emergency Supplemental Appropriations* bill and sent it to the Senate. This bill provided funding for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Senate amended that bill by including in S. 22. A similar measure, S. 2938, was introduced by Senators Graham and Burr; this bill included a provision for transferability of educational benefits to a veteran’s immediate family. This provision for transferability was added as an amendment to H.R. 2642 when the House had to agree to the Senate amendment. Congress then passed H.R. 2642, which was signed by the President on June 30. It is now Public Law 110-252. This new benefit begins August 1, 2009. **POSITION:** The American Legion fully supported this updated

GI Bill because it meets the needs of veterans who have served in the Global War on Terrorism.

Legislative Division
Steve Robertson, Director
(W) 202-263-2981; (H) (540) 371-0381
Cell (202) 445-1332
For Week Ending: 8-01-08

NATIONAL ECONOMIC COMMISSION

TOPIC 1: Joe Sharpe attended the Department of Labor's (DoL) Advisory Committee for Veterans' Employment, Training and Employer Outreach meetings in San Diego from July 23-25, 2008

BACKGROUND: During the course of the meetings, members attended the Transition Training Academy Graduation at the Balboa Park Naval Medical Center San Diego, as part of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) sponsored by DoL and Cisco Systems.

- 20 service members (Navy & Marines) graduated from this six week program
- 2/3 of those that have graduated from this six week course have found meaningful employment. Others that are still in recovery mode reported this course empowered them to succeed and helped their recovery and return their self-esteem
- Course expansion plans included Brook Army Medical Center, Ft. Lewis Army Medical Center, Ft. Gordon Army Medical Center, and Camp Pendleton Marine Base.
- The Marines is the only branch of the armed forces that require TAP as a mandatory program

Members also traveled to the Marine Corps Air Station Base in Miramar to attend the Department of Defense's (DoD) Hire Our Heroes Job Fair. Approximately 60 employers were on hand, along with an estimated 350 job seekers. Additionally, members traveled to Camp Pendleton to witness a TAP course.

- In FY 07, over 307,000 DD 214 were issued by DoD
- 1/3 of that group was between the ages of 20 – 24
- 80,000 were from the Reserve/Guard component
- Less than 50% of all service members being currently discharge from Ft. Hood, Texas receive a TAP course

Balboa Park Naval Medical Center San Diego is the most technologically advanced Navy Medical treatment facility. There are almost 500,000 people in San Diego County eligible to receive care at the Naval Medical Center. This care is provided by military and civilian staff of more than 6,000. The primary mission of Marine Corps Air Station Miramar is to maintain and operate the facilities, and provided services and material to support the operations of the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing and the other tenant organizations. Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, the Corps largest West Coast expeditionary training facility, encompasses more than 125,000 acres of Southern California terrain. Camp Pendleton is one of the DoD's busiest installations and offers a broad spectrum of training facilities for many active and reserve Marine, Army, and Navy units, as well as national, state and local agencies.

POSITION: The American Legion supports DoL and employers that assist veterans in obtaining and maintaining gainful employment.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to be involved with these Advisory Committee meetings to ensure veterans are receiving the best training and resources necessary for transition from the military into successful careers as civilians.

TOPIC 2: VA Home Loan Guaranty Program

BACKGROUND: VA housing loan program is available to service members, veterans, reservists, and unmarried surviving spouses for the purchase of homes, condominiums and manufactured homes and for refinancing loans. VA guarantees part of the loan, permitting the purchaser to obtain a mortgage with a competitive interest rate, even without a down payment if the lender agrees. This home loan program makes home loans more affordable for veterans, active-duty service members and surviving spouses by protecting lenders from loss, should the borrower fail to repay a loan. Since 1944, when home loan guarantees were offered with the original GI Bill, VA has guaranteed more than 18 million home loans worth \$911 billion. Last year, about 135,000 veterans, active-duty service members and survivors received loans valued nearly at \$24 billion. More than 90% of VA-backed home loans were given without a down payment. Due to America's current economic climate, many homeowners have found it difficult to pay their mortgages. Quick intervention by VA loan counselors has reduced the number of veterans who default on their home loans. VA counselors at nine regional loan centers assist people with VA-guaranteed loans to avoid foreclosure, through counseling and special financing arrangements. Since 2000, the service has helped about 74,000 veterans, active-duty members and survivors keep their homes, a savings to the government of nearly \$1.5 billion.

