



The American Legion Legislative Drop Sheet

FISCAL YEAR 2012 VA BUDGET – On June 14, by a vote of 411-5, the House of Representatives approved H.R. 2055, the FY 2012 Military Construction and VA appropriations measure. On July 20, the Senate passed its version of this bill by a vote of 97-2. The House version recommended \$129.7 billion for VA programs, \$7.8 billion more than FY 2011 funding amounts. The Senate bill recommended \$128.1 billion for the same VA programs, \$6.2 billion above the FY 2011 figures. H.R. 2055 becomes the first FY 2012 spending measure to be approved by both congressional chambers. Since both the House and Senate have passed a spending measure with differing language and appropriations figures, a conference committee must now be formed to reconcile the two versions before the President can sign the bill into law. With the new fiscal year set to begin October 1, there is a certain amount of urgency to get the two chambers to agree on this bill.

The American Legion urges Congress to reconcile the appropriations bills and provide VA with a budget before the October 1st deadline. We oppose including this in a Continuing Resolution.

FISCAL YEAR 2012 DOD BUDGET – On July 8 the House by a vote of 336-87 passed H.R. 2219 the Department of Defense (DOD) spending measure for FY 2012. Discretionary programs would be funded at \$519.8 billion, an increase of \$17.4 billion over the FY 2011 enacted amounts. An additional \$118.5 billion would be assigned to cover the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) account – the military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, one area the Administration has slated for "savings" is the TRICARE program. This medical program is used by former service members, their dependents and some members of the Reserve Component. Former DOD Secretary Robert Gates has voiced the opinion that the current cost of the Defense Health System – budgeted at \$32.3 billion for FY 2012 – cannot be sustained in the future. He further projected that military health care will consume 10 percent of the DOD budget by 2015. Secretary Gates sought to cut \$7 billion from the Defense Health System over the next five years.

The American Legion believes vital military benefits such as health care cannot be sacrificed merely for short term savings and urges protection of these programs.

FISCAL YEAR 2012 DOL VETS APPROPRIATIONS – The mission of the Department of Labor's (DOL) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) is to promote the economic security of America's veterans by assisting them in finding meaningful employment. VETS delivers its services through a variety of programs; including providing grants to states, public entities, and non-profit organizations to assist veterans seeking employment. The President has proposed FY 2012 ASVET funding of \$257 million, an increase of \$1 million over FY 2011.

The American Legion has believes the DOL-VETS funding must be increased to \$280 million. Adequate funding is essential to employing our nation's veterans in FY 2012.

THE CONGRESSIONAL "SUPERCOMMITTEE" – With enactment of the Budget Control Act of 2011 (P.L.112-25), Congress agreed to increase the debt ceiling in exchange for immediate deficit reductions and a process to enact additional deficit reduction measures. As the first step of this Act, new caps were put on discretionary spending for the next ten years, which, if maintained, will result in approximately \$900 billion in deficit reduction. The second step was the creation of a Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (popularly referred to as the "Supercommittee") which is tasked with proposing at least \$1.2 trillion in additional deficit reduction. The committee has an aggressive timeline with a final proposal to be completed November 23rd.

The "Supercommittee" has a narrow window in which to operate and therefore they are going to be looking for the "tried and true" budget cuts that have been floated in the past. Previous efforts have looked to the military and veterans' benefits, programs and budgets to determine where there might be "savings" either real or imagined that can be used.

The American Legion believes all Americans must shoulder their "fair share" but notes the military and veterans have already sacrificed a large share which must be considered. Furthermore any cuts must minimize impact on direct benefits and programs for the military and veterans.



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VETERAN JOBS LEGISLATION – According to numbers released by the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, there are presently over 1 million veterans currently unemployed. Chairman Miller of HVAC introduced H.R. 2433 “The Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act.” Chairman Murray in the Senate has introduced S. 951 “The Hiring Heroes Act of 2011.” The American Legion supports both of these strong pieces of legislation.

The American Legion believes finding a solution to veteran joblessness should be a top priority and urges passage of H.R. 2433 and S. 951.

FLAG PROTECTION AMENDMENT – The American Legion is committed to protecting Old Glory from acts of physical desecration. The American Legion believes the final say should be with the people, as expressed through the Congress and the 50 state legislatures. All 50 state legislatures have passed memorializing resolutions asking Congress to pass this proposed amendment and send it to the states for ratification. Representative Jo Ann Emerson (MO) introduced **House Joint Resolution (H.J. Res.) 13**, a proposed constitutional amendment supported by The American Legion and the Citizens Flag Alliance (CFA). This measure currently has 57 cosponsors. A U.S. Senate companion bill, **Senate Joint Resolution (S.J. Res.) 19**, was introduced on June 14, 2011 by Senator Orrin Hatch (UT). This measure currently has 26 cosponsors.

The American Legion supports the passage of H.J. Res 13 and S.J. Res 19 and urges members to join our efforts as cosponsors.

H.R. 2369, THE AMERICAN LEGION CHARTER LEGISLATION – On June 24, 2011, Representatives Altmire (PA) and Rooney (FL) introduced H.R. 2369 to amend our congressional charter. This non-controversial legislation clarifies by statute the autonomous and independent nature of American Legion posts and departments and offers protections against frivolous lawsuits. H.R. 2369 already has 236 cosponsors and is assigned to the House Judiciary Committee. Introduction within the Senate will occur in the coming month.

The American Legion thanks the existing co-sponsors and urges others to do so. We seek quick passage of H.R. 2369.

MILITARY WIDOWS' TAX – Under current federal law, if the surviving spouse of a military retiree is eligible to receive the monthly **Survivor Benefit Program (SBP)** annuity payment and is also awarded a monthly **Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC)** benefit by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the SBP annuity is offset, dollar-for-dollar, by the amount of DIC received. This offset is commonly referred to throughout the veterans' community as the **Military Widows' Tax**. The American Legion believes this offset is an injustice to surviving spouses of America's heroes. SBP and DIC are two distinct and independent programs with unique eligibility criteria.

The American Legion supports the passage of S. 260 and H.R. 178 to repeal the Military Widows' Tax.

MEDICARE REIMBURSEMENT FOR VA – Over half of the current VA population is Medicare-eligible yet VA is not authorized to collect third-party reimbursement from Medicare or Medicaid for services related to nonservice-connected medical services. The American Legion supports legislation to authorize VA to collect third-party reimbursement from Medicare. As Congress grapples with effort to serve the aging population while trimming budgets, Medicare reimbursement can remain a viable alternative to quality care and reduced savings.

The American Legion supports Medicare reimbursement as a viable alternative with reduced savings and increased quality for the eligible veterans.

This drop sheet does not represent the entire legislative agenda of The American Legion, but those issues that are currently pending in discussions and action in Congress. A full discussion and list of bills and issues of concern can be found on our website (www.legion.org/legislative) or by calling our office (202) 263.5752.