

Committee members;

I would like to start by thanking all of you for your time and effort to help us help Iowa Veterans. I would also like to stress the fact that we need by-partisan support on veteran's issues, and we are very glad that this is happening this year.

I would then like to start off by apologizing for Pat not being here as he is in DC attending a Directors meeting and meeting with National Cemetery Officials. We hope to get our state cemetery ready to accept veterans by veteran's day of this year, and are asking that you appropriate the funds this year to make that a reality. We have proposed figures that I hope you are familiar with, but if we need to take time with you when Pat gets back we will surely do that.

I would like to touch briefly on a few proposals we have submitted this year which I feel are very important for the survival of the claims process in Iowa. By that I mean the claims process in the link that gets Iowa's Veterans to the benefits they deserve. We need to improve that system each and every year we need to fund this process, every year, especially years when there is a war going on. We see veterans coming home on a daily basis that are severally injured, lots of them are injured mentally not physically, these are the ones that are hard to spot, to get help to, as these veterans usually do not show signs of injury until they do something that affects their families and a lot of times has dramatic consensus.

The Trust Fund, this money will help Iowans this year to the tune of about \$240,000 in interest earned. We are in the process of finalizing the proposed rules for that fund as we speak. We have taken what the legislature wrote last year and have tried to hone and add where we felt a need to get these rules ready for the July 1st release date of the interest. We want to help Iowa's Veterans with this money and we feel we can accomplish this in a timely manner, but we must have some help administering the funds as we prepare to distribute them.

The County Grants, again here is money that will help the counties; the first line of the claims process. We need to get the word to the veterans that there is help, and most veterans start at their county offices for help. We need to be sure that they know that this is a hand up, not a hand out, they have earned these benefits by serving their country. Because there are counties out there that do not have a director, and counties that have either a part time director or a commissioner who meets veterans on a case by case basis the money that was appropriated by the legislature will not all be spent this year, but if we could get you to fund that program again this year we will be able to get a handle of what the needs are this year and then next legislative session we will know where we need more help. I will take the blame for us not knowing how much of the current funding we will use, the commission was given a task of coming up with the rule making process and we got bogged down in the process. We have learned a lot this year about the process so we will not be bound by our mistakes of last year. Again, this is the first piece of the claims process puzzle, we need funding here.

License Plate fund, we currently have a fund with some money in it, we have a proposal to use that fund and are asking for your support to include the money derived from all Veterans Plates to be added to this fund so we may help even more veterans. We have used this money for a variety of reasons over the three years I have served on the commission, but the current commission would like to make a concerted effort to use this money, again to get the benefits to the veteran, that means taking the process to the veteran in the state, either at the county level, or at the VSOs in Des Moines at the VARO.

Matching funds, this I would like to touch on briefly even though it is a very important part of the process. The VSOs are funded in part by their parent organizations, by fundraising, and by generous veterans who know what this service brings to other veterans. But I am not aware of any VSO organization that is not strapped for money to run their Service Office. In the state of

Iowa we have lost three service officers last year due to lack of available funds, one VSO shut their doors of their service office, and another had to lay off two as there were not funds to support them. This is a very big problem, and in the process of the claim, the counties send a majority of their claims they start at the county level to these people. These people review the claim for accuracy, documents needed, and submit them to the VA on behalf of the veteran. When this process is followed the veteran or the county director just calls the VSO office at the federal building and will be able to track the claim through to the end, and if during the process more evidence is needed, or questions are asked by the VA the service officer can handle it. That is why we feel this resolution needs your support, to finish the process started by the county director, which we hope will result in the veteran getting the compensation or pension they deserve.

Thank you for listening, and I will be available after the meeting to answer any questions

Steve Mulcahy