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PUBLIC HEARING

before

ASSEMBLY VETERANS AND MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

"The concerns and needs of the dependents of
military personnel from New Jersey
serving in the Persian Gulf War"

March 5, 1991
Room 2131
Essex County Community College
Newark, New Jersey

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblyman Fred Scerni, Chairman
Assemblyman John "Jack" Casey, Vice-Chairman
Assemblyman D. Bennett Mazur

ALSO PRESENT:

Assemblyman Willie B. Brown
District 29

Frank J. Parisi
Office of Legislative Services
Aide, Assembly Veterans and Military Affairs Committee

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Hearing Recorded and Transcribed by
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New Jersey State Legislature

ASSEMBLY VETERANS AND MILITARY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

STATE HOUSE ANNEX, CN-068

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625-0068

(609) 292-9106

NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING

The Assembly Veterans and Military Affairs Committee will hold a public meeting on the following topic:

The Concerns and Needs of the Dependents of Military Personnel from New Jersey Serving in the Persian Gulf War

The meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 5, 1991, beginning at 7:00 p.m. in Room 2131 of Essex County Community College, 303 University Avenue, Newark.

The committee will take testimony on the concerns and needs of the families affected by the recent military call-up stemming from Operation "Desert Shield" and Operation "Desert Storm."

Honorable Donald M. Payne, Congressman, District 10, representatives of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and members of the family support organizations of units already deployed to the Persian Gulf area have been invited to attend this public meeting to give testimony. Members of the public are also invited to attend and testify.

The public may address comments and questions to Frank J. Parisi, Aide to the Committee and persons wishing to testify should contact Deborah Del Vecchio, Secretary, at (609) 292-9106. Those persons presenting testimony should provide 10 copies to the committee on the day of the meeting.

(over)

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Directions from South Jersey:

Take the Garden State Parkway North to Exit 145. Follow exit ramp to Central Avenue. Make left turn on to Central Avenue and travel East toward Newark for 2 miles. Make right turn at Martin Luther King Blvd. Proceed to junction of Martin Luther King Blvd and West Market Street. Enter college at West Market Street, Level 2 entrance.

Directions from Trenton:

Take the New Jersey Turnpike North to Exit 15E. Follow exit ramp and signs to Newark on to Raymond Blvd proceeding West. Follow signs to Market Street and proceed under Penn Station to West Market Street. Proceed to junction of West Market Street and Martin Luther King Blvd. Enter college at West Market Street, Level 2 entrance.

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ASSEMBLYMAN FRED SCERNI (Chairman): Good evening, and welcome to this hearing. I'm Fred Scerni, and I have the honor of being the Chairman of the Assembly Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee.

This hearing tonight is the second in a series of hearings that this Committee is conducting in regard to the issues that are affecting the families of the military personnel serving in the Persian Gulf.

When we held our initial hearing on these items on February 13 of this year, we faced a substantially different situation in regard to the military challenge. At that point in time, we had been involved in an air war for a number of weeks, and we were waiting, on a daily basis, for the initiation of ground hostilities.

Those hostilities have, in fact, occurred, and to the pleasure of all of us, they have been successfully concluded -- victoriously concluded -- on behalf of the forces of the United States. Notwithstanding the fact that the military situation has changed substantially from our first hearing until today, the issues that face this Committee are largely the same.

We look forward to the prompt return of our troops, but we also realize that it may take several weeks, and in many cases, several months before they are, in fact, back in this country.

At that time there will still be an additional period of time until they would resume their full civilian occupations. So, the challenge of this Committee, to look at the problems facing the families and the dependents of our personnel, remains the same.

Since our initial hearing, we have undertaken certain initiatives at this Committee level. A number of pieces of legislation have been introduced. Additionally, we have introduced an Emergency Relief Act that will be heard before this Committee at its hearing this coming Thursday.

With those thoughts in mind, we are here tonight to take additional testimony in regard to the issues that face the families of our military personnel, and we seek your assistance in regard to defining those problems and making suggestions in regard to potential solutions.

Throughout this process we have had the assistance -- the very worthy assistance -- of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs. At our previous hearing, the Adjutant General of New Jersey, Major General Vito Morgano testified, as well as the Deputy Commissioner, Richard J. Bernard.

Commissioner Bernard is with us once again tonight, and we will hear from the Commissioner first. Before I go to you Commissioner, let me just welcome the other members of the Committee.

Vice-Chairman Casey, would you care to share any remarks, as we begin?

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: No, except, Mr. Chairman, this is my second public hearing, and seeing some favorite friends of mine in here, I have to first of all give the Chairman a lot of credit. This is our second meeting in a few weeks. There will be a third meeting coming up in North Jersey next week.

There is some good legislation coming out of our Committee this coming Thursday. I just want to say that I am proud to be part of this. I think our job really starts right now, because I think as these young men and women come home, they are going to need our help more than ever. I think with the help of this Committee and with the gentleman in front of us, we will continue the process. So, gentlemen, I thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, Assemblyman.

Assemblyman Mazur, anything you want to share?

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: Yes. It's a great pleasure to be here, and we want to do whatever we can to help the families of our veterans and make life easier for them. That's all.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you.

With that, Commissioner, let's go to you. Please feel free to introduce the staff that you have with you tonight, and share any thoughts that you might have.

DEPUTY COMM. RICHARD J. BERNARD: I have Colonel Lowe, the Head of our Administrative Section, from the Department of Military and Veteran's Affairs to my left, and Colonel Nutt, who is head of our Public Information Service to my right.

It's an honor, Chairman Scerni, to be with you again, along with Assemblyman Mazur and Assemblyman Casey. It's ironic that I was born in this city in 1930, not far from here, at Presbyterian Hospital. I grew up in this city and was educated in the public school system. I played football and graduated from Westside High School and then was activated in a reserve outfit 40 years ago into the Korean War; the 21st Infantry Battalion. I came home to Newark to meet and marry my wife, and I now live in East Hanover.

Basically, I feel the only reason I am here today is because of the support systems that have been established: the first World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, Vietnam. Maybe we slipped a little bit in Vietnam.

We are now establishing another support system, that is hopefully better than the rest -- will improve on the rest -- for our people to return from the Gulf.

But it's a privilege to be here. Maybe you have some extra insight in appreciation for what our government and the State of New Jersey does for the veterans, and will be doing for the veterans.

On August 7, 1990, President Bush signed an Executive Order authorizing Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney to call up 200,000 members of the selected reserve for a period of 90 days, with an option to extend this call-up for an additional 90 days without the consent of Congress.

In December, the President went to Congress and received approval to extend the mobilization for a total of 360 days and expanded the total number of Guardsmen and Reservists subject to call-up to 1 million.

New Jersey currently has more than 5000 citizens serving on active duty who represent mobilized Guardsmen and women and Reservists from the Army, and Air National Guards and the reserves of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, and Coast Guard. Thousands more from New Jersey serve full-time in the five active components of the military.

Naturally, the personal, financial, and economic impact resulting from the mobilization of those 5000 members of the Guard and Reserve now serving in Operation Desert Storm has been dramatic, and not without hardship for the families and employers of those men and women. But they have endured, and our valiant heroes will be coming home soon; back to their families, back to their jobs, back to us as veterans.

The most important thing to remember in the aftermath of this war is that those who served have earned and are eligible -- or will be eligible when legislation is passed -- for State and Federal veterans' entitlements, programs, and services.

We in the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs stand ready to assist these veterans and their families in applying for any of these entitlements. Perhaps the most important service that we can provide veterans is assistance through our statewide network of Veterans' Service Offices. We have 16 throughout the State.

Our trained veterans' service officers are there for our veterans and their families to answer questions about entitlements, help with paperwork, and to offer assistance and referrals to veterans seeking employment.

Some of the other State services we offer are:

- * Free transportation for veterans, available in many counties.

* A free loan of a wheelchair -- it is unfortunate, they may come home and they may need one of these -- is available in all of the counties.

* We offer individual and family counseling for post traumatic stress disorder.

* The State also provides a \$50 real estate tax deduction for veterans who served during a time of war.

* In addition, we operate three long-term care facilities for veterans, and a cemetery in North Hanover Township, which offers free burials to veterans and eligible family members.

Of the many Federal entitlements available, it is important that these men and women become aware of Title 30 of the United States Code, which provides for job rights and reemployment protection.

We have already started to plan for the return of these veterans. Through a cooperative effort of our Veterans' Service Offices, family support groups, support groups from the veterans organizations, business community, and loyal support from all New Jerseyans, we will be able to effectively deal with the reintegration of these veterans back into a normal life.

