

Statement in support of Persian Gulf supplemental authorization package

Senator Daniel K. Akaka Papers

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**STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF PERSIAN GULF
SUPPLEMENTAL AUTHORIZATION PACKAGE**

Senