

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

October 20, 2006

**Event Backgrounder:**

**The President meets with Organizations that Support the United States Military in Iraq and Afghanistan**

BACKGROUND

The President will meet with representatives of military service organizations from across the country that are dedicated to supporting our troops abroad. Their services include sending care packages and letters, building homes and providing financial assistance for families of the men and women of our armed forces.

BIOGRAPHIES OF PARTICIPANTS

Debbie Aznar, Founder, True to the Red, White, and Blue (Lewiston, Montana)

Debbie Aznar and her husband are both retired Army veterans. They founded True to the Red, White, and Blue, which sends care packages to troops in an effort to boost morale and remind soldiers that the public is appreciative of their service.

Dan Bowers, Founder, Operation Paperback (Red Lion, Pennsylvania)

Operation Paperback was founded in 1999 as a family-and-friends effort to provide reading material and other recreational items to troops stationed in the Middle East. Upon seeing how well the books were received, Operation Paperback promoted the program to other military units around the world and to the public here at home. At the end of 1999, fifty members had collected and shipped 7,427 books to 37 military units around the world. Today, the organization has shipped over 600,000 books. These have gone to nearly 1,000 military units from nearly 1,000 member-citizens.

Gene Carter, Executive Director, Military Family Support Centers, Inc. (Salem, Virginia)

Military Family Support Centers, Inc. was founded in 2005 to support families of deployed troops. By connecting the needs of families to the resources within their communities, the

organization has succeeded in reducing stress on the families on the home front, and consequently, eliminating distractions of the loved ones on the war front. The Center has facilitated pantry distribution (including over 15,000 diapers), Christmas parties, videoconferencing, and repairs or remodeling of homes. Military Family Support Centers also serves as a call center so servicemen around the world can connect toll free to their friends and families across the country. The installation of three additional centers in Virginia is scheduled for next year.

Donna Cranston, Founder, Defenders of Freedom (Coppell, Texas)  
Donna Cranston founded Defenders of Freedom (DOF) in November of 2004 after her son returned from serving in OIF. During his deployment in Iraq, Cranston observed that many other Marines were not receiving the support they needed from home. DOF volunteers have greeted almost 75,000 troops as they have returned from deployment to the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. DOF has also sent 4,000 care packages to deployed service members and has provided more than \$20,000 to support wounded troops and their families.

Ginger Dosedel, Founder and Executive Director, Sew Much Comfort (Beavercreek, Ohio)

Sew Much Comfort was originally created to provide clothing for Ginger's son, Mike, a stage IV cancer survivor, to wear as he underwent surgeries and had to wear the Ilizarov external fixator (metal halo surrounding limbs). At the age of 11, while attending physical therapy, Mike suggested making the clothing for the wounded troops recuperating in the hospital. Hundreds of volunteers across the country participated in efforts to bring a growing number of clothing options to troops in almost 30 major military medical facilities, clinics, and combat surgical hospitals. Through the generosity of Americans and countless hours of sewing by the organization's talented seamstresses, this grassroots, all-volunteer organization has been able to donate over 10,000 items for wounded troops.

John Harlow, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Freedom Calls Foundation (Brooklyn Heights, New York)

John Harlow founded Freedom Calls Foundation in 2003 to help deployed military personnel with costly cell phone bills due to correspondence with their families. The foundation provides state of the art communications capabilities over its satellite network at no cost to more than 30,000 deployed soldiers at four military camps in Iraq. More than one million minutes, free internet access, and over 1,000 video conferences are provided each month. Freedom Calls Foundation has broadcast numerous

special events for troops and their families including four marriages and more than 500 births.

John McNeill, Assistant Adjutant General and Executive Director of Unmet Needs, Veterans of Foreign Wars (Kansas City, Missouri)

John McNeill has overseen Unmet Needs for the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) since June of 2004. The VFWs' Unmet Needs program has provided over 800 military families and individuals with \$1.5 million to assist with unanticipated financial demands that cannot be immediately remedied through existing means. The program's success is due to the strong relationship between military family support coordinators in the Department of Defense and the VFW, along with the significant financial generosity of individuals and corporate sponsors. This organization contributes 100 percent of donations to the affected military families.

Liann Meyer, Founder and President, Montana Supporting Soldiers (Helena, Montana)

Montana Supporting Soldiers was founded in 2003 when Liann's son joined the USAF. She realized soldiers receive little to no mail while deployed and wanted to help ensure troops receive letters of support. The organization now exists in ten states and has sent thousands of care packages to thousands of troops.

Rachel Okun, Co-Founder, ThanksUSA (McLean, Virginia)

ThanksUSA was founded in 2005 and was the idea of Rachel, 11, and her younger sister Kelsi, 8. They wanted to say thank you to the troops who defend their freedom by giving the gift of education through scholarships for the kids and spouses of active duty military personnel. With the help of a bipartisan Congress, as well as corporate and individual contributions, ThanksUSA has awarded over 1000 need-based scholarships for this academic year, in all 50 states, to all branches of the military, totaling more than \$3.5 million.

Debbie Quackenbush, Founder, American Military Family (Longmont, Colorado)

American Military Family, Inc. (AMF) was formed in January 2005 to work in direct support of the military and their families. The funds raised through AMF are used to help active duty military members stay focused on the job at hand by removing some of the financial and support pressures on their families.

Bailey Reese, Founder, Hero Hugs (Niceville, Florida)

Bailey Reese, age 10, founded Hero Hugs in 2002, which sends care packages to our troops to thank them for "making the world

a better place." Bailey's organization has sent 17,000 packages overseas.

Eileen Schwartz, Founder, Flags Across the Nation (Charlotte, North Carolina)

Flags Across the Nation (FAN) was founded in 2002 to promote patriotism through the arts. It creates patriotic exhibits of letters and children's art, linking the nation together with images and positive thoughts. Members of FANs send letters, art, and other personal items to deployed and wounded troops. They have held more than 50 exhibits since its founding.

Paula Sturla, Founder and President, Family & Friends For Freedom Fund, Inc. (Pompton Lakes, New Jersey)

Family & Friends For Freedom Fund, Inc. was founded in January 2005 after Paula's brother-in-law was severely injured in OIF. As the family worked to get through these life-altering circumstances, Paula became aware of the many other families undergoing similar adjustments in their lives. The organization's mission is to raise funds for injured Marines and their families to assist in the recovery process. Family & Friends For Freedom Fund, Inc. has distributed nearly \$100,000 to assist injured Marines and their families.

Brad White, Founder, Yellow Ribbon America (Garden Grove, California)

Brad White started Yellow Ribbon America in February of 2003 in an effort to unite local businesses, residents, churches, and community groups in focusing their resources to help military members and their families. White's awareness of the lack of immediate family support groups for reserve soldiers led him to establish this organization.

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