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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Legion opposes proposal to cut VA spending

WASHINGTON (Jan. 28, 2011) - Responding to a proposal by Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota to freeze VA health-care spending and cut veterans disability payments to help reduce federal spending, American Legion national commander Jimmie L. Foster said his organization steadfastly opposes the initiative.

"It is absurd to suggest such a thing when we are fighting two wars and creating more veterans every day who have served their country honorably and have already earned their benefits," said Jimmie Foster, national commander of The American Legion, the country's largest veterans service organization.

The plan, which proposes to cut a total of $400 billion in federal spending, is derived from an Oct. 28 report from the Heritage Foundation that projects $2.5 billion in savings from a freeze on VA health-care spending increases, and $1.9 billion in savings from scrapping disability payments for veterans already receiving Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) .

Peter Gaytan, executive director of The American Legion's office in Washington, said "Congress must find other ways to reduce federal spending that don't affect veterans benefits and health care.

"The need for high-quality veterans health care certainly isn't decreasing, so the VA budget shouldn't, either. Congress needs to stay focused on providing an adequate budget to care for those who have made sacrifices in Iraq, Afghanistan or in previous wars."

Tim Tetz, legislative director of The American Legion, said the idea of taking SSDI away from veterans receiving disability payments "has been floated before and thankfully defeated every time.

"Why would anyone want to take away disability benefits veterans have already paid for, simply because they have earned additional benefits through their honorable service in the military?"

The American Legion has consistently opposed any attempts by Congress to reduce or eliminate veterans benefits. It considers such benefits as earned, and has urged the federal government to find other methods to reduce its expanding budget.

The veterans service organization stands by the sentiments expressed long ago by George Washington: "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no matter how justified, shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their Nation."

"Of all the items in our federal budget that could be drastically cut, or dispensed with altogether, why would a member of Congress think it might be a good idea to take benefits away from those people who protect the very freedoms they operate under?" Foster asked.

Foster said he agreed that Congress needs to take decisive action in reducing the federal budget, "but we must be mindful of the sacrifices borne by the men and women who have served and sacrificed in America's armed forces."

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