STILL SERVING: IT'S WHO WE ARE

The American Legion is the voice of 2.4 million American veterans and servicemembers. As a resolution-based organization, The American Legion's positions represent the views of its members and are based on our four pillars: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation, National Security, Americanism, and Children & Youth.

Included within are the top issues The American Legion will be fighting for in 2013.

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THE AMERICAN LEGION

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

for the 113th Congress

The American Legion **LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES** for the 113th Congress

Protecting veterans and DOD from the harmful cuts imposed through sequestration

The American Legion recognizes and supports the need for a fiscally responsible government, and looks forward to working with the new Congress to develop deficit reducing strategies that do not degrade the nation's ability to defend itself, or further assault the earned benefits currently being received by our nation's military veterans (**HR55**).

Mental health care

The American Legion is deeply concerned about access to quality mental health care for veterans. With unprecedented numbers of servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with TBI and PTSD, a full 44 percent of veterans are not even accessing the VA for health care. The American Legion is concerned about these veterans falling through the cracks, especially as VA reports indicate as many as 22 veterans died of suicide a day as of 2010. The American Legion urges congressional oversight to ensure full staffing and funding of mental health programs, and increased reliance on other resources to aid veterans, such as Veteran Treatment Courts.

Oppose any further increases in TRICARE fees, including prescription drug fees

The American Legion stands strong against those who would dilute the promises made in the contract with those who serve in our nation's defense. We strongly oppose any proposed degradation of the health care promised to retired servicemembers when they enlisted through increases in fees for TRICARE For Life, increases in pharmacy co-pays or any further breaches of the contract of trust between this nation and those who have defended it.

Stolen Valor Act

In United States v. Alvarez, the Supreme Court ruled the 2005 Stolen Valor Act was unconstitutional, yet left the door open for a more carefully tailored law to criminalize profiting from lies about military service. The American Legion supports legislation to restore the criminality of lying about military service and received decorations (**HR258/S210**).

VA claims backlog

America's veterans deserve better than a disability claims system mired in delays and backlogs, where over 69 percent of claims are delayed over VA's target of 125 days to complete. The American Legion believes VA can only change the bureaucratic culture causing these delays by implementing a work credit system that places as much incentive on getting a claim done right the first time as it does on the raw volume of claims processed.

Disabled veterans tax/widows tax

VA disability compensation should not be offset from military retired pay regardless of the VA rating percentage, nor should VA survivor benefits (DIC) from military Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuities. The American Legion supports legislation that would completely repeal these unjust offsets (**HR333/HR303/HR32**).

DOL-VETS and TAP

The VETS program should be kept in its rightful place within DOL. DVOPs and LVERs should be solely focused on getting veterans jobs. Congress has already passed legislation to improve the Transition Assistance Program, but DOD is improperly executing it. The American Legion looks forward to working with Congress to ensure that TAP offers the services and information necessary for transitioning servicemembers and veterans.

Small business verification

Businesses owned by veterans have earned the right to compete fairly through federal procurement. The American Legion calls on Congress to ensure that the federal government makes its 3 percent procurement goal for the first time in history, and demands that VA address and repair the current small business verification program.

End veteran homelessness

The American Legion strongly supports the administration's goal of eliminating veterans homelessness by 2015 and calls on Congress to pledge whatever resources are necessary to accomplish this goal, to include medical, rehabilitative and employment assistance to homeless veterans and their families (**S62/HR385**).

Quality education through Post-9/11 GI Bill

As one of the founding authors of the original GI Bill, The American Legion wants to protect our veterans with oversight that include provisions to evaluate post-secondary education institutions on quality factors such as accreditation, transferability, cost, graduation rates and acceptance in the job market. State Approving Agencies should be returned their original power to protect the GI Bill along with adequate funding to execute their mandate. Student-veterans should be allowed in-state tuition rates regardless of residency status (**HR357/S257**).

Military to civilian credentialing

DOD spends a lot of money training our military. The skills learned need to directly translate to their civilian equivalent, and seamless certification is long overdue. Cooperation among The American Legion, state governments, private sector employers, institutions of higher learning and the federal government is essential to effect the necessary changes in policies and practices to fully recognize military education, training and experience. We encourage congressional offices to engage their state and local officials to address credentialing issues within their respective states.

The American Flag

The American Legion remains committed to protecting Old Glory, and continues to support legislation that safeguards our nation's flag from physical desecration (**HJRES19**).