

March 03, 2005- Military Must Ease Burden on Transition for Returning Soldiers

Military Must Ease Burden on Transition for Returning Soldiers Sanchez suggests additional benefits for severely injured veterans

Washington D.C.— Rep. Loretta Sanchez raised the issue of benefits for wounded returning soldiers with panel witnesses in today's Military Personnel Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee. Witnesses expressed interest and support for a plan to provide additional financial benefits for those veterans dealing with long-term healthcare.

"I am very concerned that our military families are being saddled with extensive financial burdens to care for injured service members," commented Rep. Loretta Sanchez. "In addition to the cost of traveling to visit a wounded family member at a moment's notice, I am particularly concerned that we are not doing enough to compensate our most severely disabled soldiers and their families for their sacrifice. These are problems that warrant this Committee's attention this year.

Existing legislative proposals would dramatically enhance the amount of the death gratuity payable to a deceased servicemember's next of kin from the current \$12,000 to \$100,000. The same proposals would also increase the amount of SGLI insurance. These proposals are motivated by a sound desire to assist families in recovering from the long-term costs associated with the death of a servicemember. Yet when a servicemember is severely wounded and forced into disability retirement, he and his family often face equally daunting long-term costs as they struggle to adjust to a life of pain, disability and earning limitations.

"In light of these realities, I would like to look into introducing legislation to provide for a lump-sum gratuity for our disabled troops at the time of discharge. There is existing authority in Title 10 for disability severance pay and I would like to see that greatly enhanced," said Sanchez.

"The rationale is exactly the same as the death benefit--and is, in some ways, even more compelling. The money would help ameliorate the transition to a life of painful struggle for the soldier and his family. It could pay off debts, provide a foundation of savings, offset the loss of income during the long period of therapy, purchase time off work for a spouse or parents, and give the disabled troop a head start on a hard road. Unlike the survivors of a deceased soldier, the family of the disabled gets zero life insurance and they have to adjust to caring for the wounded," added Sanchez.