

budget. One VISN indicated that under the President's budget it would need to reduce employment by 1,454 FTEEs, a cut of 15.4 percent of that VISN's workforce.

10 VISNs would reduce patient workload under the Clinton budget: Only one VISN said it could treat more veterans this year than last year under this budget.

71,129 fewer veterans would be served under the Clinton budget: One VISN reported that it may need to eliminate services to as many as 17,000 veterans. And this number is only the total from the 6 VISNs who gave us an estimated number. Again. Four other VISNs said they would treat fewer veterans.

But even an increase of \$500 million above the President's budget would not reverse this trend. On the contrary, this report shows that an increase of such a small amount would still require hard choices and in some cases reductions in services, staff, and veterans served.

At least 12 VISNs would have short falls under Clinton budget plus \$500 million: the largest deficit for an individual VISN was \$100 million.

At least 13 VISNs would reduce staffing under the Clinton budget plus \$500 million—in one VISN by over 1,100 employees.

At least 38,155 fewer veterans would be served under the Clinton budget plus \$500 million: Again, only one VISN said it could positively increase services to veterans under this scenario. One VISN said it would still turn away 9,600 veterans.

Veterans health care is at a crossroads. While the nation's twenty-two VISNs have struggled valiantly to do more with a shrinking budget, the results of this survey suggest that urgent action is required to reverse what has become a funding crisis in VA health care—even as America's veterans population becomes older and more reliant on VA services. Spending decisions made by Congress in the next few months will determine whether predictions made by the 22 VISNs become reality or a disaster narrowly averted.

This funding crisis will affect the World War II veteran, who has to drive 6 hours to get care because funding problems prevented the VA from opening a community based out-patient clinic in his area.

This funding crisis will affect the VA nurse who has to work 16 hour shifts because hiring enough nurses is too expensive.

It is outrageous that with federal budget surpluses 20 VISNs will run a deficit. It is outrageous that staff will be cut, or furloughed while being asked to work harder and longer hours. It is outrageous that over 71,000 fewer sick and disabled veterans would be treated by the VA next year even as they get older. These veterans need more health care not less.

But this story doesn't begin with my report. It is really a continuation of a battle begun 13 years ago with the release of the first Independent Budget by the major veterans groups. It is the continuation of a battle fought by Senator JOHNSON in the Budget Committee—to provide full funding for veterans. And of a battle TIM and I fought on the floor on the Senate to provide full funding for veterans in the Senate budget resolution—a fight that we won with a unanimous vote to increase VA funding to the level recommended by the independent budget.

But let me be clear, this is also a fight we must carry on to Appropriations.

What this report suggests is that we are through cutting the fat out of the VA budget. There is nothing left to pare but bone and muscle. The VA has reached its fighting weight and has plunged dangerously below.

We've squeezed just about as much money out of the system as we possibly can. People on the front lines of veterans health care—whether care providers or recipients—know that the VA health care system is desperately short of resources. I worry that my friend Lyle Pearson, of North Mankato, decorated for his service in WWII, disabled vet, who receives care at VA facilities in Minnesota, will not get the care he needs if the flat-line budget is not improved. I worry that veterans across the nation will be caught between increasing need and flat-lined funds. Veterans in Bangor, Maine are concerned because a VA inspector general report noted that their outpatient clinic had a 10 month backlog of new patients. Things were so bad last Fall that the clinic couldn't see walk-in patients or urgent-care patients, and there was a four month wait to see the clinic's part-time psychiatrist. Veterans in Iowa are facing the possible closure of one of their three major veterans hospitals because of budget shortfalls.

The last chance for veterans this year is VA/HUD appropriations. But we still don't know what the funding level will be the VA/HUD appropriations bills. In two and a half months, fiscal 1999 will end and we still don't even have a start on funding FY 2000. The bills have not been marked up by the committee. This is unacceptable. If veterans funding is allocated in the dark of night in a last minute omnibus spending bill, I fear the veteran will be short changed. Bring the VA/HUD bill to the floor. If there isn't enough money in it for veterans, we'll amend it to add more.

A story in the July 18th edition of the Richmond Times Dispatch quotes in chairman of the VA/HUD appropriations Subcommittee as saying that the budget situation that we face this year is very tough. That same article says that VA health care might be facing a \$1 billion cut.

I've heard that rumor. I've heard the rumor that veterans will get an increase. Well let me start a rumor this morning that veterans can take to the bank: I give notice now to my colleagues that I will be on the floor of the Senate offering an amendment to VA/HUD appropriations the first opportunity I get if the funding is not enough.

The veteran has borne the pain of budget cuts for too long. Tax cuts should come after relief for veterans. Defense buildups should come after relief for veterans. Let's make the veteran the priority again.

This is a fight to make VA health care the gold standard for health care again. It is a fight to keep a promise to the veteran: If you served your country your nation will stand up for you. If you were injured you will be healed. If you are disabled, the country will raise you up—not cast you aside.

I call on my colleagues to join me and the veterans in this fight. It will take every U.S. Senator and every Member of the House. It will take the VFW, the DAV, the PVA, the AMVETS, and the Vietnam Vets and all the other groups besides.

Most importantly, America's veterans must demand it. Veterans need to hear the call one more time.

Together we can restore the funds and keep our covenant with the veteran.

Mr. President, today the Vice President announced that the White House is going to be asking for another \$1 billion. Veterans organizations last week—I thank them—came together with us and presented this data. We said there are huge problems in the country; a lot of veterans aren't going to get the care they need and the care that they deserve.

The Vice President stated the White House is going to ask for an additional \$1 billion. I thank the Vice President for his announcement. That helps. However, we are going to have to do a lot better. That still leaves us with a \$2 billion shortfall. To my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and to the White House and to the Vice President, I say that the veterans community is organizing. It is good grassroots politics. They are going to hold us all accountable. We will have to do a lot better.

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#### STOP WORSENING REPRESSION IN BURMA

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I want to speak today on the distressing human rights situation in Burma. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN, held their Annual Ministerial Meeting in Singapore this weekend. And this week Secretary Albright will be in Singapore for the ASEAN regional forum and the Post-Ministerial Conference. It is essential

that during all of these meetings serious attention is focused on the worsening human rights situation in Burma.

We haven't heard much about Burma in the media recently. There have been no major news events in Burma recently to grab the attention of the world: No Tiananmen Square scale massacres, no Kosovo scale dislocations, no bloody street clashes like we've seen in East Timor or Iran. But in Burma today something equally chilling is proceeding, out of the world's view: A slow, systematic strangling of the democratic opposition. Since last fall, the ruling military regime has detained, threatened and tortured opposition party members in increasing numbers. At least 150 senior members of the opposition National League for Democracy are being held in government detention centers. 3,000 political prisoners are held in Rangoon's notorious Insein prison. The regime has forced or coerced nearly 40,000 others to resign from the opposition party in recent months. In a videotape smuggled out of Burma in April and delivered to the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva, the leader of the National League for Democracy, Aung San Suu Kyi, said government repression had worsened greatly in the past year on a scale "the world has not yet grasped." She said on the tape: "What we have suffered over the last year is far more than we have suffered over the last six or seven years." According to one Western official, the regime intends to do nothing less than eradicate the opposition "once and for all."

Mr. President, most of this repression takes place quietly, through intimidation, arrests at night and other activities out of the public eye. The Burmese regime carefully controls access to the country for journalists. So we have no video footage of the repression and only scant reporting from a few brave journalists and human rights workers. But just because we cannot see what is going on in Burma does not mean we can ignore it. It is all the more important for us to speak about the situation there and show our support for the forces of democracy and human rights.

In July 1997, when Burma became a full ASEAN member, ASEAN countries claimed that such a move would encourage the regime—the so-called State Peace and Development Council, or SPDC, to improve its human rights record. In fact the opposite has been true. As the Washington Post put it in a recent editorial: "ASEAN's logic was familiar: Engagement with the outside world would persuade Burma's dictators to relax their repressive rule. The verdict on this test case of the engagement theory thus far is clear: The behavior of the thugs who run Burma has worsened, and so has life for most Burmese."

