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Sen. Joe Lieberman, right, talks with Francis Paul, left, and Amos Holloway, both residents of Homes for the Brave, Friday in Bridgeport. Lieberman visited to discuss homelessness and health care needs among veterans.

# Lieberman hears veterans' plight

By **ROB VARNON**  
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It is an unpardonable shame.

More than 200,000 veterans who served on battle fields and humanitarian missions, in peacetime and in war, are homeless in America. Thousands more are in prison and others are in need of critical health care, but must struggle to get it.

Sen. Joe Lieberman came face to face with the statistics Friday while touring the Homes for the Brave in Bridgeport. Homes for the Brave is a fully occupied 42-bed facility that provides a variety of services to help homeless veterans get jobs and homes of their own.

With the The WorkPlace Inc., a job development board, Homes for the Brave won a \$296,000 grant to continue its work at 655 Park Ave. This is the fifth year in a row The WorkPlace and Homes for the Brave received the grant.

Joseph Carbone, president and chief executive officer of The WorkPlace, said the more than \$1 million has helped 149 homeless veterans find jobs and more than 271 permanent homes. There are 1,200 homeless veterans in Southwest Connecticut.

While praising Homes for the Brave, Lieberman, a Democrat who ran as an independent, admitted the country has been failing many of its veterans.

"It should be seen as a national disgrace," Lieberman said of the number of veterans who are homeless.

The senator toured the facility and talked briefly with several residents, including Amos Holloway.

"I wanted to be a Marine," said Holloway, 47, while standing in the hallway of the home's basement after Lieberman had left. Holloway had to leave a discussion with Lieberman about computer skills because his eyes can't stand the glare from bright lights used in most rooms.

Holloway has diabetes and his eyesight is going. He's had trouble getting access to care, but he said he has high hopes he will be able to get some treatment to save his vision beginning next week.

Holloway served in the Marine Corps from 1977 to 1983, mostly in Japan. He dropped out of Bassick High School to join because he said he was heading down "the wrong path" and he believed the Marine Corps would help him.

"I was supposed to finish high school in there," Holloway said. But he didn't get around to it. After being discharged, he came home to Connecticut and was working as a furniture mover until 2005. He went through a divorce and had been living in his car for about a month before he found Homes for the Brave.

He said he wasn't sure if anything could have prevented his problems, but Homes for the Brave has been helping him.

"This place is a blessing," he said. Holloway's story is a familiar one, Cheryl Beversdorf, the president and chief executive officer of the Washington, D.C.-based National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, said by phone Friday.

The three major contributing factors to veteran homelessness are health problems, lack of job skills and skyrocketing housing

costs, she said.

While advertisements for the U.S. military tout the valuable skills recruits can get while in the military, not everyone is guaranteed to learn one of those skills, she said.

Andy James, a state Department of Labor veterans' employment representative, said the U.S. Army, the biggest branch of the military, has to find infantrymen first before anything else, so not everyone gets to train in a particular field.

James said, however, overcoming a lack of skills isn't a primary problem for veterans, because most are disciplined and adaptable and can learn anything.

Matthew Gachi, chairman of the board for Homes for the Brave, said some vets encounter problems well after they've taken off the uniform. Their homelessness can very well not be due to their service. For example, Gachi said, some veterans become homeless when they lose their jobs because a company is "downsizing." Others go through a divorce.

"It's very case specific," he said.

That's why Homes for the Brave offers more than just a roof, according to Gachi. The residents get counseling for job searches and for social and medical issues.

During the tour, Lieberman discussed the program with residents.

Steve Miller, a resident who served in the Navy from 1962 to 1966, told Lieberman Homes for the Brave should serve as a national model. Miller was the only one who raised the issue of Lieberman's support for the Iraq War.

"This is another fiasco to make

profiteering more profitable," Miller said, adding he hopes Lieberman changes his stance and will push to impeach President Bush.

Lieberman listened politely and admitted mistakes were made heading into the war, but how the nation withdraws is important.

After his tour, Lieberman, a member of the Senate Arms Services Committee, said every soldier should be getting some sort of job training while in the military. He also said the health care veterans and soldiers receive is the best in the world, but more needs to be done. He also said there is legislation under consideration to extend access to college funding for longer periods of time for veterans.

But there is still a lot to do, he said and it needs to include partnerships with the private sector.

Beversdorf said it can get discouraging trying to get people to help veterans.

"I sit in this office and sometimes I say, 'does anybody care?'" said Beversdorf, a Vietnam-era nurse who cared for wounded soldiers in Japan in 1969. She said she just hopes the federal government will put more funding into caring for soldiers and veterans.

For Holloway, his hope is even simpler; "I just want to keep my sight. Pray for me."

*Veterans who need assistance can contact The WorkPlace Inc., 350 Fairfield Ave., Bridgeport. They can call 610-8500, or visit them online at [www.nchv.org](http://www.nchv.org).*

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