POSITION: The American Legion supports any administrative and/or legislative efforts that will improve and strengthen the Loan Guaranty Service's ability to serve America's veterans.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor the VA's Home Loan Guaranty Program.

TOPIC 3: Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) of 1994

BACKGROUND: USERRA prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of an individual's: prior service in the uniformed services; or, intent to join the uniformed services. USERRA also provides reemployment rights with the pre-service employer following qualifying service in the uniformed services. USERRA applies to private employers, the Federal Government, and State and local governments. Since September 11, 2001, Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) has briefed

approximately 250,000 Reservists and National Guard members on their rights under USERRA. VETS provides technical assistance on requests from employers and service members, conducts investigations into alleged USERRA violations, mediates USERRA disputes, and refers unresolved claims to the Department of Justice or the Office of Special Counsel.

FY 2006

In 2006, VETS staff closed 1,377 USERRA complaints, recovering \$2,346,142.04 in lost wages and benefits.

FY 2007

In 2007, VETS staff closed 1,200 USERRA complaints, recovering \$1,886,572.95 in lost wages and benefits.

POSITION: The American Legion supports the reemployment of Reservists and National Guard members as they come back from deployment. Additionally, The American Legion recommends strengthening the enforcement on USERRA. There needs to be effective consequences for non-compliance or proactive regulation of USERRA to ensure that veterans do indeed benefit from this earned benefit.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor compliance to USERRA, so our returning service men and women from the Global War on Terror are well received by employers and properly reintegrated into their civilian jobs.

TOPIC 4: Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSBs)

BACKGROUND: President Bush signed Executive Order 13360 on October 20, 2004. This Executed Order stated that Heads of agencies shall provide the opportunity for service disabled veteran businesses to significantly increase the Federal contracting and subcontracting of such businesses. To achieve that objective, agencies shall more effectively implement section 15(g) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C 644g), which provides that the President must establish a goal of not less than 3% for participation by service disabled veteran businesses in Federal contracting, and section 36 of that Act (15 U.S.C. 657f), which gives agency contracting officers the authority to reserve certain procurements for service disabled veteran businesses. This Executive Order is a mandate to award at least 3% of Federal contracts to SDVOSBs; however, the 3% goal of procurement is not being reached. On July 18, 2008, a letter written by Roger Correll, Deputy Assistant Secretary (Contracting) & Assistant Secretary (Acquisition) and Ronald Poussard, Director, Office of Small Business Programs of the Department of the Air Force, stated that giving the required percentage of contracts to SDVOSBs is a way of giving back to those who have given so much for our country, while ensuring that the agility, innovation, effectiveness, and dedication is provided to meet the Air Force mission. This letter indicates the kind of leadership and accountability that is needed in order to meet the 3% Federal contracting goals for SDVOSBs. Resources such as

VetBiz.gov and the General Supply Schedule SDVOSB Government Wide Acquisition Contracts are excellent sources to gain access to SDVOSB firms.

POSITION: The American Legion seeks and supports legislation to require a 5% goal, with set-aside and sole source authority, for federal procurements and contracts for businesses owned and operated by service disabled veterans and business owned and controlled by veterans, including those small businesses owned by reserve component members who have been or may be called to active duty, or may be affected by base closing and reduction in our military forces.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor Federal agencies, which according to a congressionally mandated program are to achieve compliance with the 3% goal of procurement for Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses.

Joseph C. Sharpe
Deputy Director
Economics Commission
202.861.2700 x1402
Week Ending 8/1/08

