

LARSON; NATIONAL GUARD ANNOUNCE "OPERATION ENDURING GRATITUDE"

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Initiative Calls On State Residents to Write and E-mail U.S. Troops Beginning on Sept. 11 Anniversary through Veterans Day

HARTFORD - U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01), the Connecticut National Guard and the state Association of Public School Superintendents today announced the beginning of "Operation Enduring Gratitude" in the state. The initiative calls on state residents - especially students -- to write letters and e-mails of support to members of the U.S. military serving at home and abroad, thanking them for their service and sacrifice to the nation. The effort is to begin on the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and run through November 11, Veterans Day, in remembrance of the anniversary, as well as in support of the men and women currently serving in the Armed Forces.

Letters and e-mails from residents will be collected through the Connecticut National Guard Armory in Hartford. Due to security measures, the names and locations of troops cannot be released, therefore the letters and e-mails will be addressed "Dear Service Member" or a similar greeting. The Guard has also established a central e-mail address for residents to send all electronic mail, which will then be distributed to men and women in uniform:

OPERATIONENDINGGRATITUDE@ct.ngb.army.mil

The mailing address for stamped and bulk letters is:

Operation Enduring Gratitude

State Armory

360 Broad Street

Hartford, CT 06105-3795

Larson stated: "This September 11, Americans will devote time to remembering the people who lost their lives in the terrorist attacks one year ago and reflect on the heroes that emerged from that tragedy. In addition to remembering those horrible events and memorializing the victims in our own way, let us as a nation also make every September 11 a time to recognize and thank the men and women currently serving in our Armed Forces defending freedom both at home and overseas.

"While many in our military have family and friends at home from whom they can receive letters and e-mail, many who serve in uniform do not. Think of the pride that a letter from home from an appreciative American would inspire in a serviceman or woman serving far away from home. In our day-to-day lives, we must not forget who the millions of men and women are who do their part each day in service to our nation, and the period between Sept. 11 and Nov. 11 each year is the best time to remind ourselves, and them, that we are a grateful nation." said Larson.

Major John Whitford of the Connecticut National Guard stated: "The Connecticut National Guard is honored to participate in the Operation Enduring Gratitude letter writing campaign. This is a great way for people to communicate with the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces stationed in Connecticut by communicating their expressions of gratitude and support in protecting our freedom."

Dr. David H. Larson, (no relation to Rep. Larson) Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents stated: "I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the efforts of Congressman Larson and his colleagues for initiating 'Operation Enduring Gratitude.' This is certainly a worthy endeavor, and one that will benefit both our men and women in uniform as well as the children in our schools throughout Connecticut. The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents is using our organization to support and promote the involvement of Connecticut schools in this important project."

It was also announced that on Wednesday, Sept. 11 at 3:30pm student members of the Lions Club from the Capitol Region will go to the computer lab at the National Guard Armory, where they will speak with Congressman Larson through a video teleconference, and then write e-mails of support to troops.

Additionally, a bank account has been established by the Connecticut Credit Union Association to collect corporate donations in partnership with the MetroHartford Regional Economic Alliance, to purchase telephone cards to be distributed to men and women.

Other partners in the effort include: The Lions Club, Civitan International, SBC/SNET, AT&T, local veterans organizations, the North Central Area Agency on Aging and other senior organizations, local labor organizations and the state Association of Boards of Education.

The initiative is based on a non-partisan Resolution introduced in the House of Representatives (House Concurrent Resolution 450) by Larson, a member of the Armed Services Committee, and Rep. Bob Stump (R-AZ), Chairman of the Committee; Rep. Ike Skelton (D-MO), the Ranking Member of the committee, and Rep. Duncan Hunter (R-CA), who is also a member of the committee. The effort is called "Operation Enduring Gratitude" based on the name of the U.S. operation in Afghanistan, "Operation Enduring Freedom."

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