

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 15, 2003

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Room 3E880
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld,

We are writing to commend the Department of Defense (DOD) for its January 9th move to pay for domestic travel for troops heading home on Rest and Relaxation (R & R) from Iraq and Afghanistan, but we are concerned that the DOD has decided not to reimburse thousands of other troops for their R & R travel expenses just months earlier.

A release from the Department of the Army dated January 9th, 2004, with the headline "Department of the Army Announces R & R Leave Program Onward Travel Funding" reads:

"Service Members and DoD civilians who traveled onward as part of the R&R Leave Program prior to Dec. 19, 2003, are not eligible for retroactive reimbursements of onward travel costs incurred."

This means thousands of service members who by chance were granted R & R before December 19th, 2003, and paid for their travel with their own money will not be reimbursed but those who traveled after that date will be. We believe this policy is completely unfair and should be changed so that all troops who dug deep into their pockets to pay their own way home will be reimbursed.

The R & R program was implemented on Sept. 25, 2003, and during several trips after that to Baltimore Washington International (BWI) Airport, Congressman Ruppberger heard from dozens of men and women in uniform who told him they were paying anywhere from \$400 to \$1000 for plane tickets to their hometowns. The Congressman was concerned about the excessive financial burden placed on military families and created "Operation Hero Miles", the innovative program that allows travelers to donate their unused frequent flyer miles and allows troops to use them to fly home for free.

At the same time, Congressman Dennis Moore of Kansas and Congressman Jim Ramstad of Minnesota sponsored and Congressman C.A. Dutch Ruppberger of Maryland supported an amendment to the \$87 billion aid package to Iraq and Afghanistan. In this amendment that was passed by Congress and signed by the President in November, 2003, \$55 million was earmarked to pay for R & R travel for troops.

We are asking you to do the right thing for our men and women in uniform risking their lives for our country in Iraq and Afghanistan. Please support our efforts to reimburse all our troops for the money they paid out of their own pockets to travel home on R & R to spend quality time with their loved ones during these very uncertain times. Begin with the first round of soldiers who set foot on American soil after their service in Iraq and Afghanistan in September, 2003.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Jim Ramstad
Member of Congress



Dennis Moore
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress