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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The American Legion says veterans' caregivers are being shortchanged by VA

WASHINGTON (March 29, 2011) – The American Legion is urging Congress to increase pressure on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to correct what the veterans service organization considers tardy and wrongful implementation of a law designed to benefit caregivers of seriously wounded, injured and ill military veterans.

Last May, President Obama signed Public Law 111-163, *The Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act*. This landmark legislation was written to provide relief for burdened family members caring for military veterans who, for physical and/or emotional reasons, cannot care for themselves.

In a letter to all members of the U.S. House and Senate, American Legion National Commander Jimmie L. Foster takes the VA to task for acting too slowly in putting the law into effect. He says, in part, "VA was provided with a deadline to achieve final implementation of this legislation by January of this year, yet at that time they had not even published a proposed regulation."

Foster notes the issuance of a letter by Congress admonishing the VA for the delay, but says, "VA next moved forward with an interim final regulation with the aim of speeding the process, yet this interim regulation is troubling in the narrow scope VA has chosen to apply these benefits."

He continues, "[The law] clearly delineates the broad scope of families that Congress intended to serve.... VA has chosen to accept these criteria *and* add an additional six requirements that eligible recipients must meet to access these benefits. The American Legion is deeply concerned that these additional obstacles beyond the intent of the Congress have slashed the estimated eligibility for this program by over 75 percent from over 3,500 affected families to less than 850. VA cannot be allowed to leave these families behind."

Writing on behalf of the 2.4 million member veterans service organization, Foster said that the law itself, in the Legion's opinion, falls short of its intention by failing to provide health care for the children of caregivers. He points to the fact that caregivers must often sacrifice their employment and financial stability to meet the needs of their loved one, thus leaving their children without medical insurance. While, under the new law, caregivers can receive medical benefits, their children cannot. The American Legion is urging Congress to correct this oversight.

The progress of *The Caregiver and Veterans Omnibus Health Service Act's*

implementation and other legislative matters of interest were discussed by the Legion during its 51st Annual Washington Conference last week.

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