

# LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES OF THE JEWISH WAR VETERANS OF THE USA

As Presented By

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## **JEWISH WAR VETERANS OF THE USA**



### **COLONEL HERB ROSENBLEETH, USA (RET) NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR**

Colonel Herb Rosenbleeth's military career began with five years enlisted U.S. Marine Corps Reserve service. He was discharged as a lance corporal and then served twenty-six years in world-wide U.S. Army commissioned service, first as a platoon leader in the Second Armored Division and then as a company commander in Germany.

Other overseas assignments included Vietnam and Iran, and ultimately, as Director, Program Review and Evaluation in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Rosenbleeth was awarded the Defense Meritorious Service Medal by then Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci.

In February, 1988, following that key assignment in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Colonel Rosenbleeth joined JWV as the National Legislative Director representing the organization on Capitol Hill, at the VA and Pentagon, and with national Jewish organizations. Rosenbleeth testifies on behalf of JWV before congressional committees and represents JWV at hearings on issues involving human rights, national defense, arms sales and foreign relations. On February 9, 1991, he became the National Executive Director of JWV.

Rosenbleeth has been appointed to the President's Committee for the Employment of the Disabled.

As National Executive Director, Colonel Rosenbleeth has served on the JWV Centennial Committee, and is the Washington representative on Capitol Hill, at the Military Coalition, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Pentagon.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Chairman Buyer, Ranking Member Evans and members of the House Committee on Veteran Affairs, I am Colonel Herb Rosenbleeth, USA (Ret) the National Executive Director of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV). JWV is Congressionally Chartered and provides counseling and assistance to members concerning the Department of Defense (DoD), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and other government agencies. JWV is an active participant in The Military Coalition, a group of over 30 military associations and veterans' organizations representing over five million active duty, reserve and retired uniformed service personnel, veterans and survivors on Capitol Hill.

Mr. Chairman, next month, on March 15<sup>th</sup> to be exact, we at JWV will celebrate JWV's 110<sup>th</sup> birthday. For these 110 years, JWV has advocated a strong national defense and a just and fair recognition and compensation for veterans. The Jewish War Veterans of the USA prides itself in being in the forefront among our nation's civic and veterans groups in supporting the well-earned rights of veterans, in promoting American democratic principles, in defending universal Jewish causes and in vigorously opposing bigotry, anti-Semitism and terrorism both here and abroad. Today, even more than ever before, we stand for these principles. The Jewish War Veterans of the USA represents a proud tradition of patriotism and service to the United States of America.

JWV believes Congress has a unique obligation to ensure that veterans' benefits are regularly reviewed and improved to keep pace with the needs of all veterans in a changing social and economic environment. We must improve access to veterans' health care, increase timeliness in the benefit claims process, and enhance access to national cemeteries and to state cemeteries for all veterans.

Mr. Chairman, we appreciate having the opportunity to present our views to the Congress. Every year for decades, the veterans service organizations look forward

to having their members come to Washington to personally present our legislative priorities to a Joint Session of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. This wonderful tradition has been going for so long; I haven't been able to find anyone who can recall when it began. Sadly, the tradition has ended.

Mr. Chairman, your arbitrary decision to cancel the March hearings creates a feeling of great disappointment among our members. We were all eagerly looking forward to hearing National Commander David L. Magidson present our legislative priorities to a Joint Session of the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees. At each Annual National Convention, our members work very diligently to develop our resolutions which become our legislative priorities. Your decision to cancel the highly anticipated Joint Session has created a feeling of disillusion and frustration among our members. Mr. Chairman, JWV and the other organizations deserved better.

### **GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

**The Jewish War Veterans of the USA, Inc. does not receive any grants or contracts from the federal government.**

### **VA BUDGET FOR 2007**

The administration's budget submission calls for a veterans' health care budget of \$34.3 billion, "an increase of \$3.5 billion more than 2006", according to a VA release on the budget. While this seems like a big increase, this budget proposal does not request enough to meet the federal government's obligation to veterans. In fact, this budget will force increasing numbers of veterans out of the health care system. Both the Administration and the VA have repeatedly underestimated the number and severity of wounded service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, thereby repeatedly requiring supplement appropriation requests.

The proposed VA budget for 2007 is another attempt to drive down demand, to further drive Priority 7 and 8 veterans out of the system. This is in addition to the more than a quarter of a million veterans who have already been shut out of the VA health care system. Denying earned benefits to eligible veterans is no way to solve the problems resulting from an inadequate budget.

### **MANDATORY FUNDING FOR THE VA**

JWV's major legislative goal is the passage of Mandatory Funding for the VA, thus providing an assured adequate level of funding for veterans' health care. This legislation would require the Secretary of the Treasury to make available to the Secretary of Veteran Affairs for programs, functions, and activities of the Veterans Health Administration for FY 2007, 130 percent of the amount obligated during FY 2005. The current bill number is HR-515.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA strongly endorses and supports the efforts of Congressman Evans and other members of Congress to provide required funding for veterans' health needs through the introduction of H.R. 515, the Assured Funding for Veterans Health Care Act of 2005.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA agrees in the strongest possible terms with these friends of veterans' contention that "We can no longer allow the VA to be hostage to the administration's misplaced priorities and the follies of the Congressional budget process. This bill would place veterans' health care on par with all major federal health care programs by determining resources based on programmatic need rather than politics and budgetary gimmicks."

Under the current system, funding for veterans' health care is subject to reduction at any time due to political and programmatic pressures to take money earmarked for the care of those who have served the country, many on the field of battle, and divert those funds to other programs. In this way, the most deserving

among us, those who have fought to defend our basic freedoms, are often denied the care which they have earned, which they have been promised, and which they deserve.

The lack of prompt access to the care they deserve and have earned is not acceptable. As the wounded come home in ever-increasing numbers from the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan, the problem will only worsen in the years to come. Therefore, it is imperative that all those who honor our brave fighting men and women come together to support Rep. Lane Evans' bill.

It is not enough to mouth support for our current troops and those who fought the brave fight before them. We must all support mandatory funding to ensure their future needs as set out in the legislation proposed by our friends. The Jewish War Veterans of the USA urges everyone to contact his/her senators and representatives to urge their support for this bill and corresponding legislation in the Senate. Our country owes health care to our veterans who must not be dependent on the whims of the political process to get the benefits they have earned. We must remove funding for veterans' health care from the vagaries of political maneuvering.

### **POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER**

JWV is also focusing on legislation to improve programs for the identification and treatment of post-deployment mental health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder, in veterans and members of the Armed Forces. The current bill number is HR 1588.

### **THE MILITARY COALITION**

JWV continues to be a proud member and active participant of the Military Coalition (TMC). PNC Bob Zweiman, JWV's Chairman of the Coordinating

Committee, serves on the Board of Directors of the Coalition and I serve as our Washington representative and as Co-Chair of the Coalition Membership and Nominations Committee.

JWV requests that the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs do everything possible to fulfill the legislative priorities of the Military Coalition. These positions are well thought out and are clearly in the best interests of our military personnel, our veterans and our nation's security.

### **PRIORITY GROUP 8 VETERANS**

Since January 17, 2003, access to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) care for new Priority 8 veterans has been prohibited. More than 260,000 veterans have applied to receive VA health care but have been turned away because of the cost-cutting decision to limit veterans' access to VA hospitals, clinics and medications. Citing the words of our National Commander, David L. Magidson: "There is no reason for the VA to deny health care to veterans who have served our country honorably. We should never leave any veteran behind."

### **SUPPORT FOR THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE**

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA recognizes the National Guard and Reserve as being essential to the strength of our nation and the well-being of our communities.

In the highest American tradition, the patriotic men and women of the National Guard and Reserve serve voluntarily in an honorable and vital profession. They train to respond to their community and their country in time of need. They deserve the support of every segment of our society.

If these volunteer forces are to continue to serve our nation, increased public understanding is required of the essential role of the National Guard and Reserve in



preserving our national security. Their members must have the cooperation of all American employers in encouraging employee participation in National Guard and Reserve training programs.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA encourages all employers to pledge that:

1. Employment will not be denied because of service in the National Guard or Reserve;
2. Employee job and career opportunities will not be limited or reduced because of service in the National Guard or Reserve;
3. Employees will be granted leaves of absence for military training in the National Guard or Reserve, consistent with existing laws, without sacrifice of vacation;
4. Employers must recognize that their employees' rights must be protected when their workers are activated in the war against terrorism, regardless of whether that activation was for State or Federal service; and
5. Leading by example, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, as an employer, has signed a pledge under the auspices of the National Committee for the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, to be a good employer. We ask our members who are employers to do so as well.

The Jewish War Veterans of the USA demands that all members of the National Guard and Reserves be treated as equal partners in America's total force structure entitled to all of the rights and benefits afforded to those in the active components and that they be equipped with all assets necessary to perform their mission.

### **CONCLUSION**

JWV National Commander David L. Magidson's motto is, "Never leave ANY veteran behind!" Mr. Chairman, I ask the Members of this Committee to make this your motto also.