

# IRAQ VETS VICTIMS OF THE DRUG WAR

**"Guys who wouldn't cry in a combat zone when their best friend was killed, they break down crying in front of me. And they tell me about all they can do now is bounce from job to job, drink, do drugs, and sit home contemplating suicide to end the pain."**

**– Cpl. Cloy Richards, USMC<sup>1</sup>**

Our troops in Iraq have been fighting under conditions described as more dangerous and stressful than Viet Nam.<sup>2</sup> Many have served multiple tours. Ninety percent have been shot at or experienced bombings. Most know somebody who was wounded. One Army study showed that nearly a fifth of combat troops suffer Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).<sup>3</sup>

Incredibly, they can be dishonorably discharged for alcohol related misconduct or illegal drug use even though this self medication was directly related to combat stress. And with a dishonorable discharge, all benefits are cancelled – including treatment for PTSD.<sup>4</sup>

But if the symptoms develop after they come home they may be in for even more grief. The Veterans Administration has a backlog of 600,000 disability cases with an estimated 640,000 to come.<sup>5</sup> This unanticipated flood of casualties means that soldiers who don't have urgent and obvious physical symptoms will just have to get in line.

And while they're

waiting for treatment, if they turn to booze or drugs to get through the nights of horror, the VA will often turn them away. Some VA outlets require veterans to be alcohol and drug free for six months before they get treatment.<sup>6</sup>



**Failure to provide prompt treatment for all returning troops is an outrage that demands action by Congress.**

**Common Sense for Drug Policy**  
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