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Legislature to focus on veterans' issues

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AUSTIN — Senate leaders promised Monday to focus on Texas veterans' employment, education and mental health needs as they work toward the 2011 regular legislative session.

"We want to make Texas the best state for our veterans and their families to live, and we want to have our active duty military families live in an environment where their service to our country is valued," said Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, D-San Antonio, chair of the Senate Veterans Affairs and Military Installations Committee.

Republican Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst joined Van de Putte and retired Army Reserve Maj. James R. Cunningham at a San Antonio news conference to announce the areas on which Dewhurst formally is asking the committee to focus.

For the veterans committee, that includes a study of veteran employment and veteran-owned small business issues; utilization of the new GI Bill; advantages of a centralized call center for referring veterans to benefit providers; ways to coordinate state veteran workforce programs; and how Texas can better address veterans' mental health needs. The latter includes the monitoring of additional millions that officials previously announced would be allocated for veterans' mental health programs.

Cunningham said the mental-health support for



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veterans and families is one of the most important areas. Veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder or other problems "are having a hard time re-integrating into the 'new normal' after having been in combat, and as a result, their families suffer a lot," he said.

Dewhurst highlighted the struggles facing veterans and military personnel due to the recession.

"Our veterans face the same challenges and, in fact, because of their sacrifice, many of them face even greater challenges as they return to civilian life," Dewhurst said.

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