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CONTACT: Melissa Wagoner (Kennedy)
(202) 224-2633
Kawika Riley (Akaka)
(202) 224-9126

**SUMMARY INCLUDED

KENNEDY, AKAKA FIGHT FOR THE WORKPLACE RIGHTS OF VETERANS

Bill will strengthen federal protection of returning servicemembers who lose their jobs, benefits.

WASHINGTON, Dc— Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, and Senator Daniel K. Akaka, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, introduced legislation to strengthen the employment and reemployment rights of our returning servicemen and women. Recent hearings by the Committees have revealed that tens of thousands of returning servicemembers have reported that they lost their jobs and benefits, and there is widespread dissatisfaction with the federal agencies that are supposed to help them.

Senator Kennedy said, "The Administration's failure to help returning servicemembers who have lost their jobs and benefits is a disgrace. It is an insult to their courageous service to our country, and it undermines our ability to maintain the strong National Guard and Reserve that are vital to our national security."

Senator Akaka said, "When veterans turn to the government to protect their employment rights, they deserve solutions, not delays. This legislation will assist the federal government in protecting the employment rights of veterans."

The Kennedy-Akaka Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act Enforcement Improvement Act imposes deadlines on federal agencies to assist servicemembers. It also implements the recommendations of the Government Accountability Office to reduce inefficiencies and improve the information collected by the government on these issues.

THE USERRA ENFORCEMENT IMPROVEMENT ACT

The USERRA Enforcement Improvement Act strengthens federal enforcement of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, which protects servicemembers' rights to return to their prior jobs with the same wages and benefits.

The bill ensures that federal agencies will assist servicemembers in a faster and more effective manner by:

- Requiring the Department of Labor to investigate and resolve servicemembers' cases within 90 days, and inform servicemembers of the results;
- Imposing a 15-day deadline on the Department of Labor to refer cases to the Attorney General or Special Counsel for litigation, if a servicemember asks for a referral;
- Requiring the Attorney General or Special Counsel to tell servicemembers whether the government will represent them within 45 days after receiving the case from the DOL;
- Directing the Comptroller General to issue quarterly reports on the number of cases in which agencies fail to meet these critical deadlines.

The bill reduces inefficiency and improves the information collected by the government on employment problems that servicemembers face by:

- Requiring all federal agencies that enforce USERRA to gather and report information about servicemembers' cases in a uniform way and to share information with each other;
- Mandating that agencies gather and report information on how well our government is helping disabled veterans who are denied employment, benefits or accommodations;
- Requiring the Department of Defense to report the number of servicemembers' cases it handles annually through the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

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