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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legion stunned over National Defense Authorization Act

'This cannot stand,' says Hill

INDIANAPOLIS (Oct. 9, 2009) – Like a sequel to a bad horror movie, the Disabled Veterans' Tax has once again reared its ugly head and The American Legion is furious.

"The 2010 National Defense Authorization Act should be renamed the 'Unfinished Business Act of 2009,'" American Legion National Commander Clarence E. Hill said. "For more than a century, disabled military retirees had to unfairly forfeit portions of their retirement pay to offset their disability, even though they were the only Americans required to do this. Finally, after way too long, Congress and the White House promised to correct the injustice. Their piecemeal approach now has service-connected military retirees in three distinct groups – those who get all, those who get some, and those who get none. The president's promise, at least for Chapter 61medical retirees, is now being broken."

Although there are some portions of the Defense Authorization Act that The American Legion fully supports, Hill promised to use all of The American Legions resources to reinstate the scheduled phase-out of the Disabled Veterans' Tax, also known as concurrent receipt.

"There are good provisions such as a 3.4 percent pay raises for active-duty, Guard and Reserve members and a freeze on TRICARE inpatient co-payment increases, so the baby does not necessarily need to be tossed with the bathwater," Hill said. "But this bathwater is pretty contaminated and must be cleansed."

Moreover, the National Defense Authorization Act dropped a previously approved Senate provision that expressed the sense of Congress that military retirement and health benefits are the primary offset to the extraordinary demands and sacrifices inherent in a military career, that career members deserve a health benefit commensurate with their sacrifices, and that DoD needs to look at other ways to reduce health care spending than shifting more costs to military beneficiaries.

"When Congress drops language that would protect military beneficiaries from more cost- shifting, it means in plain English, 'watch your wallet,'" Hill said. "These are not second-class citizens, but rather America's heroes. It is time for a new bill to be introduced – Lest We Forget Act – to address

the nation's unfinished business concerning the military community. If Congress won't budge, then it's time for the Commander-in-Chief to take care of his troops – past, present

and future service members. The American Legion is not about to let this go."

Another provision that The American Legion strongly objects to is the elimination of a measure that would have ended compensation penalties for survivors of military personnel who died of service-caused casualties.

"So the Unfinished Business Act of 2009 reneges the Disabled Veterans' Tax, continues the Widows' Death Tax and exposes countless military retirees and their families to massive TRICARE fee increases," Hill said. "Is Congress expressing the thanks of a grateful nation? Is this really the Year of the Military Family**?**"

With a current membership of 2.5-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 more than 14,000 posts across the nation.

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