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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **The American Legion Applauds Report and Recommendations on Gulf War Illness**

WASHINGTON (November 17, 2008) – The American Legion is expressing strong support for a report by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) that promises better care for veterans diagnosed with Gulf War illness.

The report, *Gulf War Illness and the Health of Gulf War Veterans: Scientific Findings and Recommendations*, was released today by the VA's Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses (RAC). In it, the committee identified many scientific issues for which additional research is needed. Highest priority was given to research focused on identifying effective treatments for Gulf War illness. High priority was also given to research directed at identifying objective biological markers associated with Gulf War illness, especially those that advance efforts to improve diagnostic testing. The report also recommends annual allocations of not less than \$60 million for Gulf War research in the federal budget.

"The American Legion is very pleased that research aimed at identifying effective treatment for the various maladies plaguing our Gulf War veterans is at the top of the VA committee's list of priorities," said National Commander David Rehbein. "After all, it has been more than 17 years since the end of the 1991 Gulf War and it is about time that these warriors' war-related health problems be addressed aggressively," he continued. "This is a solid report and The American Legion urges the Secretary [of VA] to act quickly on the committee's recommendations," added Rehbein.

According to the RAC, about 25 percent to 32 percent of Gulf War veterans are affected by a complex of symptoms, commonly referred to as Gulf War illness, over and above rates in contemporary military personnel who did not deploy to the 1990-91 Gulf War. This equates to between 175,000 and 210,000 veterans out of the nearly 700,000 troops deployed during the war. The symptoms of Gulf War illness typically include some combination of chronic headaches, cognitive difficulties, widespread pain, unexplained fatigue, chronic diarrhea, skin rashes, respiratory problems and other abnormalities. Even more alarming, according to the report, "[t]he federal Gulf War research effort has yet to provide tangible results in achieving its ultimate objective, that is, to improve the health of ill Gulf War veterans." A small number of treatments have been studied and none have been shown to provide significant benefit for a substantial number of veterans.

The American Legion is encouraged that the report also addresses the relationship between research and VA disability benefits. VA's ability to compensate veterans for disabilities related to their Gulf War service is directly related to research and other scientific findings. In 1998, Congress passed legislation that directed VA to contract with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to

review available research and issue reports that are used by the Secretary of the VA to make decisions regarding Gulf War-related disability compensation. There have been nine reports released to date but none have resulted in additional compensation benefits for ill Gulf War veterans. The committee concluded that the IOM reports have been “skewed and limited by a restrictive approach to the scientific tasks mandated by Congress, an approach directed by VA in commissioning the reports.” The committee recommended that VA contract with IOM to redo previously completed Gulf War and Health reports to adhere to requirements set forth by Congress.

The RAC, established by Public Law 105-368, is a panel of prominent scientists and distinguished veterans that provides advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs on proposed research plans and strategies related to understanding and treating the health consequences of military service in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during the 1990-91 Gulf War. This is the committee’s first major report since 2004.

With a current membership of 2.6-million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and patriotic youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 14,000 posts across the nation.