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**CIVILIAN DEFENSE WORKERS EXPRESS DEEP CONCERN OVER STATE OF VETERANS
HEALTHCARE**

*Union Says Congress Must Fulfill Obligation to Returning Veterans and Fully Fund Veterans and Military
Medical Facilities*

(WASHINGTON)- The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Defense Conference (DEFCON), today, expressed a deep concern over the state of healthcare being provided to the nation's returning veterans.

"The men and women that are serving our nation in the War on Terror were made a promise that if injured in service their care would be provided for. It is time for Congress to honor that promise by respecting the commitment and sacrifice of our injured soldiers and fully funding veterans' and military healthcare facilities." Don Hale, DEFCON president said.

"Our service members are experiencing wide discrepancies in their level of care based on where they live, whether they are on active duty, and whether they are members of the National Guard or Reserve. Whether in a Veterans Affairs (VA) or a Department of Defense (DoD) medical facility, both agencies have an obligation to provide fair treatment to all returning service members," added Mark Gibson, AFGE labor relations specialist.

The discrepancies in care are a result of an unprecedented demand for healthcare services at military and veterans' medical facilities as military personnel return from Iraq and Afghanistan. In rural areas veterans are being forced to travel hours, even days to visit a VA facility. In communities with high concentrations of veterans, facilities are chronically understaffed and overworked forcing veterans to wait weeks or months to receive treatment.

Mar. 19, 2007 marks the beginning of the fifth year of the war in Iraq, and experts predict that new benefits claims will reach beyond 600,000 in the next five years. The problems facing the VA and DoD medical facilities are a result of a lack of pre and post war planning, but if we do not address them now, our military medical system will breakdown.

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AFGE is the largest federal employee union representing 600,000 workers in the federal government and the government of the District of Columbia, including 200,000 employees in the Department of Defense.