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To: All Legion Leadership
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Legion National Commander slams lack of accountability at VA in Letter to President Obama

'We are hearing little about pervasiveness of corruption and incompetence'

WASHINGTON (Sept. 19, 2014) – Angered by a recent IG report on the Department of Veterans Affairs and the testimony of senior VA officials, American Legion National Commander Michael D. Helm sent a pointed letter to President Obama reminding him that he promised to institute "a critical culture of accountability" within the troubled health care system. Helm said that the change in culture has still not been achieved.

"We were shocked when the VA Inspector General's Report examined case after case of VA mismanagement, acknowledging that veterans died as they waited for health care but then stated 'we are unable to conclusively assert that the absence of timely quality care caused the deaths of these veterans,'" Helm wrote yesterday.

"Mr. President, I understand that you cannot be held responsible for every act of malfeasance that occurs in the federal government. But let me assure you that if someone on my staff were found to be cooking the books, committing fraud or putting career ambitions ahead of veterans' lives, they wouldn't be transferred or suspended with pay. They would be fired immediately. Our VA employees should be held to the same standard," Helm said.

He vowed that The American Legion will continue to keep the issue alive until VA makes the needed reforms. "A perception exists that scandals in Washington are resolved by ignoring the problem and counting on the American people to forget. Mr. President, some Americans may forget what happened at VA, but I can assure you that The American Legion never will," Helm said.

With a current membership of 2.4-million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and youth programs. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through nearly 14,000 posts across the nation.

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