

The American Legion Lauds President's Request for Increased VA Appropriations

WASHINGTON, DC (Feb.26, 2009) – The National Commander of The American Legion finds reason for optimism in President Barack Obama's request for increased funding of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The President released his fiscal year 2010 budget request executive summary today in which he calls for a \$25-billion increase in VA appropriations over the next five years.

“By this action, President Obama is sending a clear message to those who have worn, are wearing and will wear the uniforms of the armed forces that he recognizes and appreciates – in a tangible way -- their contributions to our society,” said Commander Rehbein. “Although we have yet to see the details of the budget request, this initial budget overview signals good news from the President and, by extension, his new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Eric Shinseki.”

According to the executive summary, President Obama's budget request addresses several legislative priorities of The American Legion including increasing the size of the Army and Marine Corps, closing military/civilian counterpart pay gap as well as improving military and veterans' health care, especially in the area of mental health.

The President is also calling for a repeal of the Veterans' Disability Tax -- which still burdens some military retirees with service-connected disabilities, and allowing more Priority Group 8 veterans to enroll in the VA health care system. These are veterans whose income and / or net worth is above the usual VA thresholds but are willing to contribute co-payments for their health care.

“Also worthy of note,” said Commander Rehbein, “is that some of the proposed funding increase will go toward timely implementation of the new Post 9-11 GI Bill and thus will provide significant improvements in the earned educational benefit package for veterans.

“Considering all of the present-day challenges facing him,” concluded Commander Rehbein, “The American Legion appreciates the President's attention to the needs of our veterans' community. We look forward to working with the Administration and Congress in achieving a timely, predictable and sufficient VA budget.”

Founded in 1919, the 2.6 million-member American Legion is the nation's preeminent service organization for veterans of the U.S. armed forces, including active duty, National Guard and Reserves, and their families. A powerful voice for veterans in Washington, The American Legion drafted the original GI Bill and was instrumental in establishing the agency that today is Department of Veterans Affairs.