STATEMENT OF
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TO THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISABILITY ASSISTANCE AND MEMORIAL AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS’ AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TO IMPROVE VA’S CLAIM
PROCESSING SYSTEM

JANUARY 29, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for giving The American Legion the opportunity to present its views on the topic of using artificial intelligence to improve the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) claims processing system. As VA’s claims backlog continue to grow, it is important to explore new ways to utilize advances in technology that VA can implement to adjudicate benefits claims in a more timely and accurate manner. We commend the subcommittee for holding this hearing.

The American Legion welcomes innovative ideas, such as electronic claims processing and other uses of technology, which will enable VA to improve the service it provides to this nation’s veterans, especially in the arena of benefits delivery. We must, however, caution that automation does not guarantee quality claim development and speed does not guarantee accuracy or quality of data entry. Moreover, although the use of such technology might improve the process, it is not a magic bullet that will fix all the problems that are currently plaguing VA’s disability claims process. Areas such as inadequate staffing levels, training, quality assurance, accountability, premature adjudication of claims and other problems resulting from VA’s current work measurement system, as previously addressed by The American Legion in testimony before the subcommittee, must be adequately dealt with before any real improvement resulting from use of
artificial intelligence can be realized. Therefore, artificial intelligence based programs that direct the development and the adjudication of claims should be published in the Federal Register so that the public, especially stakeholders such as The American Legion, can provide written comments.

The American Legion believes that the human element should never be removed from this equation and we are pleased that various experts that testified before the subcommittee on the use of artificial intelligence in claims processing also agreed with this philosophy. Additionally, it must also be kept in mind that the bulk of the time and effort expended by VA in the disability claims process is not in the actual adjudication or decision making part of the process; rather it is the part of the process that involves the development of the claim prior to adjudication. This process involves informing the claimant of the evidence that is needed to substantiate the claims as well as assisting the claimant in obtaining the needed evidence, such as military personnel and medical records, relevant medical evidence (both private and VA), scheduling compensation and pension examinations and other efforts necessary before the claim is ready to be adjudicated. Evidence development can be very time consuming and it is extremely important that any electronic claims system utilized by VA in the future adequately address this important part of the process, not just the actual adjudication of the claim, or any actual improvement in the current process will be minimal at best.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present The American Legion’s view on this issue. This concludes my testimony.