

VFW Applauds Senate Support to Lower New Medal Ranking

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of America's oldest and largest major combat veterans organization is applauding yesterday's introduction of S. 470 to lower the Pentagon's new Distinguished Warfare Medal to below the Bronze Star and Purple Heart in the military order of precedence. The Senate bill is a companion to H.R. 833 that was introduced in late February to correct what immediately became an extremely unpopular decision by former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta.

"It is very important to properly recognize all who faithfully serve and excel, but this new medal — no matter how well intended — quickly deteriorated into a morale issue," said John E. Hamilton, a combat wounded Marine Corps rifleman in Vietnam who leads the 2 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. and its Auxiliaries.

In announcing the new medal Feb. 13, the Pentagon said the Distinguished Warfare Medal was created to recognize the extraordinary impact that modern battlefield technology has enabled service members to have on the battlefield, regardless of distance. Hamilton agrees that those far from the fight are having an immediate impact, and so does Sens. Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Max Baucus (D-Mont.), John Boozman (R-Ark.), Dean Heller (R-Nev.) and Joe Manchin (D-W.V.) when they introduced S. 470.

"Our only disagreement is the medal's placement," said Hamilton, who discussed this issue with President Obama in the Oval Office last week and included it as testimony before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees on Tuesday.

"We are grateful for the president's interest and the bipartisan congressional support, because now is the time to lower the new medal's precedence — now before the first one is awarded," he said. "We know that overruling a predecessor's decision puts Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel into an uncomfortable position, but it is the absolute right thing to do for the troops. Medals that can only be earned in combat must mean more than new medals awarded in the rear."

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org