

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Tuesday, February 20, 2007

## **Slaughter Sends Letter to Secretary Gates Demanding Answers on Walter Reed**

**Washington, DC** - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates demanding information on the current state of outpatient facilities at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Rep. Slaughter also asked the Secretary to explain how conditions at the facilities, reported this past weekend in a series of *Washington Post* articles, have been allowed to deteriorate to such a degree.

**"It is deeply troubling to think that veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much are being left largely alone to struggle with injuries without the care and attention they need,"** Rep. Slaughter said. **"And while I am glad to hear of changes underway at Walter Reed, it shouldn't take a newspaper exposé to spur action on behalf of our wounded soldiers."**

**"Supporting our troops begins with giving them a mission that makes sense and that doesn't needlessly jeopardize their lives,"** the Congresswoman continued. **"It ends with an unconditional commitment to men and women who have made sacrifices few of us can fully appreciate. If this Administration is going to order soldiers into battle, then it has no right to stand on the sidelines when they come home. We need a serious evaluation of the care being given to our veterans, and must immediately address holes and gaps in a system that can't afford either."**

**"Critics of the President's escalation of the war are told that they can't both support the troops and oppose their mission,"** Rep. Slaughter added. **"I think that you can't support the troops if you send them into battle without proper armor, or deny them critical medical care and counseling after they are injured. That is the definition of hypocrisy, and our wounded soldiers are paying the price."**

**The complete text of Rep. Slaughter's letter is included below:**

The Honorable Robert Gates

Secretary

U.S. Department of Defense

1000 Defense Pentagon

Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates,

I urge you to explain why the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, once the crown-jewel of military medicine, has become a bleak and frustrating place for our wounded soldiers to recover, and what the Army intends to do to restore the integrity of its medical system.

This weekend's *Washington Post* series revealing the "other Walter Reed" was stunning. It painted a picture of abhorrent living conditions and a bureaucratic nightmare for our wounded soldiers in outpatient care. In striking detail, the series described how one of the outpatient facilities, Building 18, is marked by rodent infestation, mold problems, and crumbling ceilings. As if the facilities were not bad enough, wounded soldiers and their families must wrestle daily with an Army bureaucracy ill-equipped to provide them with the attention and care they need. Wounded soldiers are often left on their own to make and keep appointments, and fill out the 22 documents needed to enter and exit the Army's medical system.

The living conditions and bureaucratic battles frustrate and demoralize our wounded soldiers. Marine Sergeant Ryan Groves said it best, "We've done our duty. We fought the war. We came home wounded. Fine. But whoever the people are back here who are supposed to give us the easy transition should be doing it." Our wounded soldiers have made incredible sacrifices on behalf of the nation, and deserve the very best care throughout their recovery. The conditions at Walter Reed are unacceptable, and an affront to our men and women in uniform.

I am encouraged to read in today's *Washington Post* that the facility's commander, Maj. Gen. George W. Weightman, has announced new repairs at Building 18, and a review of the Army's entire mission at Walter Reed. However, these improvements are long-overdue and I cannot help but think that they would not have begun at all had the *Washington Post* not blown the whistle.

The *Washington Post's* series is a major black-eye and an embarrassment for the Army and the United States. I would like a full explanation of how the conditions became so dire at Walter Reed in the first place, and what steps the Army plans to take to immediately rectify the situation. Please know that I stand ready to help provide the Defense Department with the resources it needs to adequately care for our wounded soldiers. I await your prompt response to this inquiry.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