We must do everything to support our troops -- National Guard, Reserves, and regular military. If we do not, we will lose them. We have just shown the world and proved to ourselves that these men and women comprise the most effective peacekeeping force in the world; a force we cannot afford to lose.

This evening those of us in the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs are here, as this Committee is, to hear the concerns and needs of the dependents of those serving in the Gulf.

This information will enable us to better serve them, and our returning warriors.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Commissioner, Thank you.

You had indicated that the Department has 16 offices serving the veterans; is that correct?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: Right.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Is there anything that you see, at this point in time, that this Committee and the Legislature can do to assist those offices?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: Well, we can publicize where they are. Just in Newark, right here, the office is located in the Veterans' Administration, currently at the sixth floor. They are there to assist the individual with any type of a problem that they come in with.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Well, following our last hearing, we had published a list of telephone numbers of the various support groups. It ended up being a two-and-a-half page list.

If you think that it would further and assist the Department, I would be pleased to do the same thing in regard to the 16 offices. The publication of the telephone list was done through the members of the Assembly. It was distributed to all members of the Assembly, because they receive those types of inquiries for assistance, and this way, they were able to tap into the resources of the referral network.

If you think it would be of assistance, I would be pleased to see that that same type of compilation and distribution occurs in regard to those 16 offices, so that our members, when they receive a concern from a constituent, they can direct that constituent to the appropriate spot.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: That's an excellent idea. Incidentally, we will probably be manning a 24-hour, toll-free number.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: We can incorporate that into that package.

So, if through your staff you will make that available to our staff, I will see that all members of the Legislature receive that.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: Yes.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Vice-Chairman, do you have--

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: Not at this time. The second time I talked with Dick, and I appreciate it-- As Chairman Scerni said, any input we can be, whether it be in Trenton, or in our legislative offices, don't hesitate to call anybody.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: Yes. We also have an office in Atlantic City.

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: Yes. We know about that. So, any help that anyone can be--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Assemblyman Mazur, is there anything you want to add?

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: Yes. It would be most helpful if we do have all of this information at our disposal. We all are receiving requests for information, and requests for referrals, and you know, the horror stories continue to build up. Whatever information we can get as to who to refer to and, you know, how to network, the better off we will be; the better off the veterans' families will be.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: You're aware that the Governor and Adjutant General Morgano have given their full support, and their order is to move ahead and provide as much service as we possibly can to our returning troops.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: We appreciate that.

I am sure that you are aware -- just as a point of information for some of the folks who are with us, though -- that on Monday, yesterday, the Veterans Committee in the Senate released legislation in regard to post traumatic stress disorder, transferring jurisdiction for the Commission to your Department.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: Right, right.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: That's legislation that began on our side, that this Committee previously dealt with, and that was successfully passed through the full Assembly. So, now

that it is out of Committee on the Senate side, I think we can look forward to action by the full Senate, so you will officially have jurisdiction over that Commission. I realize that you have already assumed it in many ways, but we can officially get it in the Department.

Commissioner, would Colonel Lowe or Colonel Nutt have anything to add at this point?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: No, thank you.

Incidentally, Assemblyman, our report will be presented to the Chairman -- "The Post Traumatic Disorder Report" -- will be accepted by the Governor and presented to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the Assembly, and yourself. I think you will find it very, very interesting.

Definitely, that program is a vital program for our returning troops and those that we do have here with us, that do need that program.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: I look forward to the report, and you can be assured of our continuing efforts to support that program.

Gentlemen, thank you for being with us.

Let me indicate to those present that anyone wishing to testify should complete one of our forms, which are on the witness table. If you have not had an opportunity to do so, please feel free to pick one up, fill it out, and just pass it up here, so that we can include you in the witness list.

I understand that Congressman Payne wished to attend tonight, but is unable to be here. In his absence a member of his staff, Richard Thigpen, is present.

Mr. Thigpen, do you-- You're welcome to the witness table, sir.

R I C H A R D T. T H I G P E N, ESQ.: Good evening.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Good evening, and welcome.

MR. THIGPEN: Congressman Payne asked me to first express his regrets to the members of the Assembly Veterans'

and Military Affairs Committee on his inability to be here this evening. Congressman Payne was required to stay in Washington because of important votes that take place this week, but he wanted me to convey to you a strong support for the Desert Storm veterans and their families.

Efforts to assist the families of returning servicemen and women are being undertaken at all levels. Federal, State, and local volunteer networks are important, but it is also essential that our government takes a leading role in assuring the successful readjustment of veterans during their time of transition following Operation Desert Storm.

As your Federal representative, Congressman Payne is working in Congress to shape legislation which will ensure that returning service personnel and their families enjoy the full benefits and opportunities befitting the service they have rendered to their country.

Earlier this year Congress passed the Soldiers' and Sailors' Civil Relief Act amendments -- H.R. 555 -- which helped the reemployment rights of reservists and established a number of other protective measures. The bill helps to prevent the evictions of families of active duty personnel, provides automatic health insurance, reinstatement for persons called to active duty, and delays any civil actions pending against a service member until July of 1991.

Congressman Payne asked me to briefly emphasize the importance of that measure, because our brief experience with the Reserve Army during this crisis has demonstrated the amount of dislocation caused--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Mr. Thigpen, if I could? I think we're on two mike systems here. The one that is in front of you is for the recorder. I think the other one is the house mike. If you could get a little closer to the house mike, some of the folks in back will be able to hear a little better.

MR. THIGPEN: I'm sorry. Should I continue where I was?

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Yes, that's fine.

MR. THIGPEN: As I mentioned, Congress an Payne is considerably interested in the consequences of the reserve format for manpower for the Army. There was a tremendous amount of dislocation caused by professionals forced to leave small businesses and risking their investments, by professionals and medical personnel serving their community and etc., being forced to leave. He hopes that H. R. 555 -- Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act amendments -- will help to address some of those issues.

Another bill to expand readjustment benefits for veterans of the Persian Gulf War has been proposed by the Chairman of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, Congressman Sonny Montgomery. Congress is expected to act on the bill soon, and Congressman Payne strongly supports the measure.

Let me just summarize the bill's main provisions:

It would increase educational assistance under the G.I. Bill from \$300 to \$500 a month for active duty participants in the program who have enlisted for three to six years. For two-year enlistees, the benefits would be raised from \$250 a month to \$350 a month. It also increases Guard and Reserve educational benefits under the G.I. Bill from \$140 a month to \$250 a month.

For returning veterans who want to start a small business, the bill authorizes the Small Business Administration to guarantee bank loans, and to improve their access to training, counseling, and management assistance.

The measure also maintains funding for employment assistance to veterans at local job service offices. It extends from 13 weeks to 26 weeks the period of time which personnel leaving military service can draw unemployment compensation benefits.

The bill provides V.A. guaranteed home loan eligibility after 90 days active duty for Reserve, National Guard, and active force members.

The legislation provides for medical care to dependents of Guard and Reserve members called to active duty for two months following Guard and Reserve member's release from active duty. Medical care provided would be identical to care provided active care dependents under the Civilian Health and Medical Plan of the Uniformed Services -- CHAMPUS.

The bill authorizes the Department of Veterans' Affairs to furnish readjustment counseling at any V.A. facility. It calls on the Department of Defense to provide comprehensive pre-separation counseling for Guard and Reserve members called to active duty, upon their release from active duty.

It also provides for a period of six months following release from active duty, commissary and exchange privileges for Guard and Reserve members called to active duty.

Other proposals have been put forth to help ease the reentry of veterans of the Persian Gulf War, and Congressman Payne will be keeping you informed of any further developments.

One proposal that Congressman Payne is interested in pursuing is legislation to ensure African-American and other minority participation in the rebuilding of Kuwait at a level commensurate with their participation in the liberation of Kuwait. Those who shared the pain of battle should enjoy the gains derived from victory.

We are hopeful that the withdrawal of troops from the Persian Gulf will be orderly and will be accomplished as early as possible. Secretary of Defense Cheney has said that out of fairness to the troops, those who were the first to go to the Gulf will be the first to return home, except in some cases where soldiers with a certain expertise are needed for a longer period of time.

Please let us know if Congressman Payne's Office can be of any assistance to you or to your loved ones who have served in the Persian Gulf.

As I have said, we will keep you informed of any actions taken in Congress which will affect returning veterans and their families.

Briefly, again, Congressman Payne also asked me to emphasize that he is acutely aware of the many difficulties caused to the families of active duty people, particularly those in this current reserve format where it was completely unexpected that they would be called away to duty.

Our office has been quite busy trying to do what it can to help people adjust and meet their needs, and we've helped to try to put people in contact with many of the community groups that have formed support groups and are interested in serving families of the troops.

