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NEWS RELEASE



Congressman Jim Hanley

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Congressman James Hanley [32nd Dist. N.Y.] is urging all of his colleagues in the House of Representatives to correct what he calls "a great injustice by the Armed Forces and by society" to a number of Vietnam veterans.

In a speech delivered on the House floor, Rep. Hanley took issue with the Defense Department's continued use of a Separation Program Number (SPN) on military discharge forms. The SPN Code brands veterans as less than desirable individuals, even though they may have been discharged under honorable conditions. It has cost many veterans employment and educational opportunities.

"The SPN Code, which was allegedly designed for use only by the Department of Defense in determining an individual's desirability for reenlistment, has been roundly criticized," Hanley said. "From what I have been able to ascertain, SPN Codes were assigned on the basis of comments entered by various officers. The basis for such comments could be as arbitrary as a personality conflict between an officer and a serviceman. In the majority of cases there is no concrete evidence to support the remarks. The serviceman is given no opportunity to refute the assignment of an SPN Code, and most veterans are completely unaware of the Code's existence or meaning."

Congressman Hanley continued, "Through some mysterious means, lists of Code interpretations have been widely made available to large corporations, colleges, and private employers, who can easily look at the veteran's discharge papers and interpret the meaning of the SPN Code. Through use of the Code, veterans have been unknowingly branded as having character or behavior disorders."

Rep. Hanley went on to attack the Defense Department for its continued use of the SPN Code, even after it promised to undertake administrative action to eliminate the Code, rather than face a Congressional investigation and possible legislative action. Hanley said that while SPN Codes are no longer used by the Armed Forces, those veterans discharged prior to May, 1974, still have SPN Codes on their military records.

Rep. Hanley ended his speech claiming that these Vietnam veterans have suffered far too long. "I urge all of my colleagues in the House to join me in contacting the Secretary of Defense to let him know of our concern in this matter, and to ask that he take administrative action to eliminate all reference to an SPN Code from all copies of a serviceman's records. If our unified actions are unsuccessful, it may prove necessary to enact legislation in order to correct this gross injustice to Vietnam veterans."

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