

Unemployed OEF/OIF Vets at All Time High

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WASHINGTON — August unemployment data released today by the Bureau of Labor and Statistics has the new national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. very concerned. The data reflects 185,000 current war veterans as unemployed, an all-time high.

"The economic downturn has impacted the entire nation, and nowhere is it more demoralizing than in our armed forces," said Thomas J. Tradewell Sr., who was elected Aug. 20 to lead America's largest organization of combat veterans.

The BLS data increased the nationwide unemployment average to 9.7 percent for the general population, and dramatically increased the unemployment rate of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans from 9.8 percent to 11.3 percent. Equally disturbing is the increase in the total number of unemployed current war veterans, from 160,000 in July to 185,000, which almost equals the total U.S. military strength currently serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Hundreds of millions in stimulus money has now flowed to the states and commercial businesses, yet nowhere was there an attached stipulation regarding veterans employment or preference," said Tradewell, a Vietnam veteran from Sussex, Wis. "That has to be corrected immediately."

Tradewell said the VFW strongly believes that any entity that accepts federal stimulus money, regardless of amount, should be required to adhere to federal veterans' laws, in particular the Jobs for Veterans Act and the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act.

"The current state of the economy has today's military seriously questioning if they should separate or retire," he said. "That means they and their families are choosing between staying in uniform — and possibly returning for another combat tour — and standing in line at a job fair. There must be a better alternative."

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org