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CONTACT: ASHLEY ETTIEN
(202) 225-1782

Oversight Democrats Request Answers to Delays in Wounded Service Members Receiving Benefits

Members Give Agencies 6-Months to Deliver Comprehensive Plan

May 5, 2011

Washington, D.C. – House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings and Congressman John Tierney pressed for the Department of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide the Committee with a comprehensive plan within six months of yesterday's hearing to address the unacceptable delays in injured troops receiving the benefits they deserve. The request comes as thousands of wounded warriors ascended upon Washington, D.C. yesterday to meet with elected officials.

Severe problems with delays in wounded warrior care and the benefits system were exposed in 2007. Soon after the Dole-Shalala Commission recommended streamlining the benefits process for wounded warriors, the Oversight Committee, under Democratic leadership, held a series of hearings on this issue. Despite the Commission's findings, several Government Accounting Office reports, and the Committee's oversight activities, DoD and VA have failed to sufficiently address the challenges of improving the system for all wounded soldiers.

"We have got to have answers, and we have got to act on this with the urgency of now," said Cummings at yesterday's hearing after the agencies' witnesses failed to give a definitive answer as to when they will have a comprehensive plan. "I really think we have to set some deadlines

because otherwise the problems will continue to persist. We owe it to our soldiers to get to the bottom of this and move toward solutions, and I believe that we can do that in a bipartisan way."

Tierney, Ranking Member on the Committee's Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations and a leader in Congress on these issues, added, "based on the testimony today, it is clear that there is no plan in place to systematically address the problems resulting in benefit delays for our wounded veterans. I look forward to hearing testimony from senior administration officials in the next six months that convinces me that they understand the sources of these delays, they have a plan in place to fix them and that progress is being made to improve the benefits process for our wounded warriors."

Below is the letter Representatives Cummings and Tierney sent to Subcommittee Chairman Jason Chaffetz, requesting a follow-up hearing.

May 4, 2011

The Honorable Jason E. Chaffetz
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security,
Homeland Defense and Foreign Operations
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz:

Our hearing today continued a long tradition of bipartisan Committee oversight of transition delays affecting our injured service members returning from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. As we heard from the witnesses, significant challenges continue to plague the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES), including skyrocketing delays and staffing shortages that

unnecessarily burden our wounded warriors.

We are pleased to work with you in this partnership. As Ranking Member Cummings said, our Committee should hold the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs to a deadline by stating now our intent to hold a follow-up hearing at a time certain. As Ranking Member Tierney said, this hearing should include high-level department officials who can be held accountable for the successes and failures of the program. We appreciate your commitment to hold another hearing within six months, and we will support a request for senior officials at that hearing.

We fully support sustained oversight of the IDES program to ensure that our brave men and women in uniform receive the benefits and care they deserve. Based on the testimony we heard today, it is clear that this additional oversight is vital to improving the IDES program.

Sincerely,

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings	Rep. John F. Tierney
Ranking Member	Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform	Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Security and Foreign Operations

cc: Honorable Darrell E. Issa, Chairman