

Mr. Commander, and legionnaires, we have been talking a great deal about cemeteries. I think we should have the space to give each veteran a burial in a national cemetery as close to his home as we can. But I am more interested at the moment in the hospital situation. As the chairman has said, we intend this year to take, under his direction, a good look at the hospital situation because after all, that is a vital program and every veteran and his family should be interested in it.

I hope, Mr. Commander, that the American Legion will take a very firm stand in keeping the hospital situation system just where it is. I don't think that we need to put it into HEW who seems to be reaching out.

Let us keep it where it is and where we can center it on one place rather than scatter it out down there where nobody will have too much responsibility and will always have a chance to dodge and twist. I think we have a fine hospital system.

There may be some things that need to be done but we will try to go thoroughly into that and while some of my members here on the committee think that we should have hospitals any time they want them, I might say, Mr. Commander, as you well know, we are operating under a limitation of beds.

Unfortunately, I think for the hospital system—but in the early days I am afraid that many hospitals were built on a base of political expediency and not where the services required them to be built.

I hope you will take a good look at that situation as we go along and if improvements can be made, I think they should be. I am informed, however, that in some instances, we only have about 82 percent of occupancy of the hospital beds that we have, and in some instances, it is down to 65-percent level.

That would indicate that maybe these hospitals are not located just where they should be because in my great State of Florida, we have long waiting lists. So, maybe we need to shift some of these around.

One other thing, if I may, Mr. Chairman, I have had many complaints from veterans returning from Vietnam who have been returned to the States because of injuries and so forth, that they are having quite a long wait between the time that they arrive in this country until they can get some financial help, especially for their families.

I hope that we can take this matter up with the VA and see if there could not be some procedure worked out where a man who returned to the United States could have some financial relief immediately if he needs it.