

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Sub-committee:

As The American Legion of Iowa Department Adjutant, I thank you for this opportunity to present The American Legion's legislative priorities for this year.

Attached you will find a listing and brief description of the resolutions passed by the members of our organization. I will not go into each item in detail because of the limited amount of time available to us today. However, I would like to share with you how we arrive at these priorities.

The American Legion works closely with other entities of the veterans' community to establish these priorities. Those entities include, but are not limited to: the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs, the Iowa Veterans Home, the Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Labor, the Iowa National Guard, county veterans' affairs directors and commissioners, The Iowa Veterans Council, and other Veterans Service Organizations. It is only through our combined efforts and cooperation that we are able to understand and meet the needs of Iowa's Veterans.

We must also work with you as legislators to make sure new programs are initiated where there is a need and existing programs are communicated to and made accessible to our veterans.

The list of priorities we send each year is not a wish list. Our legislative priorities represent real issues for Iowa's veterans. As you look at these priorities, I encourage you to see beyond what is being asked for and examine why it is of importance to Iowa's veterans.

I will give you an example. The American Legion's Resolution #7 calls for a state income tax exemption of all servicemembers on active duty with Iowa as a home of record. At first glance, it appears to be just a tax break for those in the military, but the reasoning goes beyond that.

While in the Navy, I was responsible for military pay for the ship's crew. I cannot tell you the number of times I had sailors changing their home state of record to another state to take advantage of a tax break. While the idea may have seemed good at the time, the decision to change the state of record can have detrimental effects. When the

servicemember returns to his or her home state, they find they are ineligible for some state veterans' benefits because a change was made to the home of record.

This is why we encourage you to talk with the veteran community about veteran issues. We want you to understand why we are asking for these legislative priorities. Use the Veterans Service Organizations as a resource.

Recently, in a Senate Veterans Affairs Committee meeting, I was asked to prioritize The American Legion's legislative agenda for the year. We did not prioritize and number our list because all of these issues are important for the veterans of Iowa.

As legislators, you are tasked with identifying what items on the agenda can be met. That is especially true for this sub-committee as you deal with appropriations. As you set those priorities, I ask that you consider the following.

1. Veteran Outreach and Accessibility

One of the biggest challenges we face is making veterans aware of existing programs and services. Programs which provide outreach to veterans and make services more accessible are a top priority. Our primary vehicles for outreach and access are the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs and the county veterans' affairs offices.

2. Transition Assistance

Iowans currently serving in the armed forces need our help now more than ever. This is especially true of the National Guard and Reserve members. Many are giving a year to two years of their lives for deployments in the current war. When they return home, their lives have been turned upside down. Any programs that help them make the transition back to civilian life easier are a top priority.

3. Lower Incomes and Special Health Care Needs

We must be able to provide quality services to Iowa's veterans who need it the most. Funding for the Iowa Veterans Home and assistance programs which could be developed with the Veterans Trust Fund can help us meet this priority.

The American Legion will continue to work with the Iowa Legislature and the entire veterans' community to ensure that Iowa continues to improve our services to those who have served us. Together we can work towards meaningful solutions to the challenges being faced by Iowa's veterans. Together we can ensure that their sacrifices are honored with the thanks of a grateful state.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to appear before you today.

John Derner
Department Adjutant
The American Legion of Iowa

Index of American Legion of Iowa Resolutions

1. **Veterans Services Matching Grants** – Matching grant program for improvement in delivery of veterans services by the counties be authorized for a second year.
2. **Veterans Organizations Poker Tournaments** – Changes in Iowa’s gambling laws be accomplished to allow qualified veterans organizations to host poker tournaments with the awarding of cash prizes.
3. (Resolution 3 did not have Legislative intent)
4. **Veterans Trust Fund** – Continue to provide annual appropriations to the fund until the endowment reaches the established \$50 million level.
5. **Full Funding for the Iowa Veterans Home** – Provide full funding, salary adjustments, and staffing for the Iowa Veterans Home
6. **Full Funding for the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs & State Veterans Cemetery** – Provide full funding, salary adjustments and staffing for the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs; and provide adequate annual appropriation for the State Veterans Cemetery.
7. **Income Tax Exemption for Active Duty Military with Iowa as Home of Record** – Establish a state income tax exemption for all military personnel called to active duty or currently serving on active duty with Iowa as their state of residence.
8. **Grants to Veterans Service Organizations for Service Officers** – Provide ongoing annual appropriations to the state headquarters of the nationally accredited Veterans Service Organizations to assist in the operation of Service Offices for the purpose of providing training, office support and salaries for Service Officers.
9. **Veterans’ Property Tax Exemption** – Increase the amount of the veterans’ property tax exemption and provide necessary appropriation to fully fund the exemption.
10. **Injured Veteran Grant Program** – Continue the severely injured veteran grant program.
11. **Housing Grant Assistance Program** – Continue the Military Service Member Home Ownership Assistance Program.

