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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legion backs Nevada senator's push to pass VA funding law

WASHINGTON (Sept. 16, 2011) -- The American Legion is lauding freshman Sen. Dean Heller of Nevada for his campaign to encourage colleagues to put aside their differences and pass quickly a bill to provide funding for military construction and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The Senate and House of Representatives passed separate versions of the Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (H.R. 2055) in mid-summer, but minor differences remain that must be reconciled before the legislation can be combined and signed into law by President Obama.

On Sept. 15, Heller, a new Senator but veteran Congressman, sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, Speaker of the House John Boehner and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, urging them to pass the legislation as soon as possible so as to not endanger, among other things, the timely payment of benefits to veterans.

"The benefits owed to the men and women who have served in the Armed Services should not be jeopardized because Congress has not had the self-discipline necessary to pass a responsible budget," Heller said. "Both parties from the House and Senate need to work out their differences and pass this legislation so our veterans can be certain they will receive every benefit promised to them. Moving this process forward is the least we can do for the men and women who have selflessly served our nation and risked their lives for the freedoms we enjoy today," he said.

"This is a point I'll be making in my testimony before the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committee on Sept. 21st," said Fang A. Wong, newly elected national commander of The American Legion. "It would be easy for Congress to include VA funding in a continuing resolution, but that won't get the job done. They need to iron out a few minor differences in conference committee – this should be completed outside of a continuing resolution."

To date, a conference committee to settle the differences between the House and Senate versions of the Mil Con-VA Appropriations Act has not been formed. "Our nation's veterans didn't take the easy way out while serving their nation," Wong said. "The best thing Congress can do is fund the VA for the entire fiscal year and stop playing political games with this issue."

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