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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legion: shutdown must not harm defense

WASHINGTON (Sept. 30, 2013) -- National security cannot be diminished in the event of a federal government shutdown, American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger said Monday.

"The political impasse that is threatening to shut down the U.S. government cannot and must not compromise the readiness and welfare of our armed forces and their support personnel," said Dellinger, who leads the nation's largest veterans service organization.

The Pentagon briefed the 2.4-million-member American Legion last week about the possible effects of a government shutdown on military pay and civilian support duties. The Department of Defense said that servicemembers' Oct. 1 paychecks would be issued as usual, but pay after that date could be threatened by a government shutdown beyond the first week of the month, even though troops would be ordered to remain on duty. On the civilian side, what are termed "essential operations" – such as fire, police security and combat operations – would continue regardless of a government shutdown, but as many as 400,000 other civilian employees supporting the military could be temporarily furloughed. Pay for furloughed civilians would be issued only by an act of Congress, said the Pentagon.

"Members of Congress must assure us that a government shutdown must not in any way affect our nation's defense, Dellinger added. "Servicemembers must be paid regardless of the government's status. Troop morale would be seriously compromised, as would quality of life for military families, by the economic uncertainty resulting from a pay freeze.

"As for civilians who work for the DoD and support our national security, furloughs and pay freezes are equally serious and threatening to our national security, especially at a time of war. Congress must act to make sure that our troops are paid, no matter what, and that their civilian supporters continue on duty and on the payroll. This is absolutely essential."

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