

WASHINGTON, D.C.--Today, Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) and Jim Leach (R-IA), began circulating a letter urging their colleagues to join them in requesting humanitarian assistance for the unintended victims of the Afghan war. They are encouraging other Members of Congress to sign their letter to the House Appropriations Committee requesting that \$20 million be provided through the fiscal year 2003 Foreign Operations bill. The letter to the appropriators will be sent the week of May 20-24.

Blumenauer also plans to offer an amendment next week when the House considers H.R. 3994, the Afghanistan Freedom Support Act, authorizing the creation of an Afghan compensation program.

The following is an excerpt from Congressman Blumenauer's letter to the appropriators:

"In the aftermath of the Afghanistan campaign, we feel it is important for the United States to assist the people of Afghanistan and particularly to help unintended victims who have suffered directly due to our munitions. There are children who have been injured or killed, or left to care for themselves because adult members of their families have been mistakenly killed. Widows have been left to care for children without means to provide food, health care, and clothing. Other victims have suffered property loss or personal injury. Despite humanitarian efforts, women and children remain victims of this war and desperately need our help. All would agree that the military campaign in Afghanistan is against the Taliban and other terrorist organizations and not the people of Afghanistan.

"We believe that providing this assistance is consistent with past policy and speaks to the highest values of our nation and our people. It would be an important goodwill gesture for us to help the unintended victims of the war against terrorism that was spearheaded by our country in Afghanistan."

In the past, the United States has provided aid to civilian casualties of military operations. The U.S. has awarded compensation to unintended victims of the following incidents: the Chinese Embassy bombing by the U.S. in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; the U.S. Marine Corps jet clipping of an Italian ski-lift cable in Cavalese, Italy; the inadvertent damage and destruction of homes during combat against Noriega's army in Panama; the downing of Iran Air Flight 655 in 1988; and loss and damage inflicted on persons and property in Switzerland during World War II.