



STATE OF MINNESOTA

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February 13, 2007

The Honorable Kurt Zellers
State Representative
315 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Re: H.F. 532

Dear Kurt:

The billions expended in Iraq is but a down payment on the cost of the war. The families whose loved ones fight this war pay a much bigger price.

This war is different than all others when it comes to demographics. In this war the soldier is ten years older, often married with children, and has a mortgage and car loan in a neighborhood far removed from a base. The soldier's family has no mutuality of support from military neighbors on base, no subsidized commissary, no on-base medical clinic, no subsidized housing, and is not economically adjusted to a soldier's pay.

The soldier's family worries not just about terrorist bombs but how to adjust from a mechanic's pay of \$42,000 to a soldier's pay of \$28,000. The car can't get fixed. A pipe bursts, and the basement floods. No back to school clothes for the kids. It is pretty difficult to focus on Sunni militia when your spouse cries about bills that mount on the kitchen table.

And the soldier doesn't get a lot of comfort when hearing about the young wiz kid with the college degree who has replaced him at work. He hears that they paid the kid a reduced wage, that the kid is customizing the employer's software, and that he gets rave reviews by the customers. The soldier worries and should worry. Sure, the employer has to offer the job back, but they can lay off the veteran the next day. Soldiers hear stories about it every day. It makes it hard to concentrate on IED's.

And the guardsmember or reservist can be discharged from Bagdad to Wilmar in 24 hours. No time for readjustment. The soldier and the soldier's spouse haven't seen each other for a year. They confronted entirely different stress points during that year. They are thrown together with perhaps a screaming kid or two and confront the bills, post traumatic stress disorder, and the new kid at work. It is no wonder that the divorce rate is so high among our returning vets.

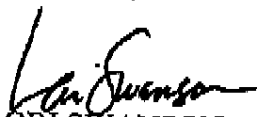
The truth is that the major cost of this war is being shouldered in silence by families who have fought for and protected this nation. We must stand by them.

We need a Minnesota G.I. Bill which will fill in the gaps of our federal law so that our soldiers get the same support provided in past wars and currently provided by states like Wisconsin and Illinois. A stipend of \$1,000 is simply too little support for these families. Many of these soldiers need retraining as they re-enter the work force. We should help in this adjustment, not only to honor their service, but to promote their success upon their return.

Minnesota soldiers also should be protected from lawsuits while deployed. The federal Servicemember's Civil Relief Act does not apply to all contracts. Accordingly, we should extend those protections by enacting a State Servicemember's Civil Relief Act.

No family who has a loved one at risk on the other side of the world should have to enter the door of a pay-day lender, a mental health crisis center, or a domestic abuse shelter. These proposals don't create more burden for the taxpayer. They simply reallocate that burden, now sustained by a few families, to all of us. We should do no less.

Very truly yours,


LORI SWANSON
Attorney General