***NATIONAL SECURITY/FOREIGN RELATIONS DIVISION
WEEKLY REPORT, 08/01/08***

Director's Notes: President Bush announced: "Violence is down to its lowest level since the spring of 2004." President Bush then discussed progress in Iraq and said, "*Beginning Tomorrow* (Friday, 1 August), *troops deploying to Iraq will serve 12-month tours instead of 15-month tours.*" That is very good news. In other good news, a top Iraqi official visited wounded American troops at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., Tuesday to thank them for their part in ending Saddam Hussein's rule in his country. "We have come ... to express our gratitude and appreciation for the sacrifices made by these great warriors, soldiers, in freeing the Iraqi people and in helping us in Iraq recover from tyranny and dictatorship," Jawad Karim al-Bolani, Iraq's Minister of the Interior, said through a translator to a handful of journalists in the lobby of the medical center. "We also want to express our gratitude to the families of all these great men and women and express how important their sacrifices are for our nation," he added. Meanwhile news south of our U.S. Border is not good with drug cartel violence considerably on the rise. Several cartel hit men have even crossed the Border and conducted hits in their ongoing drug conflicts. One hit recently occurred in Phoenix. Finally, please note that Secretary of Defense Gates Thursday released a comprehensive National Defense Strategy which you can obtain at: <http://www.defenselink.mil/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=12104>

NATIONAL SECURITY

TOPIC 1: New Defense Strategy Shifts Focus From Conventional Warfare

BACKGROUND: The DoD released the 2008 National Defense Strategy (NDS) today. The strategy outlines the national approach to the defense of this nation and its interests. The NDS is issued periodically and the last one was published in March 2005. It outlines how the Department supports the President's National Security Strategy and informs the National Military Strategy and other subordinate strategy documents. The strategy builds on lessons learned and insights from previous operations and strategic reviews such as the 2006 QDR. The strategy document, which has not been released, calls for the military to master "irregular" warfare rather than focusing on conventional conflicts against other nations, though Gates also recommends partnering with [China](#) and [Russia](#) in order to blunt their rise as potential adversaries. The strategy is a culmination of Gates's work since he took over [the Pentagon](#) in late 2006 and spells out his view that the nation must harness both military assets and "soft power" to defeat a complex, transnational foe. **POSITION:** The American Legion advocates for a strong national defense to include supporting the missions the use "soft power". **ACTION:** The American Legion will advocate that the military be fully funded.

TOPIC 2: Noble Resolve' Experiment Tests Emergency-Response Communications

BACKGROUND: Defense Department agencies as well as state and local emergency-preparedness organizations in Virginia, Oregon, Colorado and Indiana are honing their communication and coordination capabilities as part of the current iteration of the Noble Resolve homeland defense and disaster-response experiment. Noble Resolve '08, which began July 28 and ends Aug. 1, is the latest in a series of tests of disaster-preparedness communications and coordination systems sponsored by U.S. Joint Forces Command, based in Norfolk, Va. Testing information and coordination links among Defense Department organizations, state emergency-response agencies, the National Guard, other first responders such as local fire and police departments, and nongovernmental organizations is a key purpose of Noble Resolve, exercise leader Air Force Col. Gene Taylor told reporters today during a video-teleconference at Joint Forces Command facilities in Suffolk, Va. **POSITION:** The American Legion applauds the efforts of Noble Resolve. It is no longer a question of "if", it is the reality of "when" will the next disaster (manmade or natural) happen. **ACTION:** The American Legion urges its members to be a part of Citizen Corps and to participate in National Preparedness month this coming September.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

TOPIC: United Nations Votes to Extend Mission in Darfur; U.S. Abstains from Vote

BACKGROUND: The United Nations Security Council Thursday passed a resolution to extend its peacekeeping mission in Darfur despite U.S. complaints about the resolution. The resolution passed overwhelmingly, with all countries in the council voting for it, except the United States. A U.S. representative did not cast a vote, citing concerns about the wording of the resolution.

The one-year peacekeeping mandate was set to expire until Thursday's vote extended it for another year. Alejandro Wolff, the deputy U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said the United States was concerned about one paragraph in the resolution that alluded to the idea of suspending the investigation into Sudan President Omar Hassan al-Bashir for a period of time.

"The U.S. abstained in the vote because language added to the resolution would send the wrong message to Sudanese President Bashir and undermine efforts to bring him and others to justice," Wolff said. "This council cannot ignore the terrible crimes that have occurred throughout the conflict in [Darfur](#)." Al-Bashir, may face a possible indictment for war crimes. Earlier this month, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, chief prosecutor of the International War Crimes tribunal, filed charges against the president. The alleged crimes stem from a brutal counter-insurgency campaign the Sudanese government conducted after rebels began an uprising in Darfur in 2003.

