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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Rep. Bob Filner honored with Legion's Distinguished Public Service Award**

WASHINGTON (February 28, 2012) -- Called a true friend of veterans, U.S. Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif., was awarded The American Legion Distinguished Public Service Award today during the organization's 52nd annual Washington Conference.

Filner served as chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs in the 110th and 111th Congress. He is running for mayor of San Diego and will leave the House at the end of this year.

"During his tenure as committee chairman, Rep. Filner presided over significant legislation to provide historic budget increases for veterans, secured advanced appropriations for (the Department of Veterans Affairs), expanded access to VA health care and improved health services for all veterans," American Legion National Commander Fang A. Wong said. "He's a true friend of veterans."

Saying he was humbled to accept the award, Filner admitted protesting the Vietnam War. "When you all came back, I didn't spit on you," he said. "But we did not recognize your heroism. We did not recognize the sacrifice. We did not recognize, as a nation, the price that you all paid. I have learned about that, and it has affected everything I do every day in Congress."

Filner said one step toward righting that wrong, as well as toward reducing VA's massive backlog of disability claims, is by accepting all claims involving exposure to Agent Orange — not just soldiers who served on the ground in Vietnam.

"That would say thank you. That would say welcome home," Filner said. "(Those claims) have been in the pipeline for how long? Thirty years? Forty years? It's time to say thank you by honoring all of those Agent Orange claims. Just grant them.

"They say, 'Well, it may cost too much.' How we can afford not to? Let's say it cost \$1 billion, maybe \$2 billion. You know what our debt is? \$14 trillion. Are you going to tell me you're going to balance the budget on the backs of our Vietnam vets by not granting these claims?"

Filner said the same mistakes cannot be made with the current generation of U.S. servicemembers returning home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "The best thing we can do ... is give them a job," he said. "Let's welcome home everybody in this country who has served our nation by making sure they have a job and are contributing."

With a current membership of 2.4-million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans

affairs, Americanism, and youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 14,000 posts across the nation.

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