

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Congressman's visit to The American Legion Proves Beneficial to Veterans

WASHINGTON (Aug. 6, 2009) - During a recent visit to The American Legion headquarters here, U.S. Rep. Bob Filner, D-Calif., said that the maintenance of high quality health care for veterans is at the very top of his list of priorities. Within a week, Filner, who is chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, has demonstrated his advocacy and response to Legion concerns by introducing legislation long championed by the Legion that would materially aid Medicare-eligible vets.

Under the terms of Filner's bill, H.R. 3365 – the Medicare Reimbursement Act of 2009 - veterans with non-service connected injuries, illnesses and conditions would be allowed to use their earned Medicare benefits to receive care and services from Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities. Currently, VA is barred from billing Medicare.

“Because VA cannot bill Medicare, elderly veterans are unable to use their Medicare benefits, even if they may prefer to receive care at a VA facility among their fellow veterans,” Chairman Filner said. “So for those veterans, they basically forgo the hard-earned dollars that they contributed towards Medicare benefits during their working years. H.R. 3365 is an important bill that would allow elderly veterans to access both VA health care and their Medicare benefits.”

“Medicare reimbursement for veterans has been a top priority of ours for many years and we reminded Congressman Filner of that during his visit, suggesting that now would be a good time to introduce such legislation,” said David K. Rehbein, national commander of The American Legion, the nation's largest veterans service organization. “It's also a topic I discussed with President Obama just a couple of days ago during our private meeting in the Oval Office. So, Congressman Filner's action could not be more timely or welcome. We thank him for a promise kept.

“The President himself helped the Legion make this a good week for veterans, too,” continued Rehbein. “Another topic he and I talked about was the Legion's strong opposition to the absorption of VA health care and TRICARE into any national health care system. The President agreed with our point of view and has pledged to retain the autonomy of both. All in all, I am very proud of what our organization has accomplished in recent days.”

With a current membership of 2.5 million wartime veterans, The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national security, veterans affairs, Americanism, and the mentoring of youth. Legionnaires work for the betterment of their communities through more than 14,000 posts across the nation.