Questions for the Record
Joint Subcommittee Hearing
Issues Facing Women and Minority Veterans
Held on
July 12, 2007
10:00 a. m.
Follow-Up Questions for Shannon L. Middleton

1. **In testimony provided, DAV gives 8 recommendations to better serve women veterans from combat theaters. The first recommendation concerns barriers to seeking health care through VA.**

    - **In your estimation, what are the three biggest barriers female veterans encounter when trying to access health care through VA?**

    The three biggest barriers female veterans encounter when trying to access health care through VA are: lack of knowledge about VHA services, not knowing that they may be eligible for health care benefits, and the perception that VA only caters to male veterans.

2. **Women and minority OEF/OIF veterans returning from theater face, what I believe, are additional challenges than their returning peers, due, in part, to the lack of cultural education, lack of adequate research on meeting their unmet needs and other issues.**
    - **What has your organization done to help in the outreach efforts?**

    The American Legion publishes a booklet entitled *Guide for Women Veterans* that provides information about VA health care, services provided by The American Legion, information about health issues (like breast cancer, PTSD, sexual trauma, heart disease, drug and alcohol addiction) and a list of resources to enable them to find information about various issues. We disseminate them through our department service officers, outreach events, on our website and make them available upon request to the public.

    In the past, The American Legion has participated in a homeless female veteran workgroup for the Southeast Veterans Service Center and served on Subcommittees for the 2004 Women Veterans Summit hosted by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

    The American Legion is currently planning to collaborate with the Center for Women Veterans to organize a Women Veterans' Forum to be held in

conjunction with the organization's mid-winter conference. The American Legion is also participating in the 2008 Women Veteran's Summit.

We are constantly seeking new ways to bring information to veterans, all veterans.

- **Does your organization have any recommendations as to how to address the growing need for specialized services for both women and minority veterans?**

One effective way to ascertain the need for specialized services is to find various ways to ask women and minority veterans what needs they have that are not being met by current services. This can be patient survey, or an outreach initiative that includes a survey that VA disseminates by mail or via web. The information gathered would be useful in determining system-wide need for specific programs or services and may be useful in depicting geographical or population trends for needed services.

Once these needs are identified, The American Legion recommends that VA develop and implement policy to address these deficiencies in a timely manner and conduct an extensive outreach campaign to make these special populations--and those who serve them--aware of the enhancements. The organization also recommends that Congress appropriate adequate funding to maintain these enhancements, once they are in place.

Finally, DAV's recommendations that VA and DoD collaborate to conduct surveys of recently discharged active duty women and recently demobilized female Reserve component members to assess the barriers that they perceive or have experienced in seeking health care through VA and that VA Medical Centers establish a consumer council that includes veterans' service organizations, family members, and veterans--especially OEF/OIF veterans--would be excellent approaches as well.