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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

June 23, 2008

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ERRIN C. CONATON, STAFF DIRECTOR

Dear Colleague:

House Resolution 1240, a discharge petition to require consideration of House Resolution 111, a bill to establish a Select Committee on POW and MIA Affairs, was filed on June 4, 2008. The proposed House Select Committee on POW and MIA Affairs would be required to investigate all unresolved matters related to any U.S. personnel unaccounted for from World War II, the Korean conflict, the Cold War, the Vietnam era, and the Gulf War.

I wanted to take this opportunity to express my opposition to this discharge petition. Let me explain why. First, the House Armed Services Committee already has full jurisdiction over matters relating to POW/MIA affairs, including oversight of the major government offices handling this important issue: the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMO) and the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. As such, the legislative responsibility for this issue ultimately resides with the House Armed Services Committee and establishing a Select Committee only creates false expectations and perceptions.

Second, many in the POW/MIA community strongly oppose the creation of a Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. On May 14th of this year, the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia stated the following:

"Previously disproven claims of conspiracy and cover-up are again being raised, but past investigations have completely tied up assets and resources and the accounting was put on hold to allow time and attention to respond to Congress. The League will continue to oppose another wasteful, time-consuming special committee or commission unless and until there is nothing further that can be done constructively. In that event, the League would then reconsider. That time is NOT yet here."

Third, the Armed Services Committee has maintained an active oversight of the Department of Defense's POW/MIA activities over the past several years. Including:

- The FY08 National Defense Authorization Act, Public Law 110-181, increased funding for the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command by \$7.5 million, and the Defense Prisoner of War Missing Personnel Office by \$200,000 above the President's budget request.
- The FY07 National Defense Authorization Act, Public Law 109-364, requires the Secretary of Defense to submit to Congress a consolidated budget justification display that includes prior year and future year funding for specified organizations supporting POW/MIA activities of the Department of Defense as part of the Department's justification material that supports the President's annual budget request.

- The FY05 National Defense Authorization Act, Public Law 108-375, required the Department of Defense to maintain the number of military and civilian personnel in the DPMO at 46 and 69, respectively, as well as maintain its budget at \$16 million. It also directed GAO to study the adequacy of DPMO funding and personnel levels in relation to the missions it has to perform.
- The FY04 National Defense Authorization Act, Public Law 108-136, expressed the sense of Congress that the "United States should pursue every lead and otherwise maintain a relentless and thorough quest to completely account for the fates of those members of the Armed Forces who are missing or otherwise unaccounted for" and that the Secretary of Defense should use his authority to offer monetary rewards to those "who provide information leading to the conclusive resolution of the status of any missing member of the Armed Forces."

The committee remains committed to diligent oversight and steady advancement of POW/MIA issues. As such, the Military Personnel Subcommittee is committed to conducting a hearing on the status of POW/MIA activities during July 2008.

As chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, I remain steadfast in my support of the troops and to ensure no man or woman who honorably serves our Nation in uniform is left behind on the battlefield.

I urge you to consider all of these points before you consider signing on to the discharge petition. If you have any questions about this issue, please contact Debra Wada of the House Armed Services Committee staff at x5-7560.

Very truly yours,



IKE SKELTON
Chairman