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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Legion to DoD: Don't increase TRICARE fees

WASHINGTON (Feb. 10, 2011) – With the Department of Defense on the verge of increasing fees for its TRICARE insurance program, the nation's largest veterans service organization remains strongly opposed to any new out-of-pocket health-care costs for those who use the program.

“We have opposed such increases for several years, and are proud of the fact that TRICARE fees have never been raised in the 15-year history of the program,” said Jimmie Foster, national commander of The American Legion. “We are well aware that DoD needs to reduce its budget, but they need to look elsewhere and leave TRICARE alone.”

Defense Secretary Robert Gates wants to reduce his DoD's health-care costs by \$7 billion over the next five years, and TRICARE's annual enrollment fees have been eyed for increases to help do that. Fees are currently \$230 for individuals and \$460 for families.

Gates said health-care costs are “eating the department alive” and are on track to make up 10 percent of the entire U.S. defense budget by 2015.

The Legion's top official says TRICARE is one benefit that should not be compromised to improve the federal government's bottom line. “We need to remember that our military retirees have given decades of service to their country, risking their lives in combat, serving under arduous conditions, and being separated from their families,” Foster said. “Keeping their insurance rates low is one way we can repay them for their honorable service.”

At its national convention in Milwaukee last August, The American Legion passed a resolution that opposed any increases to TRICARE enrollment fees, deductibles or premiums. The resolution called such proposals “an erosion of quality-of-life benefits from a grateful nation” and “inappropriate and out of line with career servicemembers' unique sacrifices.”

Foster said many retired veterans are on fixed incomes “and the last thing they need in this economy is a rate increase for their health insurance.”

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