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Connecticut's Duty to its Citizen Soldiers

By Richard Tulisano

The pile of dirty laundry just keeps getting higher.

First we hear about soldiers writing home asking loved ones for protective body armor for birthday presents. The Bush Administration's response: a shrug. Then we find out American soldiers are digging through junkyards to find scrap metal to armor their vehicles in Iraq. The Bush Administration's response: a sigh. Then we hear wounded American soldier in Baghdad aren't even provided with pajamas or hospital gowns when their uniforms are cut off for treatment. The Bush Administration's response: silence.

Connecticut must take a stand and say the Bush/Rumsfeld policy is not acceptable. We have taken steps to provide our National Guardsmen and women with body armor when they are shipped out, but we are duty bound to do more. I would suggest that one of the most valuable services the State of Connecticut could provide its citizen soldiers would be some sense of financial security for family members.

A military family relief fund would be a step in the right direction. Illinois pioneered this idea and set up a fund to issue need-based and casualty-based grants to families of active military. Illinois's Military Family Relief Fund is supported by a voluntary check off box allowing taxpayers to contribute to the fund. Their governor also provided the fund with \$5-million in seed money. Connecticut should set up its own military family relief fund.

Most of Connecticut's National Guard signed on as weekend soldiers either for extra income or a college education. They knew the risks. They bravely accepted the call. However, National Guard troops are to be used in times of extreme national danger and unlike previous military campaigns, there was no buildup to a war footing. President Bush miscalculated in a war of his own making and now it has become the war of "part-time" soldiers pressed into full-time service. A proper military buildup is an issue that must be addressed on the federal level, but we can work at the state level to protect soldiers' families.

We must show every citizen soldier that they are precious to us and that we will do our best to protect their families' financial security as they fight in foreign lands to protect our freedoms.

I urge Governor Rell and the General Assembly to set up a military family relief fund in the coming legislative session.

This is our duty.

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