Statement of
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National Economic Commission
The American Legion
Submitted to the
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

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The American Legion appreciates the opportunity to comment on the budget for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) for FY 2000.

The American Legion continues to support the current outreach programs to private sector employers. With great interest, The American Legion noted this year's budget for VETS contains increased funding for new initiatives to help veterans obtain jobs:

- placing a list of Federal contractors and subcontractors on the Internet;
- increasing job development efforts with Federal contractors and subcontractors;
- monitoring unemployed target groups, which include veterans;
- operate some Transition Assistance pilot programs overseas;
- developing an Internet site for information on credentialing; and
- working more closely with the Employment and Training Administration on new performance measures.

The American Legion does not concur with the President's recommended funding and personnel levels for the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program (DVOP) and the Local Veteran Employment Representative (LVER) program in FY 2000. Although funding for DVOPs would increase by $175,000, it will support 32 *fewer* field staff positions. That translates into no service for many unemployed or under employed veterans. Similarly, while LVER funding increases by $175,000, the number of veterans to be served will not increase. This is not a good trade off; achieving salary increases through staff reductions is not acceptable.

With respect to the LVERs, Section 4104 (a) (1), title 38, USC, provides that a minimum of 1600 positions be funded. This has not happened for more than a decade. The American Legion recommends that this committee consider funding of at least $100 million to properly fund this program. Mr. Chairman, The American Legion believes that as the electronic medium becomes the option of choice for finding a job, the need for more

LVERs will continue to increase. We are shortchanging veterans by not funding this program properly.

Likewise, DVOPs are seriously under funded. The President's budget request for $80.2 million will support just 1,431 DVOPs in the field. That does not even begin to cover the proposed 2500 one-stop centers created by the Workforce Investment Act where veterans will go for assistance. The American Legion believes VETS will need at least 2,000 DVOPs to meet WIA funded activities and to do Transition Assistance Programs, provided that some of the one-stop centers' staffing is on a part-time basis. To meet this extremely conservative estimate, DVOPs will need an additional $40 million in funding.

Research conducted for this statement revealed that 56.2% of all unemployed veterans are over the age of 45. Therefore, The American Legion believes that many of these veterans are victims of corporate restructuring or overtaken by technology changes. These veterans need training to remain in their previous professions or to begin new careers.

Section 168 of the Workforce Investment Act (formerly JTPA IV-C) is that portion of the statute that provides for this type of training for veterans. For at least the past three years, this account received $7.3 million in annual funding, which has allowed the program to continue to operate in only 11 States. ***This is absolutely unacceptable.*** There are thousands of veterans available for work in this new economy, but they lack marketable, technological skills. The problem is clear. Adequate funding will solve the problem.

The only participants in this specific program are veterans of the armed forces of the United States. Those brave young men and women to which this Nation owes a debt of gratitude. It seems more money is available nationally to training single parents, recovering drug addicts, high school dropouts, and convicted felons than the true defenders of democracy. What message are we sending to America's youth? Is an honorable discharge more than just a piece of paper, or is it a passport to vocational opportunity? Are citations and decorations open *windows of opportunity* or closed *doors to the future*?

Try telling the kid, who is packing his duffelbag for Kosovo, that if he comes home and leaves the military, he can receive job training only if he lives in one of eleven states. If the $7.3 million funding level continues in authorizing legislation, it becomes the baseline for future budgets. The hole just gets deeper and darker for the next generation of veterans. This baseline needs to be at least $32 million to allow VETS to begin training in ***all*** fifty states.

The National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI) continues to play a critical function in the world of veterans employment. The exceptional training provided to veterans' advocates enhances the quality and delivery of services to veterans in almost every employment services office. Funding for NVTI must not continue to be flat-lined in FY 2000. This valuable resource must keep pace with market trends and inflation. Without adequate funding, the quality services provided by NVTI will surely suffer and adversely impact on the availability of classes and instructors. The American Legion recommends the Assistant

Secretary for Veterans Employment and Training report to the Subcommittee the future training needs of VETS from NVTI and the cost estimates to fund such training.

The last time VETS' statute underwent any dramatic change was more than a decade ago when Congress passed P.L. 100-323. That law has served veterans well over the years. The only way it can continue to do so is to give the agency the proper resources. The President's budget leaves the agency barely surviving on some kind of low-maintenance diet. Veterans deserve better treatment in the public labor exchange.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, is considered one of the greatest pieces of social legislation ever enacted by Congress. Unlike other social legislation, every provision was an earned benefit through honorable military service. Job training and placement was major provision of that public law. Over the five decades since its enactment, the wise decision of the 78th Congress has paid tremendous dividends not only to America, but to the entire world! As we prepare to enter the 21st Century, why are we unilaterally dismantling a successful concept; helping those who answered the nation's call to arms in their time of need? Who in American society has earned the thanks of a grateful nation than those who were prepared to die for the very freedoms all Americans enjoy?

Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee, the cost of war goes on long after the guns are silenced, the treaties are signed, the dead are buried and the parades are over.