Congressman Payne, again, asked me to emphasize to you that any assistance he can be on the subject -- because of his deep concern for the matter and because it so heavily affects so many of his constituents in the 10th Congressional District -- he will be happy and always available to do anything he can to pass on information on pending legislation, and to give legislative up-dates like the one I have just attempted to give to you today.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you. We appreciate your being with us tonight.

May I ask, is H.R. 555, is that passed?

MR. THIGPEN: H.R. 555? No. As I-- Excuse me. That was the Soldiers' and Sailors' Act?

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Right.

MR. THIGPEN: Yes, sir. That has passed. That was passed during this conflict. Congress had been considering that bill for quite some time, but under the circumstances prevailing during February, Congress passed the bill rapidly.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: That's great. We certainly appreciate Congressman Payne's support, and the fact that you

have taken the time to, in his absence, share that information with us tonight.

Assemblyman Casey. Do you have anything?

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: No, except to say, "Rick, thank you very much."

MR. THIGPEN: Sure. And again, I emphasize his apologies to you for not being able to make it tonight, and anything we can do, of course, we'll be available to you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Assemblyman Mazur?

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: No, nothing.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you for being here.

MR. THIGPEN: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Additionally, if the Congressman is interested in anything we are doing, we do have a list of bills that are pending in the State Legislature which may complement some of his efforts, so we would certainly make that available to you, should he wish.

MR. THIGPEN: That's very interesting, because one of our responsibilities certainly is to, at the very least, pay close attention to the activities of the local Department of Veterans' Affairs, which is in charge of veterans' benefits. We will be very interested in things that are done to help supplement what the Federal government has done. As I believe one prestigious politician has already pointed out, there is debate going on in Congress now where they are talking about putting veterans' benefits in the domestic budget, as opposed to under the military budget. As you know, under the current budget rules, any time you increase expenditure for one domestic budget item, you must decrease expenditure in another item. There are those, already, who are seeking to put veterans' benefits on the same level as all other domestic services provided by the Federal government. That's, obviously, a key and central issue.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Once again, thank you. We will make available to you our list of bills. You may also want to make available to the Congressman the transcript of the first hearing that we did. We did do one hearing in February of this Committee on these issues, and it was interesting that while the Committee was only dealing with the problems of the families, that we did end up with one person who testified in regard to the functioning of the Department of Veterans' Affairs at the Federal level, and the medical attention that a colleague had received.

I think that if there is a copy of the transcript here, you may wish to take it with you--

MR. THIGPEN: Sure.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: --and we can identify for you-- It highlighted a particular problem, and I'm sure it's the kind of problem that the Congressman would be interested in.

MR. THIGPEN: Sure. I'm sure we could get plenty of testimony based on people who come to our office with just such problems, on a regular basis.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you.

MR. THIGPEN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: We have a number of people from different organizations, and we also have some family members with us.

Let me, to the best that I can, alternate between the organizations and the family members. With that in mind, let me go to Dona Feldhann.

Dona, I guess you fall into both categories, actually.

D O N A J E A N F E L D H A N N: Yes, I do. I guess it truly depends on which hat I'm wearing at the moment.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: That's right.

MS. FELDHANN: Good evening. Unlike the last time I appeared in front of you, I do not have copy for you this evening, but there a few issues that I would like to bring forth--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: That's the house mike.

MS. FELDHANN: --that were not discussed, or basically were discussed lightly the last time.

I realize that a problem with CHAMPUS would be dealt with on a Federal level, but it's our hope that if we can bring some of these problems to the Committee, the Committee might be able to advance these items higher up.

The number one problem, obviously, is the deductions and the additional percentages that are paid. In most cases, they only cover 80%. But the main problem that we have found and have had to seek public assistance on, is dental. This seems to be a large problem with the family members for the children. We thought maybe that this could soon be incorporated in the CHAMPUS coverage.

The other problem is the fact that we can call for a list of what is covered and the cost that would be covered on a specific procedure, but it is not always accurate. Unfortunately, most private professional medical people will not accept CHAMPUS, so therefore the family, if they do not live close enough to the military installation so that they can utilize the on base facilities, go to private medical people. They then have to pay for the service, submit to CHAMPUS themselves, and wait for whatever is going to be reimbursed.

This is extremely difficult to deal with in this new budget, as I told you before, which is now decreased tremendously. This has also been a problem.

We did have 800 numbers to call in regard to certain services, but most of the time the physician was not local, and the family had to travel. If they are going to travel that type of a distance to a private medical professional, they could then take the time to go an hour-and-a-half, down to Ft. Dix. In my case it's a little bit longer than an hour-and-a-half.

But this is a problem, and we thought, maybe, this could be addressed in some way. Or even if CHAMPUS even got a little marketing plan together; went out and got some professional medical people who were willing to work with them, it would be very nice. And I know that doesn't just affect National Guard. It also affects full-time military.

The other issue I would like to talk to you about is one that is hitting very close to home quite a bit, and we are hoping that the Committee could give us some input and assistance on how we can proceed.

We work very hard for the families. We work for them, and we work with them. Then a flyer comes in the mail and there is some sort of activity going on, and along the bottom it says, "The proceeds from this activity will benefit official Desert Storm support groups." or, "Families of Desert Storm." There are times where there are, as one coordinator put it, some "heavyweights" on that committee, where one would not question it. However, if you make an innocent phone call and ask, "What support groups are being helped with this particular activity?" they can't always answer you with a Desert Storm support group.

We, the volunteer coordinators, were wondering if there was any way to put a task force together that could monitor something like that, because it's very difficult. We turned to "Crime Stopper," which would be our next move, but there again, if you have someone on that committee that is lending themselves and/or their office to it, it's a little difficult. We've actually, physically, called the office and told these individuals what we have found out, but we are doing so much already as volunteers, that to then police this type of a fund-raiser or rally, or this type of thing, is really getting to be a little much.

And I'm quite sure that there are going to be many, many things coming up now that our soldiers are coming home. If people want the families to benefit from it -- and God knows

they could use it -- that's wonderful, but how do we make sure. That's one of the volunteers' problems which have developed.

I would also like to thank you. I was in Atlantic City with you in February. I want you to know that we really do appreciate it. The families were very happy, and they are looking forward to the next meeting, which our group will be attending. But it's nice to hear that things are being done and people are showing concern. But when legislators come forth and really do something, that's very important to them, and I wanted to take the time to thank you for that.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Well, we appreciate that. We appreciate the fact that you recognize the work that we are doing, but quite frankly, we are doing this work because it needs to be done, not for any recognition that reflects back on us.

Let me address a couple of the things that you raised. Specifically, in regard to how do you tell what is an official Desert Storm support group or not, when we talk about financial contributions: I can't give you a complete answer on that tonight, but I can share with you how we have structured the legislation that deals with the Military Emergency Relief Fund.

The way that fund will be structured: It will initially be funded -- assuming we are successful in the Legislature -- with a \$95,000 appropriation, but we have structured the fund so that it can receive private contributions. Once that is in place, any organization that wants to direct proceeds to the dependents of our military personnel may best do so by contributing into that fund.

That fund will be administered by the Department of Military Affairs. The Adjutant General will appoint a commission, subject to the approval of the Governor, that will oversee the disbursements. So, at that point in time we will

have an identifiable source that will deal with both public moneys and private contributions so that those who are contributing would know that if those moneys are going to that fund, they will be managed in a certain way and in regard to certain standards.

Hopefully, that will begin to solve that problem. As I said, that legislation will receive its first review this coming Thursday, in front of this Committee, when we meet at 10:00 at Trenton.

In regard to the CHAMPUS issue: Could you help me out in terms of what kind of turnaround time on the reimbursement procedures there are?

MS. FELDHANN: Well, I can only do that from my current-- I work for Uni Temp Services, and I am currently assigned to Metpath Laboratories. I happen to work in the billing department, and the turnaround time to us from CHAMPUS is more than 180 days.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: That means that if the dependent goes to a private doctor, not a CHAMPUS participant, and receives medical treatment and pays out-of-pocket for that medical treatment, and then submits the bill to CHAMPUS, that person is looking at potentially six months before they are reimbursed. Is that--

MS. FELDHANN: Well, that's what I see in our department, so I have to assume that the participants are going to receive the same thing. I don't know. We have not had anyone receive anything yet, so I couldn't tell you exactly. I just know from billing.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: If they haven't received anything yet, I guess there is a lag time.

As you are aware, that is largely a Federal problem. That's a Federal program. Under the initiatives that we have undertaken, I don't know that we have really looked at medical benefits at this point in time, because it largely is Federal,

but you raise a good point, and it may be that within the next several days we can put our collective thoughts together and attempt to do something, even if it is in the form of a communication to the Federal government, to try to deal with this problem.

