

The American Legion lauds Congress and President for action on wartime spending bill

WASHINGTON (June 15, 2009) -- The American Legion has delivered letters of appreciation to congressional leaders and President Barack Obama for their assertive efforts to pass an emergency wartime spending bill.

Progression of the bill has been blockaded by debate over an amendment introduced by Senators Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC). The amendment, called the Detainee Photographic Records Protection Act, would ban the public release of photos depicting alleged abuse of Afghanistan and Iraq war detainees. The American Legion has gone on record in support of the Lieberman-Graham amendment and regrets the fact that the objection to it by a few members of Congress has stalled the all-important spending measure.

Last Thursday evening, however, President Obama intervened in House-Senate negotiations, reiterating his pledge to employ all necessary executive powers to suppress release of the controversial photographs. This could lead the way to compromise on the Lieberman-Graham amendment help assure passage of the wartime spending measure The American Legion considers vital to national security.

Letters to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi from David K. Rehbein, national commander The American Legion, expressed gratitude for their leadership roles in attempts to adopt the spending bill. Rehbein's letter read, in part:

“On behalf of The American Legion, I thank you and your colleagues for taking timely and assertive action on the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for FY 2009. Once again, through your strong leadership, Congress will provide our service members and their commanders with the necessary funding to successfully execute their vital military missions.”

“The American Legion also supports the measure's additional funding of military construction projects. Completion of these projects will contribute significantly and positively to this nation's wounded warriors' and military families' quality of life. The American Legion applauds the provision to extend GI Bill educational benefits to the children of members of the Armed Forces who are killed while on active duty, as well. This bipartisan effort clearly demonstrates commendable Congressional support for the men and women placed in harm's way during our current conflicts.”

In the letters to Reid and Pelosi, as well as in a separate communication to President Obama, The American Legion commander praised the president's firm stand on suppression of the detainee photographs. Rehbein wrote:

“The American Legion also appreciates the pledge by President Obama to prohibit the publication of photographs depicting blatantly improper actions by a few poorly trained service members.”

“It is indeed fortunate that this illegal conduct was identified, investigated, and rectified and that its perpetrators were brought to justice properly. As military leaders and the president himself acknowledges, public dissemination of damning photographs would benefit only the propagandistic efforts of our enemies and, thus, embolden them. We believe that not only would our men and women in uniform be threatened by publication of these images, but civilians at home could be placed in jeopardy as well. As we have learned most painfully in recent years, violent extremists are not discriminating in their choice of targets.”

With 2.6 million members, The American Legion is the nation's largest veterans service organization. The Legion traditionally works hand-in-hand with members of Congress, leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs and other key stakeholders to assure appropriate funding and policy making on measures and issues affecting the military's active duty, National Guard and Reserve personnel, veterans, and their families.