

STATEMENT

of

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AMVETS NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

before the

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

H.R. 2716, the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2001; and,
H.R. 936, the Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act

Thursday, September 20, 2001
1:30 p.m., Room 334
Cannon House Office Building

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of AMVETS, it is a pleasure to present our views on H.R. 2716, the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2001, and H.R. 936, the Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act.

AMVETS appreciates the opportunity to work with you on this legislation to develop a more comprehensive bill to address issues of homelessness that AMVETS has long supported.

According to the latest VA estimates, on any given night, more than 250,000 men and women who previously served in the Armed Forces spend their time on the streets of American cities and rural towns with no place to call home.

While the reasons for these displacements vary, it is clear that without assistance, these homeless veterans face a dismal future with little hope.

Clearly, finding the chance to work is the best remedy for helping veterans restore the light of hope. There is, however, staggering evidence that quality health care is also important. Critical as well is the need for transitional housing and clinical care, if homeless veterans are to recover and overcome their tragic circumstances. In some instances, the mere provision of a telephone or shower could help make the difference in a veteran's life.

Over the years, members of AMVETS have adopted a series of resolutions seeking adequate levels of federal, state, and local funding to ensure that resources are in place to help prevent homelessness among veterans.

In our 57th annual national convention, held this past August in Dallas, Texas, AMVETS' delegates voted to continue this strong tradition of support asking that our country help by "giving these veterans a hand up and not a hand out." The challenge is great in returning homeless veterans as productive members of America.

AMVETS does not stop at asking our elected members of Congress to provide funding. While government funding is important, we want you to know that AMVETS, as an organization, is intricately involved in programs and initiatives, across the country, to aid veterans in homeless distress.

Our goal is to bring a continuity of commitment to getting homeless veterans back on their feet and into the main life of our communities.

When the University of California joined hands with our Californian department to develop a program in computer coursework for homeless veterans, they noticed that the AMVETS' facility in which they met had two kitchens. The result was a new program in the culinary arts. And, it's a success because we have been able, working together, to reach out to veterans living in homelessness and help them find new career opportunities.

In Ohio, AMVETS are now expanding their successful transitional housing programs to help veterans with chemical dependency overcome their addictions. Significant in this commitment is the simple provision of housing to give these veterans, who want to win their lives back, an escape from the streets where they are almost certain to fail.

AMVET leaders in Arizona, Michigan, Virginia, and other states are combating homelessness on many fronts with success. Our members care about their fellow veterans and are working today and every day to help with shelter, transportation, food services, and related supports.

Stand Downs, begun some years ago by VA, have been very helpful. These organized events provide veterans a respite from the daily stress of homelessness. AMVETS is pleased that at least in some measure many of VA's current programs have helped former service men and women successfully reintegrate into their communities and nation's workforce.

The need, however, is great to power-up our response and find more comprehensive approaches for veterans without a home.

AMVETS clearly recognizes that H.R. 936, the Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act, offers a chance to expand the fight and perhaps find victory. We want this Committee to know that we fully share the twin goals of this legislation, to defeat homelessness and help veterans.

As indicated in *The Independent Budget*, co-authored by PVA, DAV, VFW, and AMVETS, homeless veterans need a coordinated approach to health care and benefit delivery. H.R. 936 is comprehensive in its approach. It would establish and encourage a broad cooperation between the departments and agencies of our federal, state, and local governments, private and public sector organizations, community-based experts, and individuals to end homelessness and help veterans regain their lives.

H.R. 2716 would boost funding authorization for VA's Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program and expand the very successful HUD-VASH (HUD Veterans Affairs Supported Housing) program.

AMVETS firmly believes that there is no question that these measures, H.R. 936 and H.R. 2716, would help complete a quality outreach to our most vulnerable veterans. We encourage your understanding of the challenges and issues homeless veterans face, and we encourage you to fill the serious gaps in services for the men and women who have served this nation.

Again, thank you for extending AMVETS the opportunity to present our views to the Committee, and thank you also for your support of veterans. We believe the price is not too great for the value received.

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