The United States has characterized the campaign as genocide. The government armed and cooperated with Arab militias that went from village to village in Darfur, killing, torturing and raping residents there, according to the United Nations, western governments and human rights organizations. The militias targeted civilian members of

tribes from which the rebels draw strength. About 300,000 people have died in Darfur, the United Nations estimates, and 2.5 million have been forced from their homes. Many are languishing in desperate conditions in refugee camps. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports bipartisan policies and legislation that identify areas and authorize and fund programs where the United States can provide economic, political, and social development in Africa and believes that such policies must be intertwined with our Nation's overall strategy to promote democracy throughout the world. **ACTION:** The American Legion urges the U.S. Government to encourage the United Nations to focus on limited, necessary, achievable tasks that truly better the lot of humankind in a sensible, cost-effective manner. The American Legion will support any African Nation that clearly demonstrates open democratic reforms, human rights protection and cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

TOPIC 2: Sec. Rice Remains Hopeful; Israel's PM Olmert Says He Will Resign

BACKGROUND: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice emerged from three-way talks with Palestinians in a good mood, joking and laughing with reporters—so much so that her guest, U.N. Secretary-General for Somalia Ahmedou Ould-Abdalla, wanted in on the joke.

What, one might ask, does Rice have to smile about when it comes to the Middle East peace process? Even as Rice was meeting Wednesday with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Ahmed Qorei, the top Palestinian negotiator, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announced his intention to resign. In addition to the Israeli domestic political paralysis that is likely to ensue from Olmert's personal turmoil, his partner in peace, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, is hardly in a position to agree to a peace deal as he remains victim to Hamas' takeover of Gaza and struggles for relevance within his own Fatah party. Add to that the fact Rice has only six months to nudge the two sides toward a peace agreement, their stated goal at November's Annapolis peace process.

By all accounts, Israelis and Palestinians have made progress in their direct talks aimed at reaching a deal but are far from the finish line. "They were very fruitful," Rice said Wednesday. But she added, "The issues are difficult and they've always been difficult." Olmert himself said that reaching agreement on Jerusalem, one of the major "final status" issues of the conflict, would be impossible by the end of the year. And the Palestinians have rejected an accord that doesn't deal with all of those key issues, including Israeli settlements, the borders of a Palestinian state and the fate of Palestinian refugees. Despite those odds, [Rice](#) had reason to smile. The message she got Wednesday at the talks from both Israelis and Palestinians is they would continue trying to shoot for a deal before President Bush leaves office. That includes Olmert and three of the major candidates to succeed him: Livni, Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Shaul Mofaz, the Israeli Defense Forces' chief of staff. They all know, of course, that this worthy but Herculean goal is most unlikely. If the political positions of the [Israeli](#) and Palestinian leaders alone are not enough to cast doubt on the possibility of a deal in such short order, the conditions on the ground should be. Israeli settlements keep growing. The siege of Gaza leaves half of the Palestinian population in living in squalor while the other half remains subject to hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks by the Israeli military. Many Israeli citizens live in constant fear of rockets launched by Hamas from Gaza. None of that creates much of

a climate among either the Israeli or [Palestinian](#) people for historic compromise. Still, Rice and her aides insist that a deal before the end of the year is possible. Her spokesman Sean McCormack calls it America's "indomitable positive attitude and can-do spirit" that leads his boss to think this way.

Is Rice hoping against hope? Or are the parties humoring her with rhetorical promises they know they can't meet? "Nobody is going to be the party pooper here," said one Palestinian analyst familiar with the negotiations. "It's very clear there isn't going to be a deal, but nobody is going to say that out loud. It's better to show the process is still going on." The main complaint over the years about the peace process, however, is that there is more process than peace. Many Israelis and Palestinians remember the years immediately following the 1993 Oslo Accord, which first established a serious Mideast peace process, as some of the calmest years of the decades-long conflict. The collapse of the Camp David peace talks in 2000, which led to the second Palestinian intifada and eight years of violence, mistrust and paralysis between the two parties, has shown the danger of no peace process at all. Leaving the State Department on Wednesday, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said that another "Camp David failure is not an option."

