

The American Legion Weekly Update



January 19, 2007

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The American Legion Thanks Congressional Leadership

National Commander of The American Legion, Paul A. Morin, voiced his appreciation to Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid this week for their leadership role in reinstating the traditional Joint Sessions of the House and Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committees for veterans’ service organizations. Morin also thanked the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees’ leadership for their efforts in reinstating The American Legion’s full voice on Capitol Hill.

“This wise decision restores vital congressional forums for the entire veterans’ community,” Morin said. “The ground swell of support for restoring these joint sessions by the grassroots at the local, state, and national level was overwhelming.”

“Many thanks go to Legionnaires across the country for remaining persistent and keeping this issue on the forefront with their congressional representatives,” Morin said. “This is a big win for The American Legion family. On behalf of all veterans, our voice will once again be heard, and heard loudly this fall during the reinstated hearings.”

The American Legion takes full advantage of this joint session to address its legislative agenda for the next session or the new Congress. Featured in this hearing is the newly elected National Commander addressing resolutions adopted at The American Legion’s

National Convention. The National Commander also offers budget recommendations for the Department of Veterans Affairs for the next fiscal year, months ahead of the President's official budget request. This joint session also provides Congress with valuable information with regards to key topics for future hearings as well.

Again, the wartime veterans of The American Legion sincerely appreciate Speaker Pelosi and Senator Reid's continued leadership and support of the entire veterans' community.

"The American Legion looks forward to working with the new leadership not only for the remainder of my tenure, but for years to come," Morin said.

Legislative Updates

H.J. Res. 12 "The Flag Amendment" Introduced In 110th Congress by Murtha

In the first session of the 110th Congress, Representative John Murtha (D-Pa.) introduced House Joint Resolution 12 which proposes an amendment to the Constitution of the United States authorizing the Congress to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled (two-thirds of each House concurring therein), That the following article is proposed as an amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which shall be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution when ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States within seven years after the date of its submission for ratification:

Article -- 'The Congress shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States.'

The resolution was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary on January 11.

National Commander Morin Calls Upon Congress to Pass FY 07 Military Construction and VA Appropriations

National Commander Paul Morin has called upon Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid to finish the Military Construction and Veterans' Affairs Appropriation bill for FY 2007. He urges Democrats and Republicans to resolve their differences and designate their respective MilCon/VA appropriations Conference Committee members and to instruct these Conferees to provide the critical funds needed by both the military and veterans' communities.

Currently, the funding for these important projects that directly impact the daily lives of both the military and veterans' communities is provided in a Continuing Resolution (CR) passed by the 109th Congress. The FY 06 level of funding is insufficient to cover the military operations and quality-of-life programs called for in the 2007 appropriations bills that failed to reach the President's desk. The 109th Congress used the CR to pass on its fiscal obligations to the newly elected 110th Congress.

The CR expires in mid-February, well into the second quarter of the 2007 fiscal year. This means VA administrators are forced to play a “guessing game” as to how much money do they have to spend between now and the next appropriations cycle. Ultimately, The American Legion believes this will result in hard choices between rationing of health care, postponing much needed facility repairs, backlog of equipment purchases or repairs, and maybe even hiring freezes of new or replacement health care professionals.

The American Legion calls upon the 110th Congress to come to an agreement and pass the Military Construction and Veterans’ Affairs appropriations bill to fully fund the needs of the military and veterans’ communities for the remainder of FY 2007.

The current appropriations request includes billions of dollars in military operations and quality-of-life projects that are threatened if the current funding level remains until October 2007. The Secretary of the Army, the Honorable Dr. Francis J. Harvey said, “The potential negative effects on operations readiness cannot be overemphasized; the Army’s ability to prosecute the Global War on Terrorism and to prepare for future conflicts would be severely hampered.”

The remainder of the appropriations bill deals with the veterans community - heroes of current and past wars. The direct impact on veterans’ health care is well documented. The VA budget represents the ongoing costs of war. The VA medical care system is recognized in the health care industry as the role model for others in the private and public sectors to emulate. America’s service members, veterans and their families deserve the thanks of a grateful nation, not the budgetary “sleight of hand” or political “check-is-in-the-mail” approaches agreed to by the previous Congress.

Commander Morin requests The American Legion family contact your lawmakers in the House of Representatives and Senate. Call on them to support designating the Military Construction and VA Conference Committee to take up the FY 07 Military Construction and Veterans’ Affairs appropriations bill as soon as possible. Please encourage your family, neighbors and friends who support our nation’s veteran community to contact their Federal lawmakers as well. The men and women of the Armed Forces - past, present and future - deserve the full attention and support of the 110th Congress.