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# U.S. House of Representatives

## COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

335 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515

<http://veterans.house.gov>

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May 12, 2006

James R. Mueller  
Commander-in-Chief  
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S.

Thomas L. Bock  
National Commander  
The American Legion

Paul W. Jackson  
National Commander  
Disabled American Veterans

Edward W. Kemp  
National Commander  
AMVETS

Commanders:

On Tuesday, May 8, on the Floor of the House of Representatives, I managed H.R. 5037, the Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act that I co-authored with Mike Rogers of Michigan, to protect military families from demonstrations at VA national cemeteries and Arlington National Cemetery, thereby setting the standards for decency so families may bury a loved one in peace.

Wednesday morning I was still responding to press inquiries when I was given a casualty assistance notification letter regarding one of my constituents who was killed in Iraq. While holding the letter in my hand preparing to call the soldier's wife, I was told of a press inquiry regarding your May 5 letter addressed to me, yet sent to all of my House colleagues.

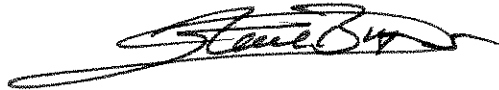
I have still not received the letter, but I obtained a copy from the press. The distinction could not be clearer—in my right hand the casualty notification letter and in my left hand a political stunt filled with falsehoods, innuendo, and misrepresentations. I hope you realize which letter received my earnest attention.

Thomas L. Bock  
James R. Mueller  
Paul W. Jackson  
Edward W. Kemp  
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Gentlemen, with the nation at war, there is much work to be done. Your members have a wealth of knowledge that is of great value to the Veterans' Affairs Committee and this Congress. That is why veterans' organizations, including yours, have at my invitation testified at nearly 40 hearings since I became chairman; and that is why I decided to move budget hearings into February, before the formulation of the budget, not after, as you are requesting.

Yet, to this day, none of you have called or asked to see me on any issue. When it came time for each of you to testify before the committee, you chose not to appear; you sent representatives in your place. Should you care to work in a positive manner to improve the lives of our veterans, my door remains open to you. Whether you are willing to accept the invitation is upon you. The committee will continue our work to provide for America's veterans and family survivors.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Buyer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Steve Buyer

Attachment

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## INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** CHAIRMAN BUYER  
**FROM:** JIM LARIVIERE  
**SUBJECT:** VSO LETTER  
**DATE:** 5/12/2006

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In regards to the letter dated May 5, 2006, from The America Legion, DAV, AMVETS and VFW.

- 1. A decision to change the hearing schedule of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee was made "without consulting VSOs"— FALSE**
  - Many of the veterans service organizations and military service organizations were present when discussion of this change was made at a veterans summit held at the Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania last year.
  - The American Legion and VFW choose NOT to participate in the summit.
  
- 2. The claim that the decision to change the schedule "shut[s] America's veterans out of the congressional debate for adequate VA funding"— FALSE**
  - In years past, VSOs came to Congress to testify in front of a joint session of the House and Senate Veterans Committees after the Committees have already completed its work on the Budget. So, in effect they provided input on the budget after the fact.
  - The improved schedule now allows these veterans organizations to give testimony during the budget process and thereby gives them a great voice.
  - Commanders of The American Legion, VFW, AMVETS and DAV were asked to testify and **chose not to participate** in the hearings on February, sending representatives instead.
  - As a result of the new hearing schedule, many **recommendations made by those testifying were adopted by the committee and included in the budget recommendations**—among these were the elimination of the proposed enrollment fees and increased co-pays, the modernization of the GI Bill, additional claims processors, and increased funding for medical and prosthetic research, and medical facilities construction.
  
- 3. "Mr. Chairman, don't silence the voice of America's veterans."— *The opposite has occurred***
  - The House Veterans' Affairs Committee has held 50 hearings since January 2005 and 36 of these hearing have included testimony from VSOs.
  - The changes made by Chairman Buyer give the VSOs more input in both the budgetary and legislative processes. In addition to the budget hearings in February, VSOs and MSOs testified soon after the budget was submitted to

Congress and before our committee formulated its counsel to the Budget Committee.

- In years past The American Legion has testified in September, giving the Congress a look back on the present cycle and an early look ahead as Congress and the administration began to assemble the next year's budget. Mr. Buyer thought this was so integral to making future decisions, that he has invited the other VSOs and MSOs to do so as well. Now, it may unfortunately be perceived as "taking some of the thunder away" from The American Legion, which had been the lone voice, but it is believed that having early input from all is better.
- Regarding the upcoming "Look Back, Look Ahead" hearing planned for this September, never before in the history of the Veterans' Affairs Committee has the leadership of the VSOs and MSOs been invited to testify on a biannual basis.