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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wong praises Army for review of PTSD cases

WASHINGTON (May 17, 2012) -- The nation's largest wartime veterans organization is applauding the U.S. Army's decision to launch a service-wide review of mental health cases dating back to 2001 to ensure that any soldiers suffering from behavioral health illnesses weren't denied appropriate medical retirement benefits.

The decision, made by Army Secretary John McHugh and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond Odierno, comes after several post-traumatic stress diagnoses at Madigan Army Medical Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord outside Seattle were wrongly reduced to lesser illnesses during medical retirement evaluations.

"We are pleased that the Army has chosen to right these wrongs and take a closer look at each of these cases," American Legion National Commander Fang A. Wong said. "The American Legion also thanks Sen. Patty Murray of Washington for her efforts in making this investigation a reality. Sen. Murray received complaints from soldiers about the way they were treated at Madigan, and she chose to act on their behalf.

"The American Legion has, time and time again, expressed its opposition to diagnosing any form of PTSD as a 'personality disorder,'" Wong continued. "Doing so belittles both the servicemember and the traumatic event he or she went through, and it limits their well-earned and deserved medical benefits. The Army's realization that there may have been misdiagnoses comes as no surprise to The American Legion. In hearing from several mental health experts and servicemembers in the past 16 months, we've learned that this was an ongoing problem."

The American Legion formed a Traumatic Brain Injury/Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Ad-Hoc Committee in October 2010 tasked with investigating the treatment methods used by the departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs, and reviewing alternative treatment methods. Since its formation, the committee has heard from both military and private-sector mental health experts, veterans and active-duty servicemembers, and their families.

"Our committee has heard from servicemembers who were told they had a pre-existing behavioral disorder and were denied the proper benefits or downgraded to lesser benefits," Wong said. "Already, more than 100 of these diagnoses have been restored to PTSD. That is a step in the right direction, and The American Legion urges the Army to continue until every wrong mental health diagnosis is reversed."

The Army will review a statistically valid cross section of cases and retirement evaluations from Army hospitals across the country dating back to 2001 to see whether

problems exist beyond Madigan.

"If it happened at Madigan, it could happen elsewhere," Wong said. "We are pleased the Army is taking that stance and evaluating its other medical facilities."

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