RESOLUTION 0706-1

SUBJECT: VETERANS SERVICES MATCHING GRANTS

SUBMITTED BY: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, It is accepted that the most efficient and effective delivery of services to Iowa's veterans is accomplished by the commissions and directors of veterans affairs in the 99 counties, and

WHEREAS, The Iowa Legislature and Governor recognize that financial assistance from the state will increase the delivery of those services, and

WHEREAS, The 2006 Iowa Legislature appropriated and Governor Vilsack approved \$1,000,000 for use as matching grants to improve delivery of services to veterans by the various county commissions and directors of veterans affairs, and

WHEREAS, Further improvements could be made both in the operation of the matching grant program and the county's delivery of services by authorization of the program for a second year, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006, That the matching grant program for improvement in delivery of veterans services by the counties be authorized for a second year, and be it further

RESOLVED, That an appropriation of \$1,000,000 be made to fund this program beginning July 1, 2007 and be it finally

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs; and Executive Director, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs.

RESOLUTION 0706-2

SUBJECT: VETERANS ORGANIZATIONS POKER TOURNAMENTS

SUBMITTED BY: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, The growth of legalized gambling in Iowa has eroded the long-term sources of income used by veterans organizations for the various purposes of the organizations, and

WHEREAS, The growth in popularity of poker tournaments, particularly Texas Hold-em, has created an opportunity for veterans service organizations to raise funds for worthwhile causes, and

WHEREAS, Current gambling laws and rules limit the possibility of poker tournaments being used as fund-raisers since any prizes won must be non-redeemable merchandise to exclude gift cards, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006, That changes in Iowa's gambling laws be accomplished to allow qualified veterans organizations to host poker tournaments with the awarding of cash prizes, and be it further

RESOLVED, That appropriate regulatory controls be put into place to ensure the social gambling aspect of the games remains in effect and be it finally

RESOLVED, That if approved, a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa and all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives.

RESOLUTION 0706-4

SUBJECT: VETERANS TRUST FUND

SUBMITTED BY: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, The Iowa Legislature and Governor have established a Veterans Trust Fund; and

WHEREAS, The Veterans Trust Fund endowment level was originally established at \$50 million; and

WHEREAS, The Iowa Legislature and Governor have authorized appropriations to the Veterans Trust Fund to provide funding for veterans' programs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006, That the Iowa Legislature and Governor continue to provide annual appropriations to the fund until the endowment reaches the established \$50 million level so that it can fulfill its purpose of assisting Veterans in the state of Iowa and be it further

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs; and Executive Director, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs.

RESOLUTION 0706-5

SUBJECT: FULL FUNDING FOR THE IOWA VETERANS HOME

SUBMITTED: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, The Iowa Veterans Home in Marshalltown is one of the finest long-term care facilities in the country; and

WHEREAS, The Iowa Veterans Home is the only long term care facility for veterans in Iowa; and

WHEREAS, In order to continue to provide adequate care for the residents at the home, full funding of the budget for the Iowa Veterans Home is necessary; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006 That The American Legion request the State of Iowa provide full funding, salary adjustments and staffing for the Iowa Veterans Home; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs; and Commandant of the Iowa Veterans Home.

RESOLUTION 0706-6

SUBJECT: FULL FUNDING FOR THE IOWA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS & STATE VETERANS CEMETERY

SUBMITTED: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs provides a repository for documents used by veterans to provide verification of the service they provided in protection of our nation; and

WHEREAS, The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs coordinates the training of County Directors and Commissioners of Veterans Affairs in assisting veterans with claims for Federal VA benefits; and

WHEREAS, The Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs will have oversight of the establishment and operation of the State Veterans Cemetery; and

WHEREAS, There have been increased demands on the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs as a result of legislation passed regarding state veterans' benefits; and

WHEREAS, The Department of Veterans Affairs has increased its outreach programs to the veterans of Iowa; and

WHEREAS, Increasing numbers of Iowa National Guard and Reserve deployments have created additional demands on the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006 That The American Legion request the State of Iowa provide full funding, salary adjustments and staffing for the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs; and be it further

RESOLVED, That adequate appropriation be made to the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs annually for the State Veterans Cemetery; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs; and Executive Director, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs.

RESOLUTION 0706-7

**SUBJECT: INCOME TAX EXEMPTION FOR ACTIVE DUTY
MILITARY WITH IOWA AS HOME OF RECORD**

SUBMITTED BY: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, Active Iowa Military Personnel are serving to protect the freedoms we enjoy everyday at home in Iowa; and

WHEREAS, With their continued service to country, they are going to be away from home, family, friends, and their civilian employment; and

WHEREAS, Military personnel are at risk at all times while we at home may choose to be employed, go to school, have families, and feel safe; and

WHEREAS, Military personnel have suffered a significant loss of income from employment due to their being called to active duty; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006 That the American Legion lobby the Iowa Legislature to establish a state income tax exemption for all military personnel called to active duty or currently serving on active duty with Iowa as their state of residence and be it further

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; and Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs.

RESOLUTION 0706-8

**SUBJECT: GRANTS TO VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS
FOR SERVICE OFFICERS**

SUBMITTED BY: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, The Service Officers of the Veterans Service Organizations are essential in providing assistance to veterans applying for compensation and pensions through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA); and

WHEREAS, The Service Officers of the Veterans Service Organizations provide representation for the veterans of Iowa in hearings and appeals with the VA at no charge to the veteran; and

WHEREAS, The State of Iowa benefits from the services of Service Officers through Federal dollars brought into the state in the form of VA compensation and pensions earned by veterans; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006 That the American Legion requests the State of Iowa provide ongoing annual appropriations to the state headquarters of the nationally accredited Veterans Service Organizations to assist in the operation of Service Offices, and be it finally

RESOLVED That the funds be used only for the purpose of providing training, office support, and salaries for qualified Veterans Service Officers and be it finally

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; and Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs.

RESOLUTION 0706-9

SUBJECT: VETERANS PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION

SUBMITTED BY: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, The citizens of Iowa have recognized the sacrifices of Iowa's wartime veterans, and

WHEREAS, The Iowa Legislature has demonstrated its commitment to Iowa's veterans by enacting into law an exemption on property taxes, now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006 That the Iowa Legislature uphold its commitment to Iowa's veterans by increasing the amount of the veterans' property tax exemption and provide the necessary appropriation to fully fund the exemption and be it finally

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; and Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs.

RESOLUTION 0706-10

SUBJECT: INJURED VETERAN GRANT PROGRAM

SUBMITTED BY: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, The Iowa Legislature and Governor enacted an Injured Veterans Grant Program effective January 1, 2006; and

WHEREAS, The Injured Veterans Grant Program has provided needed assistance to veterans who have been seriously injured in the line of duty in a combat zone or in a zone designated as hazardous duty; and

WHEREAS, The grants have provided financial assistance to these veterans so that family members may be with the veteran during recovery from their injuries; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006 That the Injured Veterans Grant Program be continued in future fiscal years and be it finally

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs; and Executive Director, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs.

RESOLUTION 0706-11

SUBJECT: HOUSING GRANT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

SUBMITTED BY: LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION

WHEREAS, The Military Service Member Home Ownership Assistance Program was established to assist with home purchases for current and former military service members who are or have served on active duty; and

WHEREAS, The program helps qualified individuals purchase a home in Iowa through matching grants; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED By The American Legion, Department of Iowa, in Department Convention assembled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, July 14-16, 2006 That the Military Service Member Home Ownership Assistance Program be continued in future fiscal years and be it finally

RESOLVED, That if approved a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Governor, State of Iowa; all members of the Iowa Senate and Iowa House of Representatives; Chairman, Iowa Commission of Veterans Affairs; and Executive Director, Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs.