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RELEASE: June 11, 1999

NEWS RELEASE

GOVERNOR ANNOUNCES SUPPORT FOR INCREASING VETERAN'S PROPERTY TAX DEDUCTION

Gov. Christie Whitman today told the 81st annual convention of the American Legion in Wildwood that she supported legislation working its way through the legislature that would increase the property tax deduction for veterans from \$50 to \$250 over the next four years.

"The veteran's property tax deduction will be added on top of our property tax rebate, on top of the property tax freeze for qualified seniors and disabled citizens, and on top of our refund to all those 100 percent disabled veterans who paid property taxes not realizing that they were exempt," the Governor said.

"Combined with our efforts to stem the costs of municipal government, this additional tax deduction will mean a real difference to our veterans. And they've earned it," she said.

The Governor also warned veterans that President Clinton's budget for fiscal year 2000 abandons senior veterans' medical services at a time when more services are needed.

"I am concerned about the decreased funding for federal Veterans' Administration medical centers," the Governor said. "That's why I've directed the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs to ensure than needed medical services are available to New Jersey's veterans."

"The decrease in funding could not happen at a worse time," she said. "For example, the VA hospitals have been ordered by the federal government to screen for the Hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C is a sometimes deadly disease that strikes those who had blood transfusions before 1990."

"Because many veterans had blood transfusions before 1990, the virus is lurking in our veterans' hospitals, attacking as many as 50 percent of the veterans in those facilities," Gov. Whitman said. "But while the VA hospitals have been ordered to screen for thinks virus, they haven't been given the extra funds to provide the testing. Where will the funds come from? The cancellation of other services? This would just not be acceptable."

The Governor said she will be working with New Jersey's Congressional delegation and other Northeast governors to correct the injustice of VERA, which is the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation, to ensure there will not be a degradation of services in VA hospitals.

A copy of the Governor's remarks is attached.

