

**STATEMENT OF  
JOSEPH L. WILSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION  
THE AMERICAN LEGION  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ON  
NUMEROUS VETERANS' LEGISLATION AND DRAFT DISCUSSIONS**

**H.R. 2722 Veterans Nonprofit Research and Education Corporations Enhancement Act of 2009**

**H.R. 1197 Medal of Honor Health Care Equity Act of 2009**

**H.R. 1293 Disabled Veterans Home Improvement and Structural Alteration Grant Increase Act of 2009.**

**H.R. 1302 Establishment of the position of Director of Physician Assistant Services at Veterans Health Administration (VHA) of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).**

**H.R. 1335 Prohibition on collection of certain copayments from veterans who are catastrophically disabled.**

**H.R. 1546 Caring for Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Act of 2009.**

**Draft discussion on extending health care to Vietnam Era Herbicide exposed veterans and Gulf-War Era veterans**

**Draft discussion on providing supportive services for family caregivers**

**Draft discussion on requiring VA to collect data on family caregivers of veterans through surveys**

**JUNE 18, 2009**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit The American Legion's views on these various pieces of legislation: H.R. 2722; H.R. 1197; H.R. 1293; H.R. 1302; H.R. 1335; H.R. 1546; H.R. 2734; H.R. 2738; and Draft discussions on Extending Healthcare to Vietnam-Era Veterans Exposed to Herbicides and Gulf War Era veterans; Providing Supportive Services for Family Caregivers

Accompanying the Veteran on Visits to VA; and Requiring the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to Collect Survey Data on Family Caregivers.

**H.R. 2722**

This bill seeks to amend title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), to modify and update provisions of law relating to nonprofit research and education corporations, and for other purposes.

The American Legion has no official position on this piece of legislation.

**H.R. 1197**

This bill seeks to assign priority status for hospital care and medical services provided through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to certain veterans who are recipients of the Medal of Honor.

The Medal of Honor is the highest military decoration awarded to a member of the United States Armed Forces. The recipients have earned this award by displaying heroism and bravery while risking their lives during service to this great nation.

In addition to supporting H.R. 1197, The American Legion would support legislation to place Medal of Honor recipients in Priority Group 1 for VA health care.

**H.R. 1293**

This bill seeks to amend title 38, U.S.C., to improve the quality of care provided to veterans in VA medical facilities, to encourage highly qualified doctors to serve in hard-to-fill positions in such medical facilities, and for other purposes.

The American Legion supports legislation that seeks to improve the quality of care for veterans, to include medical and structural accommodations that also improve quality of life. The American Legion feels Section 2c of HR 1293 is unclear and thereby requests clarification.

**H.R. 1302**

This bill seeks to amend title 38, U.S.C., to establish the position of Director of Physician Assistant Services within the office of the Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health.

The American Legion supports legislation to establish Director of Physician Assistant (PA) services in the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It is The American Legion's contention that the elevation of the current position of PA Advisor to Director is a necessity to increase veterans' access to quality medical care by ensuring efficient utilization of the programs and initiatives.

The American Legion urges Congress to act on the matter immediately to ensure the approximately 2000 PAs within VA have sufficient and full-time representation at the policy level.

### **H.R. 1335**

This bill seeks to amend title 38, U.S.C., to prohibit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs from collecting certain copayments from veterans who are catastrophically disabled.

The American Legion supports this piece of legislation.

### **H.R. 1546**

This bill seeks to amend title 38, U.S.C., to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish the Committee on Care of Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

It is The American Legion's position that TBI is usually accompanied by various injuries to include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We also contend that policies supporting care for this "Signature Wound" must be implemented and communicated from the policy level to the field. The American Legion supports this piece of legislation.

### **H.R. 2734**

This bill seeks to amend section 1781 of title 38, U.S.C., to provide medical care to family members of disabled veterans who serve as caregivers to such veterans.

The American Legion supports any legislation that accommodates those who care for this nation's veterans.

### **H.R. 2738**

This bill seeks to amend title 38, U.S.C., to provide travel expenses for family caregivers accompanying veterans to medical treatment facilities.

The American Legion supports any legislation that accommodates those who care for this nation's veterans. Veterans who injure themselves while serving this great nation are entitled to all that places them in the best of care. We also contend that expenses and support should be provided by VA to all who participate in care for the veteran.

### **Draft discussion on extending health care to Vietnam Era Herbicide exposed veterans and Gulf-War Era veterans**

The American Legion believes adequate and quality care should be provided for those who sustained illnesses and injuries while serving honorably. We also believe such discussion should be implemented expeditiously as there is no pause button for this nation's veterans. As time progresses, so does the extent of pain of our nation's veterans.

The American Legion reaffirms its support for Vietnam veterans with Agent Orange exposure in VA Priority Group 6 for VA health care. The American Legion also supports legislation to give VA the authority to include ill Gulf War veterans in Priority Group 6 for VA health care.

The American Legion supports the measures outlined in this bill which would provide health care, medical services and nursing home care for certain Vietnam era veterans exposed to herbicide and veterans of the Persian Gulf War.

#### **Draft discussion on providing supportive services for family caregivers**

The American Legion supports legislation that adequately provides for those who are unselfishly caring for our nation's veterans and believes such legislation should be implemented immediately.

#### **Draft discussion on requiring VA to collect data on family caregivers of veterans through surveys**

It is The American Legion's position that the Department of Veterans Affairs maintains a database of those who are caring for this nation's veterans. Collecting such data is only part of the accountability process. It's also imperative that VA, upon collecting this data, accurately assess services rendered and compensate caregivers adequately.

#### **Conclusion**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, The American Legion sincerely appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on the abovementioned pieces of legislation and looks forward to working with you and your colleagues on these very important issues. Thank you.