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Attention Newsroom—News Release

September 20, 2004
For Immediate Release

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Veterans Affairs' Secretary Scocos Issues Call to Action for Returning Troops

"Mission: Welcome Home" outlines aggressive community outreach for troops and families

(Madison)—Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary John Scocos announced this afternoon a major initiative that will affect thousands of returning veterans and their families. In a keynote address at the Governor's Conference on Aging in Middleton, Scocos outlined his "Mission: Welcome Home" agenda that will aggressively focus on improving services and outreach efforts for new veterans.

"This stands to be the largest paradigm shift for veterans in this state since the end of World War II," said Scocos. "We have a tremendous opportunity to build partnerships with businesses, organizations, communities and older veterans in an effort to help returning troops. This is a vision based on practical applications, limited budgets and a wealth of experience our aging veterans have to offer new veterans."

Scocos told a crowd of seniors, many veterans from World War II and the Korean War, that this new Mission would rely heavily on the older generation of veterans to build a strong bridge to the ever-increasing number of younger generation veterans who are beginning to return from war theaters around the world.

"We have to be prepared," Scocos said this afternoon. "We have to see the future and implement a vision that serves these brave people, welcomes them home and reintegrates them into our communities."

Scocos described "Mission: Welcome Home" as a "mission of the heart, not the pocketbook," given the budgetary constraints of state and federal veterans programs. The Mission agenda consists of these early agenda items, according to the Secretary:

- The creation of an "**Ambassador**" program to help answer the question of, "What can I do to help?" The program would link veterans, who have experience in utilizing veterans' services and reintegration challenges, with returning troops and their families. Civilians and community organizations will also be encouraged to participate.
- Building relationships with Chambers of Commerce in Wisconsin and businesses in their respective communities to provide **meaningful Welcome Home Baskets** to help new veterans and their families get a fresh start upon return to local communities. For example: discounts on new cars, financial planning services, groceries, resume-writing assistance, etc.
- **Providing Recently Separated Veterans Program (RSVP) packets** to every military service member returning to Wisconsin, which simultaneously introduce "Mission: Welcome Home" and more clearly spell out the services available and organizations participating in the Mission.
- **Providing a new and improved WDVA website** that will allow veterans easier access to information and direct application to services that are available to them as they re-integrate into civilian life and their communities.

(more)

Scocos said the Mission agenda is a building process that has already been getting a tremendous response from the Governor, legislators, older veterans, businesses, Chamber representatives and family members of those who have had to struggle while their loved ones are off in other theaters of engagement. Scocos hopes to expand “Mission: Welcome Home,” particularly through the efforts of community-based organizations and volunteers as he and his staff continue their outreach efforts across the state and receive input from interested groups and individuals.