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Attachments:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The American Legion celebrates signing of veterans caregivers and families relief act

But National Commander urges lawmakers to “not forget” veterans of previous eras

WASHINGTON (May 6, 2010) – With an American Legion official standing behind him Wednesday afternoon, President Barack Obama signed into law the long-awaited Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act. As its name implies, the act calls for the government to provide health benefits, training, respite care and, in some cases, monetary stipends for individuals who provide at-home care for severely ill and disabled veterans.

“This is a big step in the right direction,” said The American Legion’s National Commander Clarence E. Hill. “Finally, the sacrifices made by the families and caregivers of our wounded warriors are being recognized and, more importantly, their needs are beginning to be met.”

Many of The American Legion's top legislative priorities have been included in the congressionally popular Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act, including improvements for women's services at VA health-care facilities, better support for caregivers of disabled veterans, expanded mental-health services and more funding to help reduce homelessness among veterans.

As it stands, the benefits of the new act apply primarily, though not exclusively, to veterans and caregivers of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) – the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. According to a House Veterans Affairs Committee press release, the act does require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) “...to provide hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care for certain Vietnam-era veterans exposed to herbicide, and Gulf-War era veterans who have insufficient medical evidence to establish a service-connected disability” but contains little else specific to veterans of the pre-9/11 era other than to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to “...submit a one-time report on the feasibility and advisability of expanding the program to cover veterans who have a serious injury incurred or aggravated before September 11, 2001.”

“The American Legion has urged and will continue to press congressional leaders to expand this very important but incomplete legislation to benefit all seriously injured and ill veterans and their caregivers,” Hill said. “Our nation must not forget them.”

The estimated cost of implementing all current provisions of the act is \$1.7 billion over the next five years. Observers say future funding will be the biggest obstacle to expansion of its benefits.

With a current membership of 2.5-million wartime veterans, The American Legion is the nation’s largest veterans service organization. It was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 14,000 posts across the nation.

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