

**Testimony  
of  
Harvey Peterson, Commander  
American Legion, Department of North Dakota**

**To Senator Kent Conrad  
"Senate Budget Committee Hearing on "the State of Veterans Healthcare in ND"  
and "Views of VA Funding Levels from ND Veterans Organizations."**

Senator Conrad, distinguished guests fellow veterans and friends.

We thank you for scheduling this hearing and appreciate the opportunity to share our views.

My assignment today, taken from the message I received, is to "talk about the Legion's national perspective on funding levels".

I represent almost 20,000 veterans in North Dakota veteran members of the American Legion, Department of North Dakota. Our membership represents approximately 40% of the 50,000 + eligible wartime veterans in North Dakota. Nationwide, the American Legion claims about 2.8 million members. Taken with the Legion Auxiliary and, more recently, the Sons of the American Legion, our numbers swell to something in excess of 4 million members.

The American Legion is a Service Organization, as are the other Military Organizations. We were founded in 1919 to care for returning veterans who could not care for himself or his family. The Legion has maintained to this day its 4 core pillars of Care of Veterans, promoting a Strong National Defense, Mentoring through our very successful Youth Programs and teaching, living and promoting Patriotism

The care of veterans, the reason the Legion was founded, has become in large measure the responsibility of the Department of Veterans Affairs and or our Social Services system, including Social Security. And for that we are grateful because of the huge resources available to those systems through federal funding which could not otherwise be provided.

But when Congress fails to fund those organizations, it is community-based groups – The American Legion, and the others here, that address the personal challenges at home through volunteer services or direct financial contributions. The American Legion provides assistance in any manner we can including providing assistance to the families of deployed warriors through our Heroes to Hometowns Program. And we will continue to promote the ever increasing support needed for those who defend our country and our way of life.

You were provided the Legion's National perspective on funding in prior testimony from The American Legion, both in September by National Commander Conatser, and more recently, on January 30, 2008, by Jimmie Foster, chair of the Legion's Legislative Commission. Much of what I have prepared either mirrors or comes from their testimony but with a North Dakota slant.