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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legion hoped for more from Obama's address

In his State of the Union address, the president pledged to help America's military community in several important ways; yet he remained mute on the military COLA cuts.

WASHINGTON (Jan. 29, 2014) -- President Barack Obama, in his fifth State of the Union address on Jan. 29, pledged to cut further the disability claims backlog, improve access to health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense (DoD) -- especially mental health care -- and continue to help veterans get jobs.

"The American Legion certainly appreciates President's Obama great concern for our military families," said Daniel M. Dellinger, the Legion's national commander. "We know he wants to do right by our men and women who have worn the uniform and defended America. The Legion will do everything it can to support his efforts to reduce the claims backlog, strengthen medical services at VA and DoD, and get more of our veterans back into the civilian workforce."

The president pledged to "keep slashing that backlog so our veterans receive the benefits they've earned," and ensure that "our wounded warriors receive the health care -- including the mental-health care -- that they need."

Mental-health care is an abiding concern of the Legion, which established a committee to study alternative treatments for traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Last September, the committee issued a report on its findings, ["The War Within,"](#) which recommends that VA and DoD adopt several effective treatments that are currently not used in any standardized way.

The Legion has shared its TBI/PTSD report with the White House, members of Congress, and VA's senior leadership.

Additionally, The American Legion has been playing a key role in reducing the claims backlog, promoting VA's [Fully Developed Claims](#) initiative among its service officers at VA regional offices nationwide. This program enables claims to move through the VA system much faster, because they are more fully documented up-front than traditional claims.

Obama also addressed veterans unemployment, saying "We'll keep working to help all our veterans translate their skills and leadership into jobs here at home." The American Legion has been doing its part by co-sponsoring, with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, more than 200 career fairs per year for veterans nationwide (known as the "Hiring Our Heroes" program).

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In addition to co-sponsoring career fairs, [The American Legion](#) has been working with DoD and the Department of Transportation to make private-sector licensing and credentialing easier for veterans. It has helped 35 state legislatures to pass credentialing laws that assist transitioning veterans with employment, and helped with the passage of 49 specific state credentialing laws for commercial drivers' licenses, that provide waivers and recognize military training in transportation.

The Legion helped to write parts of the [Troop Talent Act](#), provisions of which were included in the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Yet the president failed to mention the looming cuts to pensions for military retirees 62 and younger: their benefits will be reduced by one percent per year for a full decade. The American Legion has protested those cuts since they were announced, and continues to urge Congress to repeal them.

"The American Legion is disappointed that President Obama did not show more leadership in dealing with the

COLA issue,” Dellinger said. “He promised us, back in August 2011 at our national convention, that he would not balance the federal budget on the backs of America’s veterans. But that is exactly what he is allowing Congress to do.”

Obama said the mission in Afghanistan will be completed by the end of 2014, “and America’s longest war will finally be over.” When he took office, 180,000 Americans were serving in Iraq and Afghanistan; since then, U.S. troops have left Iraq and about 35,000 remain in Afghanistan.

Dellinger said that, despite the troops draw-down, “our military’s operational tempo is increasing while its strength is decreasing, because of force reductions being made as a result of sequestration. Although Congress has recently provided \$31 billion in military funding relief over the next two years, military readiness, research and development, and compensation continue to be eroded. Sequestration is not good for national security.”

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