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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Legion calls for wiser spending in VA budget

WASHINGTON (Feb. 18, 2011) – At a congressional hearing Feb. 17, The American Legion urged Congress to invest wisely in key infrastructure areas, such as construction and vital research, in VA’s fiscal 2012 budget.

Currently, VA is asking for \$590 million in major construction and \$550 million in minor construction. The amount falls far short of the \$2 billion recommended to Congress last September by American Legion National Commander Jimmie Foster.

Tim Tetz, the Legion’s legislative director, advised the committee, “Cutting money from construction creates only illusory savings.”

Noting that VA’s fiscal 2012 request for construction funding is about \$800 million less than its fiscal 2011 numbers, Tetz said the department’s infrastructure “is one of those things you can pay for either now or later – and if you choose to pay later, you always pay more.

“How can we complete the new projects in Las Vegas, Denver, New Orleans, and upgrades needed nationwide without adequate funding?” Tetz asked the committee, chaired by Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla.

The American Legion strongly supports VA’s request for a 10-percent increase in discretionary funding, which includes \$6 billion for the care of warriors who suffer from TBI, PTS and other mental-health issues.

“But is it enough?” Tetz asked the committee. “This money seems to be directed at the immediate medical needs of these veterans – perhaps not the long-term needs of these veterans.

Tetz said the VA budget request falls short on research funding. “There is no reason, given the intellectual and technological might of this nation, that VA should not be the world’s leading authority in research on PTSD, TBI, and amputation and prosthetic medicine. The VA needs to be out in the front, not playing catch-up with the rest of the world.”

The American Legion wants VA to ensure “seamless” health care for veterans after they are discharged from active duty.

“Does (the budget) address the chasm between advances in treatment in DoD, and those available once the servicemember separates and returns to their home in upstate New York or rural Indiana?” Tetz asked.

“The great treatment they get when they put on the uniform needs to be the same

treatment they get when they put on a suit.”

Toward the end of his testimony, Tetz said “We realize there’s only so much money. We realize The American Legion, as well as every other veterans organization, comes here with expanded visions of what we need, what our veterans need, (and) what the VA must deliver.

“We remain committed to help you find savings with the existing budget, chances for (the) shifting of resources to serve the needs of the veteran sitting in the clinic in Florida, and the future veteran sitting in the forward observation base in Afghanistan.”

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