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Congressional Caucus Embraces America Supports You

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WASHINGTON, March 5, 2008 – A bipartisan congressional effort kicked off on Capitol Hill today to stand behind America Supports You, a Defense Department program that connects citizens and corporations with military personnel and their families serving at home and abroad.



From left: John E. Potter, U.S. postmaster general, Allison Barber, deputy assistant secretary of defense for internal communications and public liaison, Rep. Mary Bono Mack of California and Rep. Connie Mack of Florida, Karen Grimord, founder and president of the Landstuhl Hospital Care Project, and Army Brig. Gen. Gary Patton, director of manpower and personnel for the Joint Chiefs of Staff office and an America Supports You spokesman, pose for a picture during the America Supports You Caucus March 5, 2008, in Washington, D.C. Defense Dept. photo by John J. Kruzel

“This is a tremendous priority on both sides of the aisle,” said U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff of California, a co-chair of the America Supports You Caucus.

“Not a week goes by in my district ... when we don’t have people asking us what they do to be a support to our military and their families,” he said. “America Supports You is such a wonderful resource for them, to be able to multiply their efforts, to be able to know what’s going on and to tap into them.”

When introduced in 2004 to highlight citizen support for U.S. servicemembers, America Supports You comprised five organizations, known as “home-front” groups. The program has since branched into a network of more than 350 nonprofit organizations, companies and other supporters.

Representatives of three locally based home-front groups today described their troop-support missions to the audience gathered in the Rayburn House Office Building. In addition, the

U.S. Postal Service’s postmaster general announced a discount on mail sent abroad to military members.

One group on hand was Landstuhl Hospital Care Project, which provides comfort and relief items for military members who become sick, injured or wounded from service in Iraq, Kuwait, and Afghanistan, and is incorporated in Virginia, according to its official Web site.

Two McLean, Va.-based organizations also attended. Angels of Mercy cares for wounded troops at Walter Reed Army Medical Center here and other military hospitals, and also provides for Iraqi and Afghan schoolchildren. Our Military Kids, which joined America Supports You soon after the Pentagon program's inception, supports children of deployed and severely injured National Guard and reserve personnel through grants of up to \$500 for enrichment activities and tutoring.

Our Military Kids co-founder Linda Davidson expressed gratitude that Congress has agreed to work alongside the military and civilian sectors. "This America Supports You program is an example of an effective private-public partnership," she said.

Allison Barber, deputy assistant secretary of defense for internal communications and public liaison -- the architect of America Supports You -- thanked the co-chairs for showing compassion and commitment to U.S. troops. Co-chairing the caucus with Schiff are Rep. Mary Bono Mack of California and Reps. Connie Mack and Allen Boyd of Florida.

"On behalf of over 2 million men and women in the military, their families and our veterans, this is an important day," Barber said. "Today ... we're helping the American people know that their support matters and that through the America Supports You program they can find real, meaningful ways to show their support for our troops and their families."

Boyd served as a rifle infantryman in Vietnam. He said that after returning from combat duty -- an unpopular calling in many Americans' eyes -- he hoped no future conflict would divide the country in quite the same way.

"When I came to Congress, ... one of the things I never wanted to happen was to have our men and women put on the uniform and go carry out a policy to defend this country that the leadership had made, and then the American people not appreciate them," he said.

Boyd said that while he was in Vietnam, receiving reminders of Americans' support brightened his tour of duty. "I can tell you, when you're out there and you're getting the helicopters coming in every four days -- hopefully to bring you resupplies and mail and care packages -- that really is the highlight of the week for a soldier," he said.

Citing the importance of the military "mail call," Postmaster General John E. Potter today announce a reduction in the cost of flat-rate boxes sent from the United States to a military address abroad. "It's the way (troops) get that little touch of home ... from the American people telling them how important the work that they're doing is," he noted.

Bono Mack said it's critical that American citizens show appreciation to U.S. troops making sacrifices throughout the world. "I'm proud to see so many groups, both in my district and throughout the nation, taking on this important cause," she added.

Army Brig. Gen. Gary Patton, director of manpower and personnel for the Joint Chiefs of Staff office and an America Supports You spokesman, said he was inspired by the outpouring of support for servicemembers.

"For everybody that's had a part of that," he said, "I want to thank you."