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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Washington, DC (March 4, 2014) - - American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger spoke to a joint session of the South Carolina legislature today and called on lawmakers to ignore those who complain that military benefits are too generous.

"I can think of no other occupation where members are not allowed to quit on the spot," Dellinger told a packed statehouse. "Unlike civilians, military members are subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice and face prison if they disrespect their employers. The so-called generous benefits are available to anyone willing to enlist, uproot their children from their schools and friends every two or three years, live in undesired locations, frequently separate from family members for long periods of time and expect spouses to begin a new career with each change of duty station."

Introduced to lawmakers seated in the capitol rotunda by Lt. Gov. Glenn McConnell, Dellinger paid tribute to the 140 men and women from South Carolina who lost their lives while serving in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"They died for their country," Dellinger said. "They died for their family. They died for you and me. They bring to mind a famous definition that 'a veteran is someone, who at one point in their life, wrote a blank check payable to the USA for an amount up to, an including their life.'"

Dellinger said that his organization is frustrated that the Obama administration is trying to cut defense. "At a press conference last week the Secretary of Defense warned against becoming a hollow force," he said.

"The American Legion believes that the administration's 2015 budget is leading us in that direction. Cutting forces to pre-World War II levels makes no sense in a world where countries such as North Korea, Iran and Pakistan could become viable nuclear threats to our very existence. Moreover, we do not know the exact nature of future wars and conflicts. The American Legion believes that we must be prepared for any scenario.

Dellinger praised South Carolina for the value the state puts on military service. "With about 413,000 military veterans in South Carolina, the people of the Palmetto State know all about patriotism and service," he said.

He also praised State Rep. Stephen Goldfinch for his work on the South Carolina Military Service Integrity and Preservation Act, which adds criminal penalties to those who fraudulently represents themselves as veterans to obtain financial benefits. He presented Sen. William O'Dell and Rep. William Hixon with awards as The American Legion Department of South Carolina Outstanding Members of the Legislature for

2014. The lawmakers were recognized for their work on veterans issues, such as the inclusion of veteran status on South Carolina drivers' licenses.

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