

The American Legion Applauds VA Settlement of Identity Theft Claims

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WASHINGTON, DC (FEBRUARY 24, 2009) – The American Legion is pleased to learn that veterans exposed to possible identity theft in 2006 are now the subjects of a \$20-million court settlement from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Legion was an early and strong advocate for veterans in the incident that prompted the VA’s action.

“Though three years down the road, it is encouraging to note that the VA is doing the right thing,” said David K. Rehbein, National Commander of The American Legion.

In 2006, a VA data analyst admitted to taking home – without permission – a laptop computer and external data drive containing the names, birth dates and Social Security numbers of up to 26.5-million veterans and active duty members of the armed forces. The laptop and drive were then lost in a burglary of the analyst’s home on May 3rd of that year. The VA employee reported the loss promptly and the computer and drive were subsequently recovered intact, but veterans were not notified of the incident until nearly three weeks after the fact.

Upon learning of the privacy breach, The American Legion set up a phone bank to answer queries from veterans who feared identity theft and urged members of Congress to seek redress for the wrongdoing.

Lawyers for the Department of Veterans Affairs and plaintiffs have now reached a settlement agreement. Under its terms, veterans who demonstrate that they have been harmed by the data theft will be entitled to payments ranging from \$75 to \$1,500 each from a \$20-million U.S. Treasury Department fund. After all settlement payments are made, any surplus funds will be donated to veterans’ charities.

“We fought hard on behalf of our vets and troops whose privacy could have been seriously comprised,” concluded Commander Rehbein, “and we are very pleased with this outcome.”