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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 12, 2011

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FINANCE COMMITTEE PROVIDES CASH INFUSION TO VETERANS TRUST FUND

MADISON – The Joint Finance Committee (JFC) unanimously approved a motion on Thursday to allocate \$5 million to the Veterans Trust Fund as a part of the 2011-13 state budget.

“We are very pleased that the Committee recognized this pressing need in the veterans community and took decisive action to support our veterans,” said Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) Acting Secretary Donna Williams. “With an aging veterans population and more and more soldiers returning home, it is only right that our veterans have the services they’ve earned and the support they need to contribute to their communities as productive citizens.”

The motion, authored by Senator Randy Hopper and Representative Dan LeMahieu, provides a one-time transfer of \$5 million in general purpose revenue (GPR) from the General Fund to the Veterans Trust Fund in 2011-12. Provided the provision passes in the final version of the budget, this would be the first infusion of GPR dollars into the Trust Fund since 1988. Since the origination of the Trust Fund over six decades ago, ten separate infusions of GPR have been provided by the Legislature to ensure the solvency of the Trust Fund and preserve essential veterans programs.

While WDVA has taken action to generate efficiencies and prolong the viability of the Trust Fund through the implementation of a comprehensive Reorganization Plan, recent budget projections from WDVA and the Legislative Fiscal Bureau indicate that the Veterans Trust Fund would experience a \$3.7 million shortfall before the end of the 2011-13 biennium without legislative action.

The motion further requires the WDVA Secretary and Board of Veterans Affairs to jointly provide recommendations to the Legislature on adopting a viable long-term funding source for the Veterans Trust Fund. The motion directs the Department and the Board to issue the recommendations by June 30, 2012.

In addition, JFC provided \$68,900 GPR to ensure the availability of military funeral honors stipends for veterans service organizations for the remainder of the fiscal year.

“The Department will continue to focus its efforts on generating efficiencies and utilizing its resources in a targeted, cost-effective manner that provides the best possible service to our men and women who’ve worn the uniform,” said Acting Secretary Williams. “I look forward to working with veterans service organizations, lawmakers, and members of the Board to build on the commitment made today, and I’m hopeful that the full Legislature will support the committee’s decision when they act on the budget proposal in the coming weeks.”

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