

September 28, 2004- Members of Congress Concerned About Troop Overextension

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS CONCERNED ABOUT TROOP OVEREXTENSION43 Members of the House of Representatives Send Letter to GAO Urging Investigation into the Recruitment and Retention Efforts of the U.S. Armed Forces.

WASHINGTON - U.S. Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-CA), a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee, U.S. Rep. Vic Snyder (D-AK), Ranking Member of the Total Force subcommittee, and 41 other Members of the House of Representatives, today sent the following letter to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) urging the undertaking of a comprehensive study to review the recruiting and retention efforts of the U.S. Armed Forces.

"We are beginning to see troubling signs that we might not be able to meet our long-term force requirements" said Rep. Sanchez. "Many of our servicemembers are facing back-to-back deployments, many others are affected by stop-loss which prohibits servicemembers from leaving the Armed Forces despite being eligible for retirement, and for the first time in a decade, the National Guard will fall short of its recruiting goals by 5,000. We need an accurate picture of what is going on in order to prepare for the challenges ahead."

September 28, 2004

Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

To Whom It May Concern:

We, the undersigned Members of Congress, are writing to request that the General Accounting Office (GAO) undertake a comprehensive study to review the recruitment and retention efforts of the U.S. Armed Forces. In light of the extraordinary scope of our current military commitments-466,000 troops deployed to over 120 countries -we are concerned about the adequacy of the total force and our ability to sustain long-term force requirements. Specifically, we are seeking an analysis of the most severe stresses facing the force and GAO's appraisal of how these factors may impact recruitment and retention efforts; an assessment of how measures such as Stop-Loss and the mobilization of the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) may be masking future problems; and an assessment of how recruitment and retention issues may ultimately impact DoD's ability to meet global military commitments, especially if the need arises for more forces in Iraq, Afghanistan, or other regions around the globe. We are particularly interested in GAO's assessment of the actions DOD is taking, if any, to prepare for the eventuality of a personnel shortage.

We are concerned that a number of stress factors, such as back-to-back and/or lengthy deployments, may significantly hinder DoD's ability to effectively recruit and retain forces. Since 9/11, average tour lengths for military personnel have more than doubled from the 156-day average during Desert Storm, to the current average of 319 days for Operations Nobel Eagle, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom. More than 40,000 servicemen and women have spent more than 400 days deployed away from home in the last two years alone.

We are also concerned about heavy reliance on the reserve component. Since 9/11, 373,000 reservists have been mobilized and approximately 40% of the current force deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom is comprised of reserve component personnel, a number projected to rise to approximately 43% as the U.S. orchestrates a third rotation of troops into Iraq and Kuwait through February 2005. A study conducted by the Army Research Institute between October 2003 and January 2004 polled 10,620 Army Reserve Soldiers and found that: 27 percent said that they intend to re-enlist; 28 percent expressed uncertainty; and 35 percent said they plan to leave or transfer to the Inactive Ready Reserve when their enlistments end. (This option may become less attractive, however, as DoD continues to reactivate the IRR).

The Services have also implemented a series of measures that may further cloud official retention numbers. In November 2002, the Army initiated Stop-Loss, a program which temporarily prevents both active and reserve component military personnel from leaving the military services either at the end of their normal term of service or retirement. Nearly 44,535 Army units have been impacted by Stop-Loss, but the program cannot go on indefinitely: at some point, Stop-Loss will have to be lifted, and DoD will be forced to fill vacancies.

The involuntary mobilization of the Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) deepens our concern. Both the Army and the Marine Corp have used the IRR to fulfill manpower requirements since September 11, 2001. However, the Army recently announced the call-up of nearly 5,600 additional IRR and identified a pool of 22,000 additional IRR members who could be called to service if needed. We are concerned that Stop-Loss and the involuntary mobilization of the IRR are both measures of last resort, and signify significant manpower shortages.

Finally, we are seeking an assessment of the accounting mechanisms used by the Department of Defense to compile

recruiting and retention rates. DoD cannot indefinitely employ measures such as Stop-Loss or continue its long-term reliance on reserve and guard forces. In the interest of national security, it is essential that the United States have a sufficient number of well-trained and willing forces on hand to fulfill missions around the globe, and that we, as Members of Congress, have an accurate picture of the challenges that lie ahead. We look forward to your findings, and await your timely response.

Vic Snyder
Loretta Sanchez
John Spratt
Gene Taylor
Silvestre Reyes
Martin Meehan
Neil Abercrombie
Henry Waxman
Tom Lantos
Jim Cooper
Steve Israel
Ellen Tauscher
Baron Hill
John Larson
Susan Davis
Ciro Rodriguez
Jim Langevin
Kendrick Meek
Madeleine Bordallo
Edolphus Towns
Edward Markey
Shiela Jackson-Lee
James McGovern
Diane Watson
Louise Slaughter
Peter Deutsch
Jim Davis
Ted Strickland
Dennis Cardoza
Stephen Lynch
Patrick Kennedy
Jay Inslee
Jim Matheson
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Chris Bell
Rush Holt
William Delahunt
Carolyn Kilpatrick
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