

STATEMENT OF ANTHONY J. CASERTA, NATIONAL COMMANDER, AMVETS; ACCOMPANIED BY RALPH E. HALL, NATIONAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; DON SPAGNOLO, MEMBER, NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE; AND DOMINICK STRADA, CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL SECURITY COMMISSION

Mr. DORN. Commander, if you will, present your distinguished staff with you, those associated with you, to the committee.

Mr. CASERTA. Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Ayres.

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, we of AMVETS, of course, are most appreciative of this opportunity to continue our close cooperation with your committee by presenting for your review our legislative program for 1968.

Accompanying me this morning are national staff members, national and department AMVET and auxiliary officers, and the distinguished members of the AMVETS National Security Commission, who later this morning will accompany me to the White House for a briefing by the President.

In addition, may I present AMVETS national executive director, past national commander, and a member of the U.S. Veterans Advisory Commission, Mr. Ralph E. Hall; a member of the National Legislative Committee, Past National Commander Don Spagnolo; and past national commander and chairman of AMVETS National Security Commission, Dominick Strada of New Jersey.

We are here not only to witness but to participate in "Democracy in Action." We feel that our legislative recommendations will, if enacted, be another step toward our mutual goal of having the Nation meet its obligations to our millions of veterans.

The contribution of the individual veteran to the building of this Nation during its first two centuries makes clear how important the role of the veteran continues to be in the future existence and growth of our society.

Military service in the Armed Forces of our Nation constitutes the basis for a reciprocal obligation on the part of this Nation to provide reasonable assistance to veterans in accordance with and recognition of the greater sacrifices experienced by them.

In his message of January 30, 1968, President Johnson voiced his thoughts on these commitments when he said:

America holds some of its greatest honors for the men who have stood in its defense, and kept alive its freedoms.

It shows its gratitude not only in memorials which grace city parks across the land * * * but more meaningfully in the programs which * * * "care for him * * * and for his widow and his orphan."

In formulating our legislative program, we have not deviated from our policy that our primary objective as a major veterans organization is to do our share to help perfect a sound, realistic, and enduring structure of veterans' benefits that will enable our veterans not only to live with dignity but also to contribute the maximum of their abilities to the progress and economic growth of the Nation.

AMVETS is cognizant of the fact that our country has, and apparently must continue, as long as there is war—hot or cold—to bear part of the economic and military burden of protecting the freedoms of the free world. AMVETS wholeheartedly supported and continue