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Attachments:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The American Legion champions re-introduction of Vets Health Care Reform Bill

WASHINGTON, DC (Feb. 12, 2009) -- The Chairmen of both the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees have today re-introduced bills designed to streamline the funding of Department of Veterans Affairs health care programs and initiatives.

At an afternoon press conference, Senator Daniel Kahikina Akaka (D - HI) and Congressman Bob Filner (D - CA) announced the advancement of identical bills entitled the *Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009*.

Among the provisions of the bill is long sought-after advance appropriations for military veterans' health care administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The advance appropriations mechanism allows Congress to vote on funding levels a year in advance of the current budget cycle.

"Advance-appropriations of VA health care funds will have a couple of great benefits for our constituency," says David K. Rehbein, National Commander of The American Legion. "Knowing what money will be coming to them well ahead of time will facilitate the VA's acquisition of the personnel, equipment and facilities needed to provide the best care possible. It will also facilitate better Congressional oversight of the funds' disposition," he continued, "thus helping assure that the monies will be spent as they should be."

Similar legislation was introduced by Senator Akaka and Congressman Filner this past September, but it was too late in the legislative season to gain favor. Considering that now-President Barack Obama was a co-sponsor of the original Senate bill, it is hoped that the *Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009* will be adopted in a timely fashion.

For years, veterans service organizations had argued in favor of mandatory veterans health care funding, as it is for Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare. "While this newly introduced legislation might not have the ultimate benefits of automatic funding, it is a very fine proposal nonetheless and, on behalf of our nation's veterans and veterans-to-be, we applaud Chairman Akaka, Chairman Filner and their many co-sponsors for it," concluded Commander Rehbein.

The *Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009* has been a bi-partisan product. Though it has been introduced by Democrats -- Senator Akaka and Congressman Filner -- chief co-sponsors include Republican Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine as well as Senators Mark Begich (D-AK), Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Russell Feingold (D-WI), Tim Johnson (D-SD), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), Robert Menendez (D-NJ), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), John D. Rockefeller (D-WV), Bernard Sanders (I-VT), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), John Thune (R-SD) and David Vitter (R-LA). On the House side co-sponsors include Republican Congressmen Walter Jones of North Carolina as well as Representatives Phil Hare (D-IL) and Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin (D-SD).

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