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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# Pelosi says infrastructure overhaul can put veterans to work

MILWAUKEE (Sept. 1, 2010) -- In a wide-ranging speech Wednesday that focused on recent bipartisan Capitol Hill accomplishments for veterans, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., summoned the spirit of a past Republican president and five-star Army general to offer hope for the nation's unemployment problem.

She drew on Dwight D. Eisenhower's vision in the 1950s about how massive public-works projects, despite their high federal cost, were the building blocks of economic growth and national security.

"These were very difficult economic times," Pelosi told thousands of veterans gathered in Milwaukee for the 92nd American Legion National Convention. "And in spite of that bad economy, he made the decision to build the Interstate Highway System. But where would the money come from? You'd hear this all the time. The president said we are going forward because it is a national-security issue to have the American people connected by an Interstate Highway System. Not only that, it created an enormous amount of jobs. Just think where the country would be if it had not invested in that infrastructure at that time. It was a very courageous move by a very courageous president."

*Photo by Craig Roberts*

Today, as the nation grapples with continued high unemployment, particularly for veterans, Pelosi says Ike's strategy can be deployed again to rebuild America's aging infrastructure, put people back to work and strengthen the nation as a whole.

"All who serve our country in uniform know that some of the reasons for going to war can be addressed by having a stronger America here. We promised them a future worthy of their sacrifice. That future must provide economic opportunity for them and their families as they make it in America, build our infrastructure, reduce our dependence on foreign oil, clean up our air, and make us technologically No. 1. The connection between our returning vets, job opportunities, preserving our industrial base, strengthening that base, building the infrastructure of America … is the path I believe we must work together so that everyone can make it in America."

During her 30-minute presentation, Pelosi touched on a number of recent legislative accomplishments fueled by American Legion initiatives and support, including:

- Passage and implementation of a GI Bill for the 21st Century. "With The American Legion at our side, just as (it was) for the creation of the original GI Bill,

we passed the Post 9/11 GI Bill," Pelosi said. "Together, we have restored the promise of a full four-year scholarship for our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and have made it transferable to their spouses and children. Educating our nation's veterans is a cost of war, and it's a promise we make to our troops."

- Passage of advance appropriations for VA health-care facilities to ensure timely budgets at the facility level. "Advance appropriations is now the law of the land," said Pelosi, who was applauded after acknowledging that advance appropriations was the Legion's highest legislative priority in 2009, the year it passed.

- Passage of the largest one-year increase in VA funding in history, "which means tens of thousands of new doctors and nurses, new Vet Centers and outpatient clinics, 300,000 modest-income veterans receiving VA health care for the very first time," she explained.

- House approval of legislation to end the so-called "disabled veterans tax" or restriction against concurrent receipt of VA disability compensation and DoD retirement pay, even though they are different payments for different reasons from different budgets. "We're going to keep the pressure on the Senate until it becomes the law of the land," Pelosi said.

- Increased health-care services for veterans who live far from VA facilities and quadrupling of the travel reimbursement for those who have long distances to drive for their VA care.

- Passage of over $13 billion in funding to handle an expected wave of VA claims after three new diseases were added to the list of those presumed to have been caused by exposure to Agent Orange defoliant during the Vietnam War.

Pelosi said The American Legion has worked alongside Congress and helped set priorities that led to most of the recent accomplishments. "Together, we have made more progress over the last four years for our veterans, military and families than has been made since the passage of the original GI Bill in 1944. I am especially proud that the vast majority of our accomplishments were done with overwhelming bipartisan support. There should be no division between Democrats and Republicans when it comes to supporting those who have worn our nation's uniform."

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