From: Raughter, John B.
To: Public Relations Division
Subject: American Legion: If debt ceiling is breached, troops still need to be paid
Date: Thursday, July 28, 2011 5:14:15 PM

If debt ceiling is breached, troops still need to be paid

WASHINGTON (July 28, 2011) – Should Congress and the White House fail to come to an agreement to raise the national debt ceiling by Aug. 2, The American Legion says the paychecks of servicemembers must not be sacrificed.

"We visited this same issue last April when the federal government narrowly averted a shutdown," said Jimmie L. Foster, national commander of The American Legion. "At that time, we urged the government not to default on payments to our troops, and we are urging the same course of action again."

Foster, a military retiree with 26 years of service in the Army and Marine Corps, said it was inconceivable to him that lawmakers and the White House would subject men and women in uniform to such stress – twice in only four months.

"As a nation that shows so much support for those who defend us in Iraq and Afghanistan, we really need to consider the message being sent to our military by the political brinksmanship that so many in Washington insist on playing," Foster said.

"Our elected leaders need to stop maneuvering for next year's elections and start practicing sound government – solve the debt ceiling crisis today and stop holding as hostages the pay of our servicemembers and the benefits of our veterans," he said.

Peter Gaytan, executive director of The American Legion in Washington, was briefed by the White House on July 26 on the possibly calamitous effects of a default on America's debts.

"The White House said – point blank – that it did not know yet what will happen to our military and veterans population if a solution isn't found to this debt crisis, because America has never faced this kind of threat before. We've never been on the verge of harming so seriously our economic standing in the world, because our own government can't agree on an acceptable course of action," Gaytan said.

While Washington generates rhetoric about the wisdom of raising America's debt ceiling, cutting budgets, and increasing taxes, "troops hearing about it in the field are worrying about one thing," said Barry Searle, director of the Legion's national security/foreign relations division.

"They are worried there won't be enough money to pay them. They are out there, dealing with firefights and IED explosions, and wondering if their families will be able to pay next month's rent because Congress and the administration can't come to an agreement," he said.

The American Legion is absolutely insistent on troops getting paid without interruption, Searle said, because so many servicemembers pay rent, mortgages, car loans and many other bills with automatic deductions from their bank accounts.

“If a single paycheck gets held up by this debt crisis, a military family’s credit rating can go right down the tubes,” Searle said. “And the effects of that wouldn’t go away for a long time to come. The White House and Congress need to think about all the ramifications for our military if they fail to solve this debt crisis in the next few days.”

Foster said Congress and the White House should be commended for legislation and initiatives that focus on the well-being of America’s military families. “Yet all of that good will won’t matter very much if we have to stop paying our armed forces, have to stop paying benefits to veterans who have earned them, all because politicians wanted to play ‘chicken’ more than they wanted to act in the best interests of our country.”

30