

Congressman Larson Announces DOD Release of Long-Awaited Reimbursement Policy for Troop Body Armor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 30, 2005

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WASHINGTON, D.C.-Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01), who introduced a law providing reimbursements for service men and women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan without adequate protective armor, announced Wednesday that the Department of Defense had issued regulations needed to initiate the program.

The regulations were released seven months after the Congressional deadline that Congress mandated in the 2005 Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 108-375, Sec. 351). Under the Department of Defense's policy, members of the armed forces - or those acting on their behalf - can be reimbursed up to \$1,100 for body armor or other vital equipment that they had to purchase on their own. Due to wide spread shortages at the start of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, many soldiers sent abroad without vital protective body armor. The reimbursements cover purchases made up until Aug. 1, 2004 ,when the military indicated it had corrected its shortage problem and allocated current-standard issue gear to all service members serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Congressionally-mandated rules for reimbursement should have been in place by Feb. 28, 2005 - 120 days from the bill's enactment.

"This reimbursement policy is a long time in coming," Larson said. "I'm cautiously optimistic that they fulfill Congress's intent to repay service men and women and their families for the money they spent on body armor that should have been supplied to them in the first place. American men and women should never have been sent into battle with out the vital protective equipment they needed. Frightened family members should never have needed to resort to spending their savings to get their loved ones the armor that would keep them safe. This law is meant to help set right that wrong.

"I and other members of Congress will be monitoring the progress of these reimbursements to ensure that the program runs smoothly and no bureaucratic impediments have been raised to deny those who fought and their families their rightful reimbursements."

Leading up to today's release, Larson called and wrote to defense officials expressing his dismay at the delay and urging

action. Most recently, Larson sent a letter to Secretary Donald Rumsfeld stating in the strongest possible terms, my concern with the slow progress the Defense Department had made in getting the reimbursement program up and running.

Larson proposed a bill to reimburse body-armor purchases in 2003 after Pene Palifka, a mother of a National Guardsman sent to Iraq, explained at a district forum that she had paid \$1,100 of her own money to buy armor that would provide more protection than the basic flak jacket that he had been issued. Larson later successfully inserted the provision in the the FY05 Defense Authorization Act, which became law on October 28, 2004.

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