MS. FELDHANN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Assemblyman Casey?

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: Some very good questions, Mr. Chairman. I was going to follow-up with Dona with this:

You said if you have to go to Ft. Dix, you have to drive that hour-and-a-half, or so forth-- At that point you wouldn't have to worry about billing? It's just when you go to a private doctor, is when you have to turn--

MS. FELDHANN: That's correct. You use the on-patient facilities on the base, then you're not dealing with CHAMPUS, you are now dealing with the program that the military calls DEERS.

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: For my own information: Roughly how many base hospitals are there in the State of New Jersey that you can go to? Ballpark, two, three, five, would you say?

MS. FELDHANN: I believe there are four, but I'm not exactly sure. I live far enough north that I would end up going to West Point.

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: Okay. That's all, Mr. Chairman. I just wanted to clear that up in my mind. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you.

Assemblyman Mazur?

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: No, nothing.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Well, thank you once again, Dona. We appreciate your help. Have we heard from the Sergeant Major lately?

MS. FELDHANN: I saw him. Well, I was pulling out of the driveway as he had the blinker on to come in, so--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Okay. So he's here now, right?

MS. FELDHANN: Oh, yes. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: You got him back.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, Dona.

Morse Abraham?

Welcome, Mr. Abraham. I understand that you are a Veteran Service Officer with the New Jersey Department of Military Affairs?

M O R S E A B R A H A M: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Welcome, sir.

MR. ABRAHAM: Thank you. Thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Sir, could you lean into the round microphone a little bit. The round one is the house microphone.

MR. ABRAHAM: I am here representing the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs. My deepest concern is for the veteran of Desert Storm.

Upon their return-- Here we are in a county college that represents 25% of the minorities of Desert Storm, but I speak to you on the behalf of all veterans. And I speak to you, asking you to be a voice and an ear to the Legislature of the State of New Jersey for jobs when they return--

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Could you help us out a little more with that microphone? Just talk right into the end of it.

MR. ABRAHAM: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: There you go.

MR. ABRAHAM: --jobs when they return; for housing, educational benefits, and the like.

I was deeply disturbed, maybe because I had heard some premature rumors that there would be some cuts on the behalf of the veterans as far as for the budget in the State of New Jersey, but that didn't happen. But I would like to go on and not dwell on that.

Essex County College is a representative of education for the needs of the minorities in this State. (lengthy pause while witness reviews notes)

Excuse me.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Sure, take your time.

MR. ABRAHAM: We have not, as of yet, begun the task. There is a lot to be done. Desert Storm was, or is, something that we would all love it to be. After the storm, there is a job that has to be done. The economy-- And those who return are going to need jobs, and their families are going to need housing.

After the celebration, after the waving of the flag, there is a job that has to be done, and I call upon you to knock on some doors, to make some telephone calls to the proper corporations that exist in this State, to stimulate jobs for the minority population -- not just the minority, but the minority and the majority -- and the veterans of the State of New Jersey. Because this is something that we are-- We are all involved in the euphoria of the victory, if you want to call it that.

When I go home at 4:30 in the evening -- and I go up South Orange Avenue and Springfield Avenue -- there is a difference when I turn on the TV. And there is a difference from the conversation that I hear on the bus. I don't drive home; I take public transportation.

There's a job that we all have to do. Let's not forget that the veteran who fought in Vietnam is still waiting to come home. Desert Storm was easy in comparison, but let's--

We all have a job that has to be done, and I think you know what I'm saying. I'm not going to go into depth. I don't think I can go into detail, right now, but you understand what I am saying.

The homelessness is beyond what I can describe. People don't have-- People are losing their apartments and

their jobs right now. Let's not get caught up in the euphoria of fantasy and dwell on realism. There is a job that still has to be done; take care of our veterans.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Mr. Abraham, I think this Committee certainly appreciates your remarks, and I know that, from having dealt with the members of this Committee, that we do not view the victory in Iraq as the end. Quite the contrary--

MR. ABRAHAM: It's only the beginning.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: We view it as the beginning. Yes, sir. We are very much in touch with the thoughts that you have shared.

That is why we are here tonight. Some of us traveled an awfully long way to be here, so that we can hear, firsthand, the thoughts and the concerns of the people throughout this State. So for us, the victory is not the end; the victory, in fact, is the beginning. And I believe that this Committee is dedicated to that idea, and that this Committee will convey that same idea to the full Assembly and that that will be manifest in the work and the type of legislation that will move through this Committee, and be offered on the Assembly floor.

Assemblyman Casey, is there anything you would like to add?

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: No. Mr. Abraham, I think Chairman Scerni speaks for all of us.

MR. ABRAHAM: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: This is only the beginning, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Assemblyman Mazur?

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: No.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Helena Latimore?

H E L E N A L A T I M O R E: It's Latimore. (corrects pronunciation)

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Latimore, I'm sorry.

MS. LATIMORE: To the moderator, the platform, guests, and to the members of this staff tonight, I bring you greetings in the name of the Lord.

I have a son who is in Desert Shield. My son has been in the service for twelve years. He is an officer over there. I don't know when I will see my son again because he might not be one of the first ones to come home because he was the first one that went over there.

But what I can give to this group tonight, there are people are encouraged Desert Shield. They run away like it's a bad place. My son has never complained about being over there. We are disencouraged. Our young men left behind us never to join the war.

We have a war over here. We have a war everywhere: drugs, homeless, and everything else. What I would just like to say to this platform committee tonight, for my son was here. He did assist me some, because I am handicapped, but I hope soon I will be able to return to work. I am in the catering business. Also I am a missionary. I work with the homeless people also, in the streets.

I don't think nobody in the world knows no more about the homeless people than I do, because I have been to jail already for helping the homeless people. When you be arrested and go to jail, then you know what it is like to work for someone.

Well, to this group, the only thing I would like to say to you tonight-- If I could just have a decent place to lay my head, a decent apartment or a house or something. Where I am at now, I live with a slum landlord. I have an inch of water in my bathrocn. I can't take a bath. I can't cook.

I live in the slums with a slum landlord. But let me leave this thought with you tonight. It's not that bad, because my son never has complained one time since he been in Desert Shield. He never said, "Mom, I want to come home." He

said, "I'm going to do what I can do for my country." When he joined the Army when he was 16 years old, he knew that one day there was going to be a war. I hope, sooner or later, in my achievement, in my endeavors, that I will be able to go to college, and go to high school, and talk to young boys and young women about the war, that it is not as bad as people claimed it is.

Also, I'd like to say to you, we cannot stop praying now. Before the war was going, everybody wanted to pray. Now the war has ceased, nobody wants to pray. We need down here a unity, and we need more prayer.

Like I said to the platform committee and to this moderator tonight, like I say, if my-- If I could do anything, just get me a decent place to live.

God bless you. Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you.

In his remarks, Mr. Abraham made mention of the Vietnam veterans. Next, let me call upon Greg Payton of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

G R E G O R Y P A Y T O N: Good evening. My name is Greg Payton. I represent Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In the Newark metropolitan community, I sit on a steering committee. I am a Vietnam veteran. I served in Vietnam from June 1967-- Well, I got drafted in June, 1967, but I was in Vietnam from November 1967 to December 1968. I am a 30% disabled veteran.

I'd just like to go on record -- and I hope this is no reflection on the Committee of the whole -- but I just feel that it is a sin and a shame that we have to sit down and decide what kind of legislation is necessary to help some young men and women that have willingly participated in war, and after the fact -- after we sent them off -- we have to sit down and now decide what to do to help them and the fact that these things are not implanted beforehand.

Like I said, I know it's not a reflection on the Committee, and I'm not even accusing anybody, I just want to put that in the record, primarily.

I think that as a Vietnam veteran, my heart really goes out to the young men and women who participated in this conflict, or war, or action, or whatever you want to call it. I feel that we also have to remember, as Mr. Abraham stated, and several other people, that a lot of the soldiers are home right now. We have to look at the apparatus that is in place right now, because a lot of the things that I heard being mentioned in terms of bills being passed, and things of this nature, have been in existence. There has been counseling in existence, but obviously, with the rate of homelessness and drug addiction among veterans, the miseducation and the lack of educational opportunities, there may be something in the mechanism that is not fully working.