Which is why McCormack and other Rice aides insist that she will continue to push the parties to their limit, but not so hard as to "break" the peace process entirely. What that means, they say, is Rice is not naive. That even as she presses for a deal, she is mindful of handing over a functioning peace process to the next U.S. president. **POSITION:** The American Legion supports productive international relationships. **ACTION:** The American Legion supports foreign policy that specifically targets diplomatic, economic, and educational programs to promote greater and peaceful democratic reforms in countries within the Middle Eastern Region.

National Security-Foreign Relations Division
Phillip D. Riley, Director
(W) 202-263-2984
Week ending: 08/01/08

NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION

TOPIC 1-VA Mental Illness/Suicide Prevention Outreach

BACKGROUND: More than 22,000 veterans have sought help from a special suicide hot line in its first year, and 1,221 suicides have been averted, the government says. The hot line received 55,000 callers in its first year, including both veterans and people who are concerned about them, according to figures being released Monday. The Department of Veterans Affairs teamed up with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to launch the hot line last July after years of criticism that the VA wasn't doing enough to help wounded soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The hot line receives up to 250 calls per day - double the average number calling when it began. Meanwhile, a nationally televised public service announcement and messages on the side of buses and in subway stations in Washington, DC, "will direct troubled veterans to call a suicide prevention hotline operated out of the Canandaigua VA Medical Center. As part of a three-month trial advertising campaign that began this week, the VA is spreading the toll-free hotline number around the nation in an effort to address the high rates of veteran suicides. The DC transit system ads will stay up for three months and be expanded into other cities if they prove successful in generating more hotline calls. The 24-hour toll-free hotline was launched last year out of Canandaigua.

POSITION: The American Legion is hopeful that all veterans with mental health care needs receive the care they need through the VA health care system. Proper care and treatment for veterans suffering from PTSD, suicidal tendencies, and other issues are a major concern of The American Legion.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor, testify, and maintain outreach regarding this issue.

TOPIC 2: Army Health Care

BACKGROUND: Gen. George Casey said he worked hard to come up with a way to describe the Army's current state. The Army is by no means broke, it's 'out of balance right now,' the Army chief of staff said on Thursday at 1st Cavalry Division headquarters. Casey said the Army is out of balance because it is so weighed down by the demands of fighting, and that is taking away from the ability to take care of soldiers and families for the long haul." Meanwhile, retired Gen. Ricardo Sanchez said recently, "I think [the Army] as an institution have always had significant challenges with taking care of soldiers that either had some sort of physical problem to continue to serve and now we've been essentially overwhelmed with the wounded warriors that are coming out of this war. And when you put all of that together, that is a very significant challenge for the institution and our medical community. This is a national problem, because you have to take what's happening to us inside of the active army and combine it also with what's happening with the Veterans Administration, and it is a significant national challenge.

POSITION: The American Legion is hopeful that all veterans with mental health care needs receive the care they need through the military as well as the VA. Proper care and treatment for veterans suffering from PTSD, suicidal tendencies, and other issues are a major concern of The American Legion.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to monitor this issue and will follow up, with testimony and advocacy, as necessary.

TOPIC 3: VA Women's Health Care

BACKGROUND: In January, the VA opened its 16th inpatient ward specializing in treating victims of military sexual trauma. And in response to complaints that it is too male-focused in its care, the VA is making changes such as adding keyless entry locks on hospital-room doors so women patients feel safer. Over 190,000 female service members have served in Iraq and Afghanistan alone.

POSITION: The American Legion supports the continued overhaul of the VA Health Care system to meet the needs of women Veterans, and their families, in the 21st Century.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to work with VA and the Congress to ensure the needs of all women Veterans and their families are met.

TOPIC 4: VA Cemeteries

BACKGROUND: The US Department of Veterans Affairs has announced that South Carolina's new veterans cemetery will bear the name of the Army installation where it is located. Cemetery director Gene Linxwiler told The State newspaper of Columbia on Friday that the Fort Jackson National Cemetery should be ready for its first burials by late November.

POSITION: The American Legion supports the proper burial of all honorably discharged veterans as per NCA policy.

ACTION: The American Legion will continue to work with VA and the Congress to ensure the burial needs of all Veterans and their families are met.

NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION

Peter S. Gaytan, Director

(202) 263-2983

Week Ending 8/1/08