Portland, Ore.— Oregon's five House Members, led by Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) last week called on House leaders to reject efforts by the Department of Defense to cut back on the number of National Guard personnel. The Pentagon has proposed cutting about 24,500 Army and National Guard members over the next five years, according to recent news reports.

"We believe any proposal to reduce the National Guard's end strength will only further damage our military preparedness, our total force readiness, and harm our nation's security," said the five lawmakers in a letter to the Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Committee. "Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, the demands on the National Guard have grown to include the homeland defense mission in addition to its traditional missions stateside and abroad. Unfortunately, neither the Guard's funding nor its size have grown to adequately meet its entire Constitutional role."

"We fully support the actions of the delegation and appreciate their support during these difficult times we are living in," said Colonel Mike Caldwell, Deputy Director of the Oregon Military Department. "The view of the Pentagon budgeters is not the reality of what we experience at the local level. We are delighted that the delegation is bringing our concerns to Congress' attention."

The Army's budget proposal is now being reviewed at the Department of Defense and final funding levels must be approved by Congress. A copy of the letter was sent to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

The full text of the letter signed by Blumenauer as well as Congressmen Greg Walden, Peter DeFazio and David Wu and Congresswoman Darlene Hooley, follows:

January 13, 2006

Dear Chairman Hunter and Ranking Member Skelton,

We are writing to express our concern over media reports of a planned force reduction in the Army and Air National Guard. We are additionally concerned that these reductions might include units from the Oregon National Guard.

Cutting the National Guard makes no sense in the current security environment. Since the

terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, the demands on the National Guard have grown to include the homeland defense mission in addition to its traditional missions stateside and abroad. Unfortunately, neither the Guard's funding nor its size have grown to adequately meet its entire Constitutional role.

National Guard forces have played critical roles in both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. There is no reason to believe that they wouldn't need to play a similarly large role in any future missions in the Global War on Terror. In light of this, we believe any proposal to reduce the National Guard's end strength will only further damage our military preparedness, our total force readiness, and harm our nation's security.

Finally, as you know, the outstanding men and women of the National Guard play a crucial role in our communities, providing vital services that range from public safety to disaster recovery. Reductions to these key service providers at home will have grave consequences. Just recently the Oregon National Guard responded with over 2000 citizen-soldiers to the areas devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Without this irreplaceable National Guard presence, our home-front recovery efforts will be irrevocably hindered.

The citizens of Oregon take great pride in the achievements of our state National Guard as they do their duty to keep the state and nation secure, from hurricane recovery efforts to the deployment of Oregon Guard units to Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. We hope that you will join with us in recognizing the critical role the National Guard plays in keeping Americans safe and reject any proposals to cut the strength of the National Guard.

While we support efforts to eliminate unnecessary spending in the Department of Defense's budget, a force reduction in the Army and Air National Guard would put the safety and security of Americans at risk. Instead, we stand ready to work with you to ensure that the Guard receives the funding and troop levels it needs to meet its multiple critical missions.

Sincerely,

Earl Blumenauer, Greg Walden, Peter DeFazio, Darlene Hooley and David Wu