I think that some of the things-- From my experience as a disabled veteran, and having gone through some of the many services that the Veterans' Administration provides, I think there are some things that we really need to look at, especially in the area of psychosocial readjustment. I think that it is extremely important that there is outreach and follow-up for these veterans as they come home. Many of them may want to shun getting involved with the veterans' agencies, for whatever reasons. You know, post traumatic stress affects you in many different ways, but I think that it is important that in the legislation that you are drawing up, that you make some type of provision for outreach and follow-up, and also advertising in the community at large.

A lot of these things and bills and things that are being passed, or benefits that are available, a lot of veterans just don't have the information at hand. They're not readily circulated in the minority community -- the black community and the Latino community. As a result, many times, by the time it

filters down to our community, many of the benefits are either cut, or they no longer have the funds available to involve our community.

I think that it's also important that if we are going to talk about doing something in trying to improve on some of the existing things that we provide, some type of evening services for these veterans, that like everything, you know, if there could be some early evening office, late hours, or whatever there is. Because a lot of these veterans, as we mentioned, are going to be coming home, and they are going to have to go right back to work. They won't have the luxury of maybe laying around and getting plugged into things. So I think that they are some of the things that you really have to look at in terms of really effectively serving these veterans.

Quite naturally, everybody mentioned housing and training, and I'm sure that all of these things will be addressed, and I'm sure that they have been mentioned many times. You know, I think in the area of drug treatment and in particularly family counseling, I think there has to be really special attention given to these areas. It seems that in the veterans' community, these are the two hardest hit areas that we seem to suffer in.

While on a Federal level, there are only 18 V.A. beds for substance abuse training at the East Orange V.A. Medical Center, and they are always overcrowded. I mean, there is a long waiting list for treatment, and I think that we have to look at some type of mechanism to provide treatment for these young men and women that may be affected due to post traumatic stress and the other things that happen when you go to war.

I just want to say that I think it is a very positive endeavor that has taken place. I, as a Vietnam veteran, experienced a lot of negativity upon my return home, and I'm so grateful that, if anything, we've learned from past wars, that we have learned that we have to-- We may not honor the war, but we should honor the warrior.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Mr. Payton, could you stay with me for a minute, if you will? Based on your experience in the community, you said that some of the information doesn't get out?

MR. PAYTON: Exactly.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Based on your experience, what mechanisms do you think we should use to get the information out? Where do we go? You mentioned minorities specifically. Where should we go to make sure that the information about the available services does get to where it should be?

MR. PAYTON: Well, certainly I think it should attack all types of minority periodicals and publications, you know? Certainly WNJR should be enlisted in this endeavor. I think you have to look at it in the same way as advertisers do, you know? It seems like Budweiser, Salem cigarettes-- They seem to get their message to the community, you know?

So I think that we have to sort of look, maybe, in the sense it may be a little theatrical, but in a lot of cases-- You see, what I want to point out is that all of these services are very good, you know, for what we're trying to-- But the whole idea is that something happens to a soldier when he comes home, and sometimes he does not really want to participate in the process right away. Sometimes, in between that process, he loses it, so it's real important, like I say, that there is some outreach, and there is some kind of follow-up.

You know, I guess somewhere along the line there is a computer readout that says, "These troops are returning home." You know, maybe a letter, maybe a phone call, or whatever it is, you know, some of the many agencies just to keep in touch and let these people know, but certainly, you know, minority publications in the community, the local radio station, and maybe even some flyers or posters could help in this endeavor. It is very important that--

Because I, as a veteran, even sitting here -- I heard some things that I heard about the treatment centers and so forth and so on, the 16 offices throughout the State, and it was really news to me. And I try to keep abreast of most of these things. I know people sometimes want to tune out a lot of things that have happened. As a result, they miss out on a lot of benefit opportunities.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Okay. Just before you leave -- I'll be coming to you in a second. Do we operate the 16 centers at night, at all?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: (speaking from audience) No.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: We do not?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: No. But that could be considered.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Okay. Just for the record, because the record may not be picking up what I just did. I asked the Commissioner if we operate the 16 centers at night. He indicated we do not, but the Department would be willing to give some consideration to that.

MR. PAYTON: Yeah, I think that would be a good idea.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: I mean, even to that extent, Mr. Payton, we can't solve all the problems immediately--

MR. PAYTON: I understand.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: --but, I've got the Commissioner over here, who is now aware of your concern, which is a valid concern, and I think the Department will give that some consideration. So even at this level, on an evening like this, we can take a step in the right direction.

MR. PAYTON: All right. I appreciate that.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, Commissioner. Thank you, Mr. Payton.

MR. PAYTON: Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Mr. Payton, thank you for your service, too, sir.

MR. ABRAHAM: Mr. Chairman? (speaking from audience)
ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Is that Mr. Abraham? Mr. Abraham, do me a favor? Come on down here.

I will apologize to our other witnesses. I am going to go back to Mr. Abraham, since he caught my attention there. It seems that he has a point that he wishes to make.

Just come on down, so I can have a transcript of this.

MR. ABRAHAM: (inaudible)

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: I need you near a microphone so I can have a transcript.

MR. ABRAHAM: (speaking off recording microphone; entire statement is indiscernible)

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Okay. Thank you, sir. Just as an aside. You're raising economic issues. I would indicate that while some of this legislation is still pending, we've undertaken a number of economic initiatives. We have a program in place that would result in tenants not being able to be evicted if they are the dependent of someone who is in the military service. We will consider, on Thursday, legislation that would prohibit the lending institution from foreclosing on a home loan while there is someone in the military service. We are considering legislation that would prohibit the auto insurance company from canceling the auto insurance policy, and we are, in fact, dealing with those issues and we--

Your points are well taken, sir, and we will continue along that line.

MR. ABRAHAM: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you.

I would indicate to those gathered here that I only have two additional witnesses. If there are other people who have not signed up and wish to do so, please feel free to do so. The sign-up sheet is on the witness table, immediately in front of us.

Let's go to Mr. Hadren W. Simmons from the City of Newark, Veterans' Affairs Committee.

As Mr. Simmons approaches the witness table: I understand that there has been the recent formation of this Veterans' Affairs Committee in the City of Newark, sir?

H A D R E N W. S I M M O N S: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Hadren W. Simmons. I am one of a body of 15 who were recently sworn in as Commissioners of Veterans' Affairs for the City of Newark. I would just like to go on record to make that known to the Committee and in addition to that, I would like to let you know that we look forward to working with you in a very, very strong sense, in attempting to meet some of the many needs that we all know that need to be met with regard to veterans, overall.

I would like to just add that I have had the opportunity, over the weekend, to spend some time with the family whose son was recently brought back, deceased, from the war over in Iraq. That family had a lot of questions. Some I couldn't answer; some I could. That's my reason for being here this evening: to stress upon the Committee that, as the gentleman before me mentioned, there is a definite need for some kind of outreach situation, where the veterans coming from Desert Storm -- veterans of prior wars -- can know, somehow, what services are, in fact, available for them.

I think back to when I was discharged from the military, which was some time ago, and had it not been for my own diligent manner of just wanting to know what was available to me as a veteran, I never would have known. Very basically, during that time, I did not know that a veteran could receive "X" amount of points as it relates to he or she taking a civil service exam.

It just builds kind of basic things, and then there are a multitude of others that I think, somehow -- there needs to be an extra effort made toward letting veterans know there are a multitude of services available for them.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: May I ask, has your organization undertaken efforts to make sure that it is known in the community that you are around and available to serve?

MR. SIMMONS: We have not formally met as of yet. We were just sworn in, maybe two-and-a-half weeks ago. I was in contact with the Mayor's Office today, and the person there indicated to me that they are in the process of now setting up a formal meeting of the body of Commissioners who were sworn in, and that all that should be falling into place.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Because it would appear that within the City of Newark, the Commissioners who share their seats with you on the Commission would be in the front line of dealing with many of these veterans' issues. The more you could spread the word, and quite frankly, the more you could even coordinate with the Commissioner's Office, because I'm sure that you can act as a conduit for information about their programs and--

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERNARD: (speaking from audience; off microphone) Assemblyman? I just have another member of the Committee here. It would be an honor and a privilege for me, personally, to address your group the next time you have a meeting. If I can't get there, I'll make sure a representative does. We would like to open up the lines of communication; we need your help.

MR. SIMMONS: Very good. We will look forward to that. We will hold you to that, as a matter of fact.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Okay. So that certainly looks like a step in the right direction.

Just in case the record didn't pick it up, the Commissioner indicated that he or a member of his staff would meet with the Newark organization in the near future to open the lines of communication.

Thank you.

I have just been advised that we have with us the Business Administrator, who is now the Acting Mayor of East Orange, Leroy Jones. Mayor Jones, would you like to share any thoughts with us tonight? You are welcome.

F R E E H O L D E R L E R O Y J. J O N E S: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To yourself and the members of the Committee, it certainly is a pleasure to be here, on behalf of our mayor of the City of East Orange, the Honorable Cardell Cooper, and certainly on behalf of all the citizens in the City of East Orange. Understanding that this issue is a very, very critical issue that we find ourselves in, in a post war initiative relative to the families of those servicemen who have served our country honorably in the Persian Gulf--

Just some of the things that we have experienced in the City of East Orange relative to inquires made from families of our servicemen: Some of the issues sort of center around the substantiation of one's quality of life; the ability to sustain and continue to live comfortably, if you may, when income has been substantially altered, or that cash flow has been stymied.

As we move through these hearings, just some of the concerns that come out of that basically center around the ability to continue to pay, for example, one's mortgage, or the ability to continue to meet the payments of rent when a spouse is left home with the responsibility of her children, and her income requirements don't necessarily meet the cash flow requirements that help sustain that family.

One of the things that is quite prevalent in our community, which I think is representative of the urban community, is the individual or the service member that does not necessarily support a wife and children, but may support a mother, a father, or even a sister, in some cases. I don't believe that there is current legislation in place -- and if there is, I certainly stand corrected -- but that person finds

himself in an awkward position when his or her sole responsibility was that of a mother, a sister, or an uncle, and the individual cannot continue to sustain a quality of living or standard of living. The legislation, or whatever is in place currently, does not necessarily speak to that type of relative.

So I think what should come out of these hearings, as they move along in a positive fashion, is to just try to address some of the concerns that affect those individuals that are not spelled out specifically in Federal legislation pertaining to those relatives that I have mentioned.

Again, we talk about mortgages and the ability to continue, or deferment of installment credit, if you may. An individual gets caught in the situation -- and these have been some of the comments that we have been made aware of: individuals that have an obligation to make payment on installment credit. I believe it calls for a freezing until such time as the individual is back in the normal work force. However, it is our understanding that the interest continues to mount on those installment credit obligations. That does not seem to be equitable, as an individual has to serve his country and his community in the Persian Gulf, but still private industry has an opportunity to profit by way of interest. Even though the payments have been deferred, the interest continues to mount and the obligation becomes that much more critical and certainly, a financial burden on those families.

So those are just some of the concerns just off the top of my head. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to lend some of those to the record. We would be more than glad to provide you with an in-depth analysis, and if need be, refer the individuals who have called our office -- as we have kept a log of those individuals for further follow-up -- to the Committee.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: We certainly appreciate that, and if-- I mean, I know that tonight we have representatives of various support groups here, as well as the Department of Military Affairs. It may very well be that some of the folks who are calling your office seeking assistance could be helped by the Department and its support people. If you would like to make a list of those people who have those concerns available, I'm sure the Commissioner and his staff will assist in reaching out to them.

FREEHOLDER JONES: Okay. Let me just add, Mr. Chairman. One thing that is quite a concern is what happens, as we are in a post war environment -- and I'm sure it has probably been touched on as these hearings have been ongoing -- but individuals returning, the opportunity that awaits them here. The reason, in a lot of cases that individuals are in a position that they are in from a military standpoint, just volunteering, because the opportunity had not presented itself in the private sector for that individual to be gainfully employed or employed to his satisfaction. So the military became an option in a lot of cases.

When we are in a nonwar environment, and the military is not at full complement, then it becomes a dilemma for the individual to become gainfully employed. What I believe we have to be sensitive to is providing opportunities, whether they be educational -- and we cannot stop there, because if we are going to provide educational opportunities through a G.I. Bill, then the ultimate has to be to provide opportunities in the way of employment and jobs after the fact.

So, again, I think we have to be sensitive not only to the concerns that the families are experiencing now on the down side, but the long term. What I think this Committee, again, has to be sensitive to is the long-term effects and the benefits of those servicemen after the fact.

I don't know that that is necessarily the content of the concerns of this particular session, but it is certainly a concern in my community, and I speak not only as Acting Mayor, but as an Essex County Freeholder and a legislator who has a concern for his constituents, just trying to move that agenda in a forthright fashion.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Well, quite frankly, that issue is beyond the scope of what we are doing, but I believe that those of us who sit on this Committee have to be sensitive to that particular problem. I also think that, to some extent, the issue that you raise really goes to broader issues in society in regard to economic opportunity and educational opportunity that are provided to certain people.

If other opportunities can be made available, then someone who might find themselves in the dilemma that you have described might not be there. So it is a broader societal kind of problem, but it is a problem that folds back into the work of this Committee as we look at ways to provide assistance and benefits to military personnel.

We certainly appreciate your observations and concerns in that regard.

Assemblyman Casey?

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: Just to let Mr. Jones know, we do have some legislation coming out through the Committee this coming Thursday. The thing is, we have learned while going around the State of New Jersey -- bear with me with this cold -- is to see concerns of acting mayors such as yourself, freeholders, people in and out of government. So it's a duty on us to pass legislation to help this. We do have a very strong bill.

As being a banker, myself -- my full-time employment -- we have met, with the help of our aide, Craig, here, have drawn up very good legislation. We think it is workable for both the financial industry, and most of all for the veterans.

So, we are moving. It's a slow process, but as we hear people like yourself, and needs that we get throughout the State of New Jersey, we're working along with you. We appreciate any help you can be.

FREEHOLDER JONES: I'm certainly glad to hear that, Assemblyman. As you know, we all have a responsibility of improving the quality of life for those who reside here in these domestic borders, and those that venture to international borders for the sole purpose of protecting this country's international interests, certainly are part of proffering and just creating and continuing to provide for that American dream. And all those veterans are certainly part and parcel of that American dream process.

Again, let me just thank the Committee for the opportunity to lend some testimony to the record, and certainly my concerns. And whatever the City of East Orange, through the office of Cardell Cooper can provide, and certainly the County of Essex, through my office. We're there, and we're certainly supportive.

Again, thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thanks. Anything, Assemblyman?

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: No. It is very important. Your point is well taken. It is well expressed. Thank you.

FREEHOLDER JONES: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, and please give our regards to Mayor Cooper.

FREEHOLDER JONES: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Let me welcome to the Committee, Speaker Pro Tem, Assemblyman Willie Brown.

ASSEMBLYMAN BROWN: At first I was going to welcome everyone, but I noticed that most of you are from the New Jersey area, so I don't think it's appropriate to acknowledge any of you as guests, because I think all of us are very familiar with Essex County College.

I did just want to make a few comments, Mr. Chairman, for the record. To my colleagues, welcome to the 29th Legislative District. That's the old 29th Legislative District. I should say the current 29th Legislative District.

Can you all hear me out there, okay? Good.

As a resident and a representative of this great city, I would like to extend to all the members of this Committee a warm and friendly welcome to Newark.

Assemblyman Casey, this may be your first time here as an Assemblyman. I know that you have been here before. It's a little different when you come here as an official, because you will have an opportunity to vote on issues as they relate. You probably saw Newark as just a place to visit before. Now you can see it as a place to support, along with my other colleagues.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee for its efforts to help and protect the families of New Jersey servicemen and servicewomen in the Persian Gulf. I share in the relief and joy that has swept through our world following the triumphant conclusion of Operation Desert Storm. However, I also share the deep grief and hardship felt by the families and friends of our troops who will not be coming back from the Persian Gulf; the ones who made the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of freedom.

Such are the family and friends of Private Robert Talley. As most of you know, we honored them in the Assembly a few sessions ago; a very touching event, but just some of the things which are probably just symbolic of what happened throughout the United States for those who did have the misfortune.

As this Committee works on behalf of the troops and their families to conquer the many complications war brings to daily life, I ask that it also address the plight of so many

young men and women who entered the military service much like Robert Talley did. I think it is very significant that we don't forget those individuals who made the kinds of contributions that they made, and the ultimate sacrifice.

As a result of growing up in an urban environment, Robert Talley viewed the military as a rare opportunity to access an education. He wanted to proudly serve his country, but understood that putting his life on the line on the field of battle also made it possible for him to attend college and ultimately, to become a doctor.

Many members of the minority community, as evidenced by the cultural and racial makeup of the United States Armed Forces, see the military service as the only means of furthering their education, and it has nothing to do, necessarily, with their academic abilities. It is just that they don't have the basic resources otherwise.

These are brave men and women, who have been fighting in another war zone, our urban centers, where poverty, crime, and substandard schools are the enemies. So, as I commend the Committee for its efforts to help the men and women called to duty in this and future wars in foreign lands, I ask for something in return. I ask for you, my colleagues in the Assembly, to join me in the challenge to make our State a better place for our troops to come home to.

Help make New Jersey a State where educational opportunities abound for all citizens. Help make New Jersey a State where, for many urban minorities, there is more than one road to take in order to access an affordable and quality education.

I think that while we talk about minorities specifically, I think that also we must address the issues as they relate to those individuals regardless of their race, creed, or color. Those who are on a lower socioeconomic scale, which are really victimized somewhat to the degree that this is

the only alternative they have, even though they have the various kinds of academic skills and abilities that they can continue to make ongoing contributions, not just the ultimate sacrifice of contributing their life for a cause.

I think that if we continue to provide the opportunities for all, then maybe somewhere in that whole mix we would develop individuals who will be able to interact and become mediators with their skills throughout the world, so that we can negotiate from a peaceful standpoint of view, rather than having to deal with violence, and rather than having to deal with the threat of life. That we will probably have people that would be able to interact on a national or international basis, and develop the skills with the proper training, by us providing the kinds of resources that this country was able to provide for the military, the very high technical skills -- the high technology -- that we were successful in this recent war. But I think if we had invested -- and I'm not being critical of what we have done, but I think that was probably good up to a point -- but I think that the time has come when we must look in another direction.

We must start to invest into education, into lives, and into humanity and into humanistic issues so that we will not have to get into wars and things of that nature. That we will be able to understand each other, regardless of what part of the planet we live on. And we will be able to communicate with each other, who will have the kinds of interaction.

So I think that's probably what we need to probably also look at as a postwar-- And this Committee promised to start to look at some of those challenges as we probably legislate and regulate and give suggestions and recommendations back as it relates to what we are doing in the form of legislation, or in the form of just basic policy making, whether it is related directly to the Veterans Affairs' Committee-- But I think the whole education process, as we

look at how we fund education, how we make sure that those who have been deprived of their equitable distribution of the resources from the education standpoint of view--

I could go on and on. I don't want to prolong the meeting, but I think that that should be also the challenge that we owe to families like the Talley family, or the families throughout the world, whether they be in the United States or the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Kuwait-- All those lives that were lost, they were still lives, and they were innocent people. We have a responsibility and an obligation, I think, to make sure that our priorities become peace in the future, and not just war.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to share these brief comments with you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, Assemblyman Brown. What you said is well said, and I hope as we go from tonight and into this week and into the coming year, that we have an opportunity to look at the kinds of issues that you are raising. I know that this Committee will look to you for your thoughts and guidance as we deal with those types of issues.

I appreciate you taking the time to stop in here tonight and be with us. It's nice to be in-- (pause)

ASSEMBLYMAN BROWN: Newark.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: I know I'm in Newark. The 29th, right?

ASSEMBLYMAN BROWN: The 29th District.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: --the 29th, for the moment.

Okay, let me go to Don Fuller. Mr. Fuller is with the Disabled American Vets. He is with the Legislative Committee of that organization here in New Jersey.

D O N A L D F U L L E R: Thank you Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee. We appreciate your coming tonight for this hearing and trying to help out all of the people concerning Desert Storm.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Mr. Fuller, please make sure that you speak into the end of that mike.

MR. FULLER: All right. This way?

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Yes, that's fine.

MR. FULLER: Okay. Thank you.

The main thing that I would like to speak about is something concerning Congress, but first I would like to make a comment about the gentleman who spoke about the outreach centers.

I'm sure that-- I would like to say that as far as it's concerned to the Committee, in case they are not aware, that the DAV has, during the time of the Vietnam War, set up these outreach centers. I'm sure that Ben Mazur here remembers that, and I'm sure that we will do the same thing to help the Desert Storm people. That would be one way that we could solve that problem with the outreach centers. A lot has to be done for it, but I'm sure that would be one way to achieve the purpose, where they have these people. The DAV trains all those outreach counselors and sets up the centers.

The rest of my presentation is a pamphlet that the national legislative office gave me when I was in Washington last week for the Midwinter Conference. I'd like to read that and put it in the transcript.

This is stated here: "The message to give to your representative and senator:

"Do you realize that last October, even as we were putting our troops in harm's way in the Persian Gulf, the Congress approved legislation to do the following:

"One, reduce the disability compensation benefits of any Persian Gulf casualty who is single and determined incompetent to handle his own finances.

"Two, eliminate the vocational rehabilitation benefits of Persian Gulf casualties with disabilities determined to be slight; 10%.

"Eliminate burial benefits -- \$150 plot allowance and \$87 headstone allowance -- for Persian Gulf veterans who are not buried in the National Cemetery."

Also, "That the administration's proposed budget has no money requested for medical treatment of Persian Gulf casualties.

"Two, eliminates all V.A. beneficiary travel; proposes additional elimination of vocational rehabilitation eligibility for Persian Gulf casualties; proposes the elimination of V.A. orphans' educational assistance for stepchildren of Persian Gulf KIAs and totally disabled."

These are the items that were taken out of the budget, to cut back. Also, they will affect Desert Storm as well as present veterans, from World War II down to the Vietnam situation.

That's all I have gentlemen. I thank you very much for the privilege of giving you this information.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, Mr. Fuller. I'm sure you recognize that those concerns that you expressed are, in fact, Federal?

MR. FULLER: I said that. I realize that. That's true. I just want to put it in the record, and I will be giving a copy to Congressman Payne's aide, there.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Good. Then we appreciate you taking the time to be with us.

Roger W. Liggon? I hope I'm pronouncing your last name right.

R O G E R W. L I G G O N, SR.: Liggon. (pronounces name)

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Liggon. Roger W. Liggon. (corrects pronunciation)

MR. LIGGON: Good afternoon. I didn't come here prepared to speak tonight, but something just got ahold of me tonight and I figured that let me put in my two cents, one way or another.

I am a Vietnam vet. I served in Vietnam in '66 and '67 with the First Battalion of the Ninth Marines, better known as the "Walking Dead." My outfit suffered a hell of a lot of casualties, so I sit before you a very lucky person.

I was raised in Newark. I went to school in Newark -- Westside High -- and I know that I am an extremely lucky person to be here tonight.

I am concerned because nobody likes war. The people who do, are crazy. I know that the people who are in the Persian Gulf -- for the most part the Reservists and the Guard -- they did not join the military to fight a war. But they also realized that once they were called, it was their job to go. They have made the sacrifice.

What I am concerned about is the treatment that these troops are going to get when they get back home. All these young men and women who are in the Persian Gulf now, will come back different people. You can not face a combat situation and come back the same person that you were when you left.

I still see that sight of that young Marine corporal on the recon mission who called in the rounds, and the look on his face as he was talking to the cameraman from CNN. As my cousin would always say, "You can always tell when a person has faced death, because of the look that is in their face."

I know that I made a vow when I came back from 'Nam, that I would never let another troop come back from war and not feel the need to be thanked and hugged and so on and so forth. I think that the difference between the Persian Gulf and Vietnam is, we all know someone who is in the Persian Gulf. It is not like Vietnam where most of the people who went to war were 18- and 19-year-old kids where the only people who knew them were their high school friends and their parents.

This time the war called our teachers, our lawyers, our doctors, our next-door neighbors, our bosses, and for the

first time, our women. As I was talking to a friend of mine a few weeks ago, before we even imagined that the war would end this quickly, the thought that I brought up to him was: Was this country ready to handle maimed women veterans? We look at a male veteran with one arm and we respect him because we say, "Yes, he served in the war." At times we forget it. But now we face the fact that our women are also going to be in that same boat.

The young lady, Major Rossi, I bring her to light because I was watching the news the other night, and I felt so good for her and the way that she spoke about performing the job that she was trained to do. Three or four days later, we found out that because her chopper went down, that she is no longer here.

I am concerned because I wonder if we are going to give these troops returning home the support that they need, from a mental viewpoint. You will probably find out that a lot of the Vietnam veterans complain about the lack of treatment and the time that they have to wait to go to the V.A. hospitals, and so forth. This problem could be magnified with the troops who are coming home.

We have picked up a saying in the network that I am involved with. "Damn, it hurts; but together, the pain becomes livable." I think that we as veterans, we as citizens, have to remember that we should not have to sit down and pass laws after the fact that our veterans have returned home. These laws should be in place. They should be ongoing.

As Mr. Payton said, this is not a slap against the Committee, but these are things that-- My father had always said, "Once you're a veteran, the country will take care of you." And believe me, I know a lot of Vietnam veterans who don't have homes. They have mental problems. They have alcoholic problems. And it seems that no one cares.

So my question to the Committee, and my hope for the Committee, is that we can find a way to make sure that some of the things that happened to the Vietnam vet will not happen to our Persian Gulf vets.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, sir.

Questions or comments?

ASSEMBLYMAN CASEY: None at this time.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, sir.

Colonel, did you want to get back in this, again.

C O L O N E L H A R O L D W. N U T T: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of the Committee.

Sir, I rise, if you will, to speak of the Employer Support of the Guard and the Reserve Committee that is, in fact, in being in our great State. I have the privilege of serving as a Special Assistant to the Adjutant General. I also have the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of the New Jersey Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and the Reserve.

Many, many times in the last eight to ten years, I have had the privilege to tout the value of the Guard and the Reserve. That time has passed, to wit, to what these magnificent men and women have done in the Gulf in the last three months.

But what does concern us -- and when I say "us," I am talking about some 190 members of the New Jersey Committee that embrace the length and breadth of our State, who are dedicated to resolve problems between the employer and the Guardsperson or Reservist. What I am specifically addressing, sir, is that when our troops return, I suspect that we are going to have some significant problems in terms of employer problems.

That is to say, that the fact that these individuals were taken from the workplace, I wonder how supportive that

employer is going to be when that time arises. There have been many cases, in hospital units for instance, 12 people came from the same hospital, etc.

Also, with the problems with the economy that we have, both from the State, county, and municipal level, there are going to be jobs that are no longer there. The State statute and the Federal statute are very plain. They say that an individual be afforded all those opportunities as if he never went. Well, if a job is eliminated, then he may not have a job -- or she may not have a job -- when he comes back.

As part of this Committee is the New Jersey Department of Labor, as well as the Director of the United States Department of Labor. He shares -- or they share -- the concerns of the Committee.

I don't have a specific answer for that, sir, okay? But I think we have to be in a position to deal with that. It's been suggested a number of times by the business community that perhaps there be an incentive for hiring or employing a Guardsman or Reservist. I certainly would recommend that that also deserves your attention.

I would be delighted to provide to the Committee the organization of the State Committee, as well as the names and telephone numbers. I would say, sir, that in each of our 21 counties, we have a County Chairman who stands ready to assist any dependent or whoever, in the way of family support.

I thank you for the opportunity to bring this to your attention, Mr. Chairman.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, Colonel. We met at Fort Dix not that long ago, and we had New Jersey Business and Industry present.

COLONEL NUTT: Yes, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: It seemed that those people were there basically to learn about and explore what obligations they may have as employers. Personally, I thought at that

point, that was a positive step; the fact that they were taking that kind of interest in what their obligation is in regard to their employees who are Guardsmen and Reservists.

It may also be well to provide, and we can provide for distribution, the names of those 21 county coordinators. If we disperse those, it might be of some assistance to any number of people. Once again, we can do that through our membership, so when they have problems or requests from constituents, they will know where to direct them.

COLONEL NUTT: Sir, I would be remiss if I did not highlight the fantastic support that the total business community from our State has provided the Guard and Reserve over the years. As a matter of fact, as an added step of New Jersey Business and Industry, they mailed to each one of their members a listing of the Committee members in the 21 counties, as well as an excellent brochure we provided from the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. They, as a group -- as an entity -- have been very, very supportive.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Any comments or questions? (no response)

Colonel, thank you.

COLONEL NUTT: Thank you, sir.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Reverend Ernest Sutton?

B I S H O P E R N E S T L. S U T T O N, SR. Thank you. First of all, I would like to say, give honor to our Lord and Savior. To the whole staff, the Assembly, Assemblyman Brown, to all the officers from everywhere, all the service commanders, and whatnot--

First, I am an ordained bishop, and I am a disabled veteran. I'm a veteran of all the wars since World War II, and I know what the veteran is going through, or what they go through.

I'm one of the newly appointed Commissioners of the Mayor of Newark, on the Commission of Military Affairs. As a

member, I have many questions. However, Commissioner Bernard has answered many of them.

I am glad tonight to be here and to meet this board, where I was listening and I was getting a lot of questions, because we need the answers. Because we have the troops, and we can't wait, because they are coming back now.

So, there are many questions that we have. The Commissioner has given us permission to meet with him on many of these questions. What I would like to know-- I would have to ask him: Do we have a plan in place for these returning troops? How soon can we obtain this information?

I believe in-- If you give me a job to do, I believe in doing it. But right now, this is the point of this Commission-- I read in the paper everyday that-- They had our names in there when we were taking the oath of office on the 13th of February. Now, when someone sees you who knows you, and they have someone in Saudi Arabia, they have a question.

Now, I went to the Mayor and asked him, "Where do we get these answers?" He said, "We're going to have a meeting." But what I had cleared up tonight for me was Commissioner Bernard-- He may not remember, but we met before, at the-- I work also at the Newark Vets' Center, and I work at the V.A. Hospital, and I work with all phases of veterans' affairs. I mean, I had this opportunity.

But, for our Commission, everybody is a worker. I think the Chairman asked what can we do about it? What they can do about it is there has to be some way where all the chain-- There has got to be a chain -- just like the chain of command. I don't care how high or how low you are, if you are from the Veterans' Affairs, you should have a string coming down so that all the information that you get, we get. Then we on the bottom, who are the ones to do the work-- But we can't answer the questions if we don't have the answers.

Commissioner Bernard gave us permission. He said to let him know when our meeting is, and he is going to sit in on our meeting. I would appreciate being here and listening, but I don't like just listening. I like to see the help when these troops start coming back. I want somebody to ask me a question, and I want to answer.

If I have to, and I see Assemblyman Brown on the street somewhere, I'll go to him and ask him. Yes, I will.

I'm real proud to be appointed in this position. I'm really concerned with the lady who got up here and with her complaints or oppression or what have you, but this is what we are all about.

We are the Mayor's Commission of Veterans' Affairs. Any veteran in Newark has a problem, we want to know about it. If we know about it and it's a problem that we can't handle, then we can bring it to you.

So I just want to say that it was a pleasure being here and I thank you. And I thank the Commissioner for enlightening me with much information tonight, on veterans' affairs. Now we know where we can go.

If it hadn't have been for this tonight, we would still be in the dark on where we can go to get this information. I wouldn't know about this if Honorable Martinez gave me a letter-- This Sunday we had a veterans' ceremony, and Honorable Martinez gave me a letter about this program. We didn't know anything about that.

Anything that the veterans have, I think we should know about it. We'll participate 100%. If I can do it-- I have two artificial knees, I have cancer, I have a disk out of my back, two hearing aids, I can't see without my glasses, high blood pressure-- But I'm good. Other than that, I'm 100%. (laughter) But I'm still out here trying to help somebody. I appreciate you, and I thank you.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, Reverend.

I do not have any other witnesses. Is there anyone else who would like to testify before we wrap up? (no response) If not, let me share a couple of observations that I have noticed developing here tonight.

In large part our intention is to identify areas where we can assist the families of our military personnel with legislative programs. We have been doing that, and we will continue doing that, but a couple of other things happened here tonight which really point out the value of these hearings.

I've had people say to me, "Are you going to continue the hearings now that the war is over?" The answer to that, of course, is, "Yes," because even though the shooting has stopped, our job, in many ways, has just begun. That's the first point that we recognize.

Also, simply by being here we have accomplished other things. An issue arose as to whether or not the 16 service offices of the Department of Military Affairs were open in the evenings, and a suggestion was made that they might be able to service the veterans if they were open in the evenings. The Commissioner has agreed to give that some serious consideration.

We have also had tonight some testimony from the newly formed Commission here in Newark, and it appears that we have touched a coordinating point between the State Department and the new organization here in Newark, with the Commissioner being prepared to appear with the Newark Commission and provide whatever integration and assistance that he can. That is another positive.

These are positives that we are achieving just by being in this room tonight. Even before we go back to Trenton, and even before we begin considering legislation, we have, in fact, accomplished something here tonight.

With that in mind, I would thank all of you for attending tonight. We can't do this without you. I would especially thank our staff -- both OLS and our partisan staff. I once again recognize the representation that the Department has had at all of our hearings, and I would advise you that we will continue these hearings, with the next hearing being held on March 13, which is a Wednesday evening, I believe, one week from tomorrow night. That hearing will be held at 7:00 p.m. at the Cliffside Park Borough Hall in the Council Chambers, in Cliffside Park, New Jersey, which is in Assemblyman Mazur's district. Is that correct?

ASSEMBLYMAN MAZUR: That's correct.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: We look forward to seeing you there. A special thanks to our host, Speaker Pro Tem, Willie Brown. Willie, it's nice to be with you in your district.

ASSEMBLYMAN BROWN: You're welcome.

ASSEMBLYMAN SCERNI: Thank you, everyone.

(HEARING CONCLUDED)

