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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VA benefits in peril if government shuts down

American Legion Commander: 'Put veterans ahead of politics'

WASHINGTON (Sept. 30, 2013) -- In a statement issued Sept. 28, the Department of Veterans Affairs warned that funding for veterans benefits "will run out by late October" if the federal government shuts down. "At that point, VA will be unable to make any payments."

While claims processors at the Veterans Benefits Administration would continue working after a shutdown, funding for any benefits that might be awarded to America's veterans would soon dry up, VA warned.

"Congress has an obligation to put veterans ahead of politics," said American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger, leader of the nation's largest veterans service organization. "The fact that funding for VA benefits could disappear in a month ought to be incentive enough for our elected leaders to achieve a solution."

According to the VA statement, "The Administration strongly believes that a lapse in appropriations should not occur. There is enough time for Congress to prevent a lapse in appropriations, and the Administration is willing to work with Congress to enact a short-term continuing resolution to fund critical Government operations and allow Congress the time to complete the full-year 2014 appropriations."

According to VA's "Veterans Field Guide to Government Shutdown," other services would be impacted by a potential lapse in appropriations, including:

- No decisions on claims appeals or motions will be issued by the Board of Veterans Appeals.
- The recruiting and hiring of veteran job applicants will cease.
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Education counseling will be limited.
- Interments at VA national cemeteries will be conducted on a modified rate.
- The VA secretary's correspondence with veterans and veterans service organizations will be suspended.

"Our federal government must never put veterans in this kind of position," Dellinger said. "It is imperative that Congress understands The American Legion strongly objects to the cessation of any VA benefits or services that put our country's veterans and loved ones at risk."

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