

From: March, Joseph H.
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Attachments:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New vets budget is cause for celebration, says The American Legion

WASHINGTON, DC (April 30, 2009) - The National Commander of the nation's largest veterans' service organization expressed appreciation for yesterday's congressional passage of the fiscal year 2010 federal budget resolution with its proposed Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) funding increase.

"The American Legion is pleased with the projected VA funding level and especially the provision allowing advance appropriations for medical care in FY 2011," said Commander David K. Rehbein. "This effort to assure timely, predictable and sufficient funding for VA medical care is something that the entire veterans' community supports."

With a favorable U.S. House vote mid-afternoon yesterday and an evening passage by the Senate, Congress has now adopted a conference report on the \$3.6 trillion fiscal 2010 budget resolution. The measure includes an unprecedented, nearly 12-percent increase in funding for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The spending plan provides a \$53.4-billion VA appropriation -- \$5.6-billion over the 2009 allocation. The budget agreement also contains a provision long supported by The American Legion allowing Congress to provide annual discretionary appropriations for VA medical services in both FY 2010 and 2011. This gives assurance to the veterans' health care system administrators that they will receive funding at the start of the new fiscal year, even if funding of other portions of the appropriations bill are delayed.

"Only four times in the last two decades have Department of Veterans Affairs appropriations been adopted at the beginning of the new fiscal year," said Commander Rehbein. "For too long VA administrators have been told 'the check's in the mail' as they waited for final congressional action on the VA budget. Advance appropriations will be a tremendous boon for the VA and, by extension, this nation's veterans," continued the Commander. "No longer will the VA be plagued by funding delays - delays that often lead to rationing of care, delays in service, postponements in building maintenance, hiring freezes and the like, that often compromised the quality and timeliness of veterans medical care."

"This is a good news day for our veterans," concluded Commander Rehbein. "Today we must thank the President and the congressional leadership for making veterans and their families a national priority."

The American Legion joined with eight other veterans service organizations in a "Partnership for Veterans Health Care Budget Reform" that helped author and promote legislation that has led to these needed budget provisions. The Legion's partners included AMVETS, Blinded Veterans Association, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars and Vietnam Veterans of America.

The American Legion, celebrating its 90th year in existence this year, is the nation's largest veterans' service organization with 2.6 million members. Its website address is www.legion.org.

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