

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY SHEET

Advance Appropriations for VA Medical Care -- The American Legion is actively engaged in an effort to reform the process of the annual Federal appropriations to achieve timely, predictable and sufficient annual appropriations of VA medical care. Currently, Congress allows some Federal programs and agencies to request appropriations for advanced funding (Advance Appropriations). While Congress is in the process of determining the Federal budget for the next fiscal year, some Federal programs and agencies seek their appropriations for the fiscal year plus an additional year. When successful, advance appropriations assure the timely enactment of the appropriations, even if the rest of the appropriations process is not yet completed. This year, The American Legion will be seeking VA appropriations for FY 2010 and VA medical care appropriations for FY 2011, as well. If successful, The American Legion will know that the FY 2011 VA medical care appropriations will be timely and predictable. This will allow VA managers to make more certain long-range decisions. This does not guarantee the goal of sufficiency, but allows a full year of lobbying to seek any necessary increases in specific health care funding, as well as the remainder of the VA annual appropriations. Advance Appropriations deals with only discretionary appropriations. The American Legion supports both H.R. 1016 and S. 243, Veterans Health Care Budget Reform and Transparency Act of 2009.

VA appropriations for FY 2010 -- The American Legion National Commander Dave Rehbein testified before the congressional Veterans' Affairs Committees last September and clearly outlined the funding requests for VA in FY 2010. The American Legion will continue to push for full funding of the VA in FY 2010 and urge timely enactment before the start of the new fiscal year. The National Commander's testimony focused on major portions of the VA budget to include health care, medical research, construction, the Veterans Benefit Administration, National Cemetery Administration and both the state veterans' home and cemetery grant programs.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Legion's Request</u>
Medical Care Total	\$ 42.8 billion
Medical Care Recovery Fund*	
Medical and Prosthetic Research	\$ 532 million
Major Construction	\$ 1.8 billion
Minor Construction	\$ 1.5 billion
State Veterans Homes Grants	\$ 275 million
State Veterans Cemetery Grants	\$ 49 million
National Cemetery Administration	\$ 249 million
Information Technology	\$ 2.7 billion
General Operating Expenses	\$ 2.8 billion

* *The American Legion continues to support using Medical Care Recovery Funds as supplements, not offsets, to discretionary VA funding.*

Timely administration of the Post 9-11 GI Bill Educational Benefits -- The American Legion will be closely monitoring the timely implementation of the new benefits of the Post 9-11 GI Bill Educational Benefits which significantly changes the amount of money available for veterans seeking higher education. The bill also provides for the transferability of earned educational benefits to immediate family members for certain eligible veterans. The new benefits are to be available by August 2009. Under this new program, tuition payments go directly to the college or university, while veterans receive a monthly stipend for 36 months. The new benefit also provides an annual additional payment for books and supplies.

VA Claims and Adjudication Process -- The American Legion intends to continue working with the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs Shinseki to improve the timeliness and accuracy of VA disability claims. Congress has provided additional funding to hire and train more claims representatives and adjudicators in order to aggressively meet the challenging claims backlog. The American Legion believes quality initial training of initial hires, continuing education of qualified adjudicators, and retention of trained adjudicators are the key elements in achieving timely and accurate claims decisions. Another critical component is making sure claims are properly developed before they are given to VA for a decision. This is an important role for our Department Service Officers when assisting veterans with their initial claims.

Global War on Terrorism -- The American Legion remains committed to the provisions of Resolution 169: to support the troops, support the President and support the Congress in the Global War on Terrorism. The American Legion will continue to seek support in local communities across the nation for the young men and women placed in harm's way and when they return home. The American Legion is steadfast in its commitment to combating terrorism on multiple fronts.

Fully Fund and Increase the Size of the Armed Forces -- The American Legion realizes the strain the Global War on Terrorism has had on the equipment and training of active-duty, National Guard and Reserve units across the country. The American Legion strongly encourages Congress to properly fund the Armed Forces to reset units with new equipment, replacement parts, and much neglected training of specific job skills. The American Legion also supports an increase in military personnel end-strengths to help reduce the frequency of deployments. It remains imperative to maintain peace through military strength and sound diplomacy.

Quality-of-Life issues facing our service members, veterans and their families -- The American Legion is committed to effectively addressing a large range of quality-of-life issues including but not limited to salary, health care, retirement, TRICARE, compensation, housing, education and disenfranchisement. Some of the most pressing issues are; mental health needs of America's service members, veterans and their families; and reforming Warrior Care and the transition process associated with it. Every effort must be made to remove the "stigma" associated with mental health counseling and treatment. The American Legion is committed to improving the transition process by supporting change and improvements in the Physical and Medical Evaluation Boards; improved support for caretakers; transferable electronic medical records; and concurrent receipt of retired and disability pay. Meeting the mental health needs of service members and their dependants and the improvement of the transition process must be achieved in both the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs.