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Contacts: Marty Callaghan, American Legion, 202-215-8644
Lisa Gough, VVMF, 202-393-0090 ext.109
Beth Newburger, Epoch Communications, 571-436-0887
Mindy Crawford, Preservation PA, 717-234-2310

LEADING VETERANS CALL FOR REJECTION OF CASINO PROPOSED AT FRINGES OF THE GETTYSBURG BATTLEFIELD

Event inaugurates national letter writing campaign on behalf of American service members

(Harrisburg, Pa.) – At a news conference this morning, three prominent leaders among American service veterans came together urging the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board to reject a proposal to license a casino just one half-mile from Gettysburg National Military Park.

“Gettysburg has been called hallowed ground by no less than one of our nation’s greatest presidents, Abraham Lincoln,” said Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund President Jan Scruggs. “If Gettysburg is truly hallowed ground, then it should be treated as such. It should be a place for study, reflection and contemplation. It should not be a place for gambling.”

Peter Gaytan, executive director of the American Legion, which represents some 2.5 million American veterans agreed, saying, “Gettysburg represents more than a single moment in history. It is a monument to the bravery of all American soldiers, not just those who fought there. We need to be sensitive to the fact that this is a hallowed resting place for our brothers-in-arms and protect it from such inappropriate development.”

Today’s event marked the creation of Veterans for Gettysburg, a collection of service veterans from around the nation who believe that the presence of a casino operation so close to the scene of some of the nation’s most blood-soaked ground would disrespect the sacrifices made by previous generations of American soldiers. One of the effort’s honorary co-chairmen is Edwin C. Bearss, Chief Historian *Emeritus* of the National Park Service. Bearss enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1942 and fought at Guadalcanal and the Russell Islands before being severely wounded at Suicide Creek on Cape Gloucester, New Britain.

“When I answered the call to serve my country in World War II, I felt a kinship with all those soldiers who had come before me,” said Bearss. “I believe I am duty-bound to honor the legacy of their service.”

Gathered in the rotunda of the Pennsylvania State Capitol, the speakers unveiled an open letter to the Gaming Control Board from America’s veterans. As a chairman of the effort, Bearss invited all American veterans to lend their voices to the chorus calling for the protection and stewardship of Gettysburg by visiting www.ipetitions.com/petition/veteransforgettysburg to add their names.

(More)

THE AMERICAN LEGION
1608 K St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005

**THE VIETNAM VETERANS
MEMORIAL FUND**
2600 Virginia Avenue, N.W., Suite 104
Washington, D.C. 20037

America's Veterans Call for Protection of Gettysburg Battlefield

September 21, 2010

Page 2 of 2

While unable to attend in person, the effort's other co-chair, Paul W. Bucha, recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry during the Vietnam War, offered the sentiment that "Gettysburg is blood, bones, limbs and lives given for the idea of America ... Tested and proven by the anonymous soldiers who gave so very much so that we their descendants and heirs might receive so much."

The event was hosted by Preservation Pennsylvania and emceed by state representative Paul Clymer (R-Bucks County), a veteran of the U.S. Army who served as chair of the legislature's Pennsylvania Monuments at Gettysburg Restoration Committee. He currently serves on the Gaming Oversight Committee and as chair of the Capital Preservation Committee.

"The Gettysburg Battlefield captures one of the most historic moments in our nation's history. Its legacy of bravery and sacrifice should not be diminished by the advent of nearby casino gambling," said Clymer. "I invite all of my fellow veterans from all eras and all branches of service to join this effort."

In their message to the Gaming Control Board, the veterans invoke the words of Maj. Gen. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, recipient of the Congressional Medal of Honor for his role in the Battle of Gettysburg, writing: "Those who fell here — those who have fallen before or since — those who linger, yet a little longer, soon to follow; all are mustered in one great company...."

At the letter's heart is the firmly held belief that "service to our nation is a tie that binds all generations of America's fighting men and women — whenever and wherever they served." Noting that no Civil War soldiers remain to speak for themselves, today's veterans offer a voice in their stead, declaring: "As you would honor our service, we ask you to remember theirs."

Although concerned about the overall preservation of Gettysburg, the veterans are specifically objecting to a proposal that would transform an existing, family-friendly hotel complex just ½ mile from the edge of Gettysburg National Military Park into a gambling resort. The project is led by the same local investor who previously tried to secure a gaming license for a site one mile from the battlefield, in a more commercially developed area of Adams County. That project was rejected by the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board, largely due to widespread public opposition.

Veterans for Gettysburg is an ad hoc organization of American service veterans concerned with development proposals that threaten the hallowed ground of the Gettysburg Battlefield, site of the bloodiest engagement of the Civil War and a significant turning point in American history. Constituent groups of Veterans for Gettysburg include the American Legion and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund.

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(All American veterans are invited to sign this open letter to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board by visiting www.ipetitions.com/petition/veteransforgettysburg)