

LARSON AMENDMENT TO REIMBURSE TROOPS, FAMILIES FOR BODY ARMOR PURCHASES PASSES HOUSE ARMED SERVICES

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LARSON AMENDMENT TO REIMBURSE TROOPS, FAMILIES FOR BODY ARMOR PURCHASES PASSES HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

WASHINGTON, D.C.- The House Armed Services Committee today accepted an amendment offered by U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) that would allow the Secretary of Defense to reimburse American troops serving overseas for body armor they purchased - or was purchased on their behalf by their families or loved ones - because they did not yet have the most up-to-date protective equipment. The committee passed Larson's amendment to the National Defense Authorization bill for Fiscal Year 2005, H.R. 4200, by voice vote.

Larson initially introduced the measure as stand-alone legislation to reimburse troops and families for such purchases following a public forum on the issue of Iraq at East Hartford Town Hall in October 2003. At the forum, Pene Palifka of East Hartford, CT told the Congressman that her son, Bill Palifka of the CT National Guard's 248th Engineer Co. then serving in Iraq, had not been given the most effective Interceptor body armor American troops were supposed to have been issued. Worried for her son's safety, she said she used approximately \$1,100 her own money to buy the body armor for him. In November 2003, Larson introduced H.R. 3615 to reimburse people like Mrs. Palifka, which the amendment is based on.

"For too long the federal government did not meet its obligation to provide all our troops with the protective equipment they needed," said Larson. "This amendment rights that wrong by reimbursing those who spent their own hard-earned money on body armor for themselves or a loved one. It is unconscionable that people like Pene Palifka would have to spend their own money to protect their family member serving in the military. Now, thanks to Mrs. Palifka coming to a town hall meeting and speaking out about her son, this amendment is well on its way to becoming law. I will continue to work to ensure that it sees smooth sailing as the bill moves through the full House and Senate."

The program would be administered by the Secretary of Defense and would cover body armor purchases made between September 11, 2001 and December 31, 2003 for troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite the fact that Congress had appropriated funding in an April 2003 supplemental spending bill for ceramic Interceptor body armor that gives greater protection to servicemen and women, many troops still did not have the adequate armor until early this year. The measure requires the Secretary of Defense to issue regulations expediting the reimbursements within 60 days of the provision becoming law.

According to the DOD, all troops should have been issued the up-to-date body armor by December 31, 2003.

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