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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

111th Congress achieves banner year on veterans legislation

WASHINGTON *(*Oct. 13, 2010*)* – Congress may be receiving low approval ratings from the general voting population, but The American Legion says lawmakers have done quite well on veterans issues this year.

"The 111th Congress may be remembered for banner legislation such as health-care reform, financial regulation and the recovery act," said Jimmie Foster, national commander of the Legion. "But, in our view, the real successes were the passage of bills that affected nearly every veteran in America."

Chief among the pieces of veteran-related legislation was the "Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009," which guarantees appropriations for VA health care one full year in advance.

Another significant milestone for the 111th Congress was the "Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2010." The bill included substantially increased VA funding for fiscal 2010 – the agency's first budget to exceed $100 billion.

More recently enacted laws affecting veterans include the "Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010," which created a pilot program of comprehensive assistance for family caregivers, and also addressed a number of issues important to women veterans and those residing in rural areas.

A bill signed in July provided $13.4 billion to compensate Vietnam veterans who have suffered ill effects from exposure to the toxic herbicide, Agent Orange.

Within the past month, bills have been passed that provide a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for veterans receiving VA benefits, and expand state veterans nursing-home care to include parents whose children have died on active duty.

The American Legion's legislative director, Tim Tetz, said that, although Congress is becoming increasingly partisan, "the bipartisan passage of so many veterans bills by the 111th Congress certainly demonstrates its commitment to honor the sacrifices of those who have served in uniform."

Still awaiting President Obama's signature is the "Veterans Benefits Act of 2010." This omnibus legislation will clarify and, in some cases, expand certain benefits – including those related to homeless veterans, burial benefits, and adaptive automobile allowances for disabled veterans.

Foster laid out The American Legion's legislative agenda for next year during testimony before a joint House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing on Sept. 22. His list of priorities included a repeal of the disabled veterans tax, which penalizes military retirees by reducing their pension payments if they are receiving VA disability compensation.

The Legion also favors extending Post-9/11 GI Bill education funding to include vocational and distance-learning curricula, and providing benefits to more National Guard and reserve servicemembers.

Despite the work yet to be done, the Legion's national commander reiterated his praise for the 111th Congress. Reflecting upon his visit to Washington last month, Foster said, "I came to town to deliver my testimony on the needs of our nation's veterans. Before I left, Congress had passed half of our legislative agenda."

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