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Attachments:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VA healthcare will not be endangered by national system, says President Obama

Promise made during private meeting with National Commander of The American Legion

WASHINGTON (Aug. 4, 2009) - President Barack Obama, meeting privately with the leader of the nation's largest veterans service organization this morning, pledged to keep the medical care system administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs essentially as is - quelling fears that VA healthcare would be absorbed into a national health care system.

"(I) got his very strong assurance the VA as our veterans know it will continue to exist," said National Commander David K. Rehbein. "It will not be diluted or folded into some sort of national system and that the folks who go to the VA…that will be considered their insurance, so any insurance requirements (will be met) simply by being enrolled in the VA."

Another topic discussed during the one-on-one meeting in the Oval Office was Medicare reimbursement to the VA; a proposal long championed by The American Legion. This proposed practice would require Medicare to pay for care provided at Department VA medical facilities to Medicare beneficiaries - that is, eligible veterans over the age of 65 with non-service related injuries, illnesses and conditions. Currently, Medicare is precluded by statute from doing this.

"Medicare reimbursement to VA would be a boon to veterans in that it would encourage them to take advantage of what we consider the best care anywhere," said the Commander. It would also generate much-needed revenue for the VA." Prompted by Legion leadership, such a proposal is being advanced in Congress by U.S. Representative Bob Filner (D-CA), Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

President Obama and Commander Rehbein also discussed the positive effects that the enhanced educational benefits contained within the newly enacted and American Legion-pioneered Post 9/11 GI Bill will have on the veterans community and the nation as a whole.

The vexing problem of a dramatically growing backlog of VA benefits claims was also considered by the two. Rehbein said he feels the President "fully appreciates" its gravity and will do what he can to aid in its solution.

Commander Rehbein, obviously pleased with the meeting's outcome, characterized the 25-minute White House chat as "very friendly…conversational in style" in which "issues were discussed rather than positions being presented."

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 the mentoring of youth. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 14,000 posts across the nation.

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Media contacts: Craig Roberts, (202) 263-2982, Cell (202) 406-088 or Joe March, (317) 630-1253; Cell (317) 748-1926. A high resolution photo of Nat. Cmdr. Rehbein is available at www.legion.org.