

"The cost of war must include caring for the warrior."

Washington, DC -- Rep. Peter Welch today continued his efforts to assure oversight of the Bush Administration's plan to care for returning soldiers from Iraq and Afghanistan after reports of intolerable outpatient care at Walter Reed Army Medical Center last week.

Welch enlisted all 41 Democratic members of his freshman class and one Republican to join him in calling for an independent assessment by the U.S. Government Accountability Office of "the adequacy of the Administration's long term plans to provide the full range of necessary services for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars while continuing to care for veterans of previous wars." The GAO is the independent non-partisan watchdog of federal spending.

"President Bush failed to prepare for this war and it has become increasingly clear he is not preparing for the care of our returning troops. It is long overdue that Congress provides vigorous oversight of the policies of this President. The cost of war must include caring for the warrior," said Welch, upon release of the letter.

On February 21, Welch wrote a letter to Chairman Henry Waxman requesting an investigation into the reports of "appalling and unacceptable reports" of outpatient care. Subcommittee Chairman John Tierney responded by scheduling a National Security and Foreign Affairs subcommittee hearing for 10 AM on March 5 at Walter Reed entitled "Is this Any Way to Treat our Troops? The Care and Conditions of Wounded Soldiers at Walter Reed."

Also, today Welch became an original House co-sponsor of the Dignity in Care for Wounded Warriors Act, sponsored in the House by Representative Rahm Emanuel and in the Senate by Senators Barack Obama and Claire McCaskill.

The legislation ensures that wounded service members receive the treatment, care and services they deserve by requiring improved inspections; reducing red tape for recovering service members; providing improved counseling for service members and their families; and improving support for families of recovering service members.

The bill also provides for a Wounded Warrior Oversight Group to monitor the progress and ensure that the nation's recovering service members receive the highest quality of care possible.

The following letter was sent to the Comptroller General today:

March 1, 2007

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General
United States General Accounting Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Walker,

As new members of the House of Representatives, we are writing out of concern over recent press reports that have exposed glaring problems in the delivery of outpatient health care for recovering soldiers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. As you know, this issue is now being investigated by various Congressional committees.

These reports raise broader questions about whether the federal government is prepared to meet the needs of all returning soldiers in addition to the ongoing needs of veterans of previous wars.

The situation at Building 18 is a clear indicator of a systemic failure in the delivery of quality

outpatient health care and services to those who have bravely served our country. We are concerned that this failure may be the tip of the iceberg in terms of a lack of readiness for the significant needs of returning veterans, particularly in the context of the Administration's proposed out year reductions in the budget for the Veterans Administration.

We believe the cost of war must include caring for the warrior. To that end, we are asking the General Accounting Office to conduct an independent assessment of the adequacy of the Administration's long term plans to provide the full range of necessary services for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars while continuing to care for veterans of previous wars.

A thorough examination of this issue is critical to ensure that we meet our moral obligation to those who have answered the call of duty. We look forward to working with you on this important study.

Sincerely,

Peter Welch
Joe Sestak
Paul Hodes
Ciro D. Rodriguez
Steve Kagen, MD
Hank Johnson
Joe Courtney
Joe Donnelly
Timothy Walz
Nick Lampson
Albio Sires
John Yarmuth
Jason Altmire
David Loeb sack
Kirsten Gillibrand
Harry Mitchell
Heath Shuler
Patrick Murphy
Jerry McNerney
Keith Ellison
John Hall

Phil Hare
Charles Wilson
Michael Arcuri
Ed Perlmutter
Bruce Braley
Mazie Hirono
Betty Sutton
Kathy Castor
Nancy Boyda
Ron Klein
Steve Cohen
John Sarbanes
Yvette Clarke
Chris Murphy
Chris Carney
Tim Mahoney
Zach Space
David Davis
Baron Hill
Gabrielle Giffords
Carol Shea-Porter
Brad Ellsworth