

Washington, DC -- The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) agreed today to conduct an investigation initiated by Rep. Peter Welch into the adequacy of the federal government's plans to provide services to returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

The GAO is the independent non-partisan watchdog of federal spending.

"I strongly believe the cost of the war must include care for the warriors. The failure of President Bush to prepare for this war cannot be repeated in preparing for the care of our returning troops," said Welch.

Welch added, "I am pleased that GAO has agreed to create a yard stick by which Congress will measure the readiness of the Administration to care for returning veterans as well as the impact on veterans from previous wars."

On March 1, 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."

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 Loebsack
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