

**STATEMENT OF
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THE AMERICAN LEGION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
H.R. 147, H.R. 228, H.R. 297, H.R. 466, H.R. 929, H.R. 942, H.R. 950, H.R. 1008, H.R. 1089,
AND H.R. 1171, HOMELESS VETERANS REINTEGRATION PROGRAM
REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2009**

MARCH 4, 2009

Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present The American Legion's view on the several pieces of legislation being considered by the Subcommittee today. The American Legion commends the Subcommittee for holding a hearing to discuss these important and timely issues.

H.R. 147, seeks to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow taxpayers to designate a portion of their income tax payment to provide assistance to homeless veterans. The American Legion supports this provision. This fund will provide medical, rehabilitative, and employment assistance to homeless veterans and their families. Homeless veteran programs should provide supportive services such as, but not limited to, outreach, health care, case management, daily living, personal financial planning, transportation, vocational counseling, employment and training, and education. This designation of funds would provide these needed services for America's most vulnerable veterans.

H.R. 228, directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a scholarship program for students seeking a degree or certificate in the areas of visual impairment and orientation and mobility. The American Legion supports this pilot program. There is a strong need for more medical providers in these medical fields and this program would provide the necessary funding for veterans who are interested in these career opportunities.

H.R. 297, Veteran Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Subsistence Allowance Improvement Act of 2009, amends title 38, United States Code (USC), to provide an increase in the amount of subsistence allowance payable by VA to veterans participating in vocational rehabilitation programs. The American Legion supports this provision. This subsistence increase would allow the veteran to meet his or her needs and maintain their educational pursuits within the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program.

H.R. 466, Wounded Veteran Job Security Act, amends title 38, USC, to prohibit discrimination and acts of reprisal against persons who receive treatment for illnesses, injuries,

and disabilities incurred in or aggravated by military service. The American Legion supports this amendment to the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) to allow veterans to maintain their employment while being treated for service-connected disabilities. Service members who honorably defend this country depend on laws like USERRA. It was the intent of Congress in enacting USERRA that no veteran be denied employment, reemployment, advancement, or be subjected to discrimination in employment for serving their country as a member of the Armed Forces. .

H.R. 929, amends title 38, USC, to require VA to provide eligible veterans with skills relevant to the job market. The American Legion supports this legislation. This program would provide job training in a relevant career field for veterans who have been unemployed for at least 90 of the previous 180 days, are not eligible for education or training services, or have a primary or secondary military occupational specialty that is not readily transferable to the civilian workforce. This program would be the only Federal job training program available strictly for veterans and the only Federal job training program specifically designed and available for use by state veterans' employment personnel to assist veterans with employment barriers.

H.R. 942, Veteran Self-Employment Act of 2009, directs VA to conduct a pilot project on the use of educational assistance under programs of the VA to defray training costs associated with the purchase of certain franchise enterprises. The American Legion supports this provision. The American Legion views small business as the backbone of the American economy. It is the mobilizing force behind America's past economic growth and will continue to be the major economic factor as we move into the 21st Century. This program will provide veterans with the training that is required to run a franchise successfully.

H.R. 950, amends chapter 33 of title 38, USC, to increase educational assistance for certain veterans pursuing a program of education offered through distance learning. The American Legion believes that paying veterans a lesser benefit when they receive credit via distance learning is a concern. Department of Defense reports that over 70 percent of its enrollees are receiving credit via distance learning and the VA is reporting a similar shift towards increasing utilization of the distance learning modality. Accordingly, The American Legion is recommending that the allowances for distance learning be similar to those for residential learning. This policy assures equity for veterans including such individuals as single parents and veterans with significant medical disabilities.

H.R. 1088, Mandatory Veteran Specialist Training Act of 2009, amends title 38, USC, to provide a one-year period for training new disabled veterans' outreach program specialists and local veterans' employment representatives by National Veterans' Employment and Training Services Institute (NVTI). The NVTI was established to ensure a high level of proficiency and training for staff that provide veterans employment services. NVTI provides training to federal and state government employment service providers in competency based training courses. Current law requires all DVOPs and LVERs to be trained within 3 years of hiring. The American Legion recommends that these personnel be trained within 1 year.

H.R. 1089, Veterans Employment Rights Realignment Act of 2009, amends title 38, USC, to provide for the enforcement through the Office of Special Counsel of the employment and unemployment rights of veterans and members of the Armed Forces employed by Federal executive agencies. The American Legion has no position on this legislation.

H.R. 1171, Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program Reauthorization Act of 2009, amends title 38, USC, to reauthorize the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) for fiscal years 2010 to 2014. The American Legion notes there are approximately 154,000 homeless veterans on the street each night. This number, compounded with 300,000 service members entering the private sector each year since 2001 with at least a third of them potentially suffering from mental illness, indicates intensive and numerous programs to prevent and assist homeless veterans are needed. The purpose of HVRP is to provide services to assist in reintegrating homeless veterans into meaningful employment within the labor force and to stimulate the development of effective service delivery systems that will address the complex problems facing homeless veterans. HVRP is the only nationwide program that focuses on assisting homeless veterans to reintegrate into the workforce. The American Legion strongly supports the reauthorization of HVRP for fiscal years 2010 to 2014.