WASHINGTON (November 2, 2015) -- American Legion National Commander Dale Barnett said the recent Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) recommending the closure of a popular and historic veterans hospital in Hot Springs, S.D., “sends exactly the wrong message” to veterans needing essential health-care services but often opting to forgo treatment.

“A veteran might not make the effort to travel all the way to Rapid City,” Barnett pointed out. “The Hot Springs and surrounding community rely on the VA Medical Center, which is why delegates at The American Legion National Convention in Baltimore last summer unanimously passed a resolution reaffirming its support for the VA Medical Center and residential rehabilitation services there.”

The resolution also calls for the creation of a Center of Excellence for the treatment of post-traumatic stress, substance abuse and homelessness prevention at the VA campus in Hot Springs. “While the hospital closure would be a blow to veterans in the region, we hope that VA plans to mitigate this pain by constructing a state-of-the-art Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), so it can still provide some services to veterans in the area,” Barnett said.

The released EIS, which is still a draft, is subject to a public comment period prior to a final decision by VA Secretary Robert McDonald. The comment period is until Jan. 5, 2016. Barnett is encouraging American Legion Family members and other interested parties to submit their comments online or through regular mail. Public comments can be mailed to: Staff Assistant of the Director, VA Black Hills Health Care System, 113 Comanche Road, Fort Meade, S.D. 57741. Reference to “BHHCS Reconfiguration Draft EIS” should be included on the envelope. Online comments should be sent to vablackhillsfuture@va.gov.
With a current membership of 2.2 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 nearly 14,000 posts across the nation.

-30-

Media Contact: Andrea Dickerson, (202) 263-2982 / cell (202) 417-4090, adickerson@legion.org; John Raughter, (317) 630-1350 / cell (317) 441-8847, jraughter@legion.org