

LARSON AND COLLEAGUES URGE GAO TO INVESTIGATE OVEREXTENSION OF ARMED FORCES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 4, 2004

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-1) and 41 other Members of the House of Representatives 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.

“Our troops are looking at back-to-back deployments, being recalled into service after retirement as part of the Individual Ready Reserve and are facing a stop-loss order that prevents them from leaving the service even after they are eligible for retirement,” said Larson. “More troubling is the fact that for the first time in a decade the National Guard will fall short of its recruiting goals. There are serious concerns that we will not be able to meet the military’s future force needs in terms of recruitment and retention. This investigation will help give us a good idea of what is happening so we can take action to address recruiting and retention efforts of the military,” said Larson.

The following is the full text of the letter:

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 Noble 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.

Sincerely,

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

Sheila Jackson-Lee

James McGovern

Diane Watson

Louise Slaughter

Peter Deutsch

Jim Davis

Ted Strickland

Dennis Cardoza

Stephen Lynch

Patrick Kennedy

Jay Inslee

Jim Matheson

Harold Ford, Jr.

Chris Bell

Rush Holt

William Delahunt

Carolyn Kilpatrick

Michael Honda

Elijah Cummings

Tom Udall

Jim McDermott

Diana DeGette

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