Not only has the SPDC stepped up its repression of the opposition party, the National League for Democracy, it has intensified its campaign of oppression against the country's ethnic minorities. The regime has increased forcible relocation programs in the Karen, Karenni, and Shan States. The use of forced labor in all seven ethnic minority states continues at a high level, and forced portering occurs wherever there are counter-insurgency activities.

Amnesty International has just issued three new reports which describe in compelling detail the harsh, relentless mistreatment of farmers and other civilians of ethnic minority groups in rural areas. Let me read a few brief passages from these excellent, detailed reports:

In February 1999, Amnesty International interviewed recently arrived Shan refugees in Thailand in order to obtain an update on the human rights situation in the central Shan State. The pattern of violations has remained the same, including forced labor and portering, extrajudicial killings, and ill-treatment of villagers. Troops also routinely stole villagers' rice supplies, cattle, and gold, using them to sell or to feed themselves. According to reports, Army officers do not provide their troops with adequate supplies so troops in effect live off the villagers. One 33 year-old farmer from Murngnai township described the relationship between the Shan people and the army:

Before, I learned that the armed forces are supposed to protect people, but they are repressing people. If you can't give them everything they want, they consider you as their enemy . . . it is illogical, the army is forcing the people to protect them, instead of vice-versa.

Amnesty International also reports similar abuses in Karen state:

Karen refugees interviewed in Thailand cited several reasons for leaving their homes: Some had previously been forced out of their villages by the Burmese army and had been hiding in the forest. They feared being shot on sight by the military because they occupied "black areas" where the insurgents were allegedly active. Many others fled directly from their home villages in the face of village burnings, constant demands for forced labor, looting of food and supplies, and extrajudicial killings at the hands of the military.

These human rights violations took place in the context of widespread counter-insurgency activities against the Karen National Union (KNU) one of the last remaining armed ethnic minority opposition groups still fighting the military government. Guerilla fighting between the two groups continues, but the primary victims are Karen civilians. Civilians are at risk of torture and extrajudicial executions by the military, who appear to automatically assume that they supported or

were even members of the KNU. Civilians also became sitting targets for constant demands by the army for forced labor or portering duties. As one Karen refugee explained to Amnesty International, "Even though we are civilians, the military treats us like their enemy."

A similar situation exists in Karenni State. Three-quarters of the dozens of Karenni refugees interviewed by Amnesty International in February 1999 were forced by the military to work as unpaid laborers. They were in effect an unwilling pool of laborers which the military drew from to work in military bases, build roads, and clear land. When asked why they decided to flee to Thailand, many refugees said that forced labor duties made it impossible for them to survive and do work to support themselves. Several of them also mentioned that forced labor demands had increased during 1998.

Unpaid forced labor is in contravention of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention No. 29, which the government of Burma signed in 1955. The ILO has repeatedly raised the issue with the government and in June 1996 took the rare step of appointing a Commission of Inquiry. In August 1998 the Commission published a comprehensive report, which found the government of Burma ". . . guilty of an international crime that is also, if committed in a widespread or systematic manner, a crime against humanity."

Mr. President, I am under no illusion that the military regime in Burma will reform overnight and end its human rights abuses. But I think it is critically important that we keep the world's attention focused on the terrible repression of democracy and abuse of ethnic minorities going on there. I hope our message of concern, backed by the invaluable reporting done by Amnesty International, will get through somehow to the Burmese people and to their courageous leader, Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi.

ASEAN member countries are gathering in Singapore currently for a series of meetings. We need to encourage them to develop a new strategy for dealing with the SPDC's intransigence regarding human rights. Now that criticism of fellow ASEAN members is no longer completely taboo, I hope some of the ASEAN countries that have improved their own human rights records will take the initiative to prod the Burmese to move in the right direction. The ASEAN regional forum (ARF), which deals with Asian security issues, will meet at the same time and should address this as a security problem. Western nations, including the U.S., who will also be present at the ARF should work closely with all concerned countries to encourage the SPDC to improve its human rights record.