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SENATE PASSES BILLS ON BULLETPROOF VESTS, PSOB, OFFICER SUPPORT AND DEBBIE SMITH REAUTHORIZATION *BVP program bill named for Senator Leahy is sent to President to be signed into law*

Chuck Canterbury, National President of the Fraternal Order of Police, applauded news that the United States Senate considered and passed three bills strongly supported by the FOP by unanimous consent during National Police Week.

“These votes on the Senate floor demonstrate that supporting and protecting the men and women in law enforcement is very bipartisan,” Canterbury said. “The FOP is extremely proud and thankful that the House-passed bill, permanently reauthorizing the Bulletproof Vest Partnership program, which has been named for its long-standing champion Senator Patrick Leahy, passed and is now on its way to be signed by the President.”

The Bulletproof Vest Partnership grant program was established by legislation authored by Senator Patrick J. Leahy (D-VT) and former Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO) in 1998—more than 20 years ago. Senator Leahy took to the Senate floor this week and asked for unanimous consent to pass H.R. 2379, the House companion to S. 1231, and the Senate adopted the measure. Senator Leahy spoke on the floor and thanked National President Chuck Canterbury, Executive Director Jim Pasco, and legislative staffer Tim Richardson personally for the FOP’s support for the program.

“I’m immensely proud of this program. It has put vests on the backs of well over one million police officers to date,” Senator Leahy said in his remarks. “This legislation will ensure that millions more officers will be similarly protected. It is perhaps the most tangible support that Congress can provide to our nation’s law enforcement officers.”

“The BVP grant program can document more than 3,100 officers whose lives were saved because they were wearing soft body armor. No other government program can document their success so starkly,” Canterbury said.

Since 1999, more than 13,000 jurisdictions received a total of \$467 million in Federal funds for the purchase of nearly 1.35 million vests. The program is set to expire in FY2020, but the legislation passed by the Judiciary Committee today will permanently authorize the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) program.

—BUILDING ON A PROUD TRADITION—

The Senate also passed, by unanimous consent, S. 1208, the “Protecting America’s First Responders Act,” which makes critical improvements to the Public Safety Officers Benefit (PSOB) program, especially with respect to disability claims filed by officers who are severely injured in the line of duty. The bill now goes to the House for further action.

“The PSOB program is of critical importance to law enforcement and their families. However, the program is currently burdened with unreasonable definitions which, in too many cases, prevent officers who are disabled in the line of duty from receiving the benefits to which they are entitled,” Canterbury explained. “The Grassley-Gillibrand bill would update the PSOB disability determinations and the definition of ‘gainful work,’ making it more consistent with existing Federal law and helping those officers whose service left them severely disabled.”

The Senate also unanimously passed S. 998, the “Supporting and Treating Officers in Crisis (STOIC) Act,” which would revive and expand programs designed to help officers and their families with stress reduction, suicide prevention, and the promotion of overall mental health and wellness. The bill now goes to the House for further action.

“It is a sad fact that we lose more officers to suicide every year than we lose in the line of duty,” said Canterbury. “I think we can do more to help the officers suffering from job-related stress and address the need for better mental resiliency and wellness for our officers and their families. We’re grateful to Senators Hawley and Whitehouse for their leadership on this issue.”

Finally, the Senate also unanimously passed the S. 820, the “Debbie Smith Act,” which reauthorizes programs providing much-needed resources to State and local law enforcement agencies to complete forensic analyses of crime scenes and untested rape kits. This bill also goes to the House for further consideration.

The Fraternal Order of Police is the largest law enforcement labor organization in the United States, with more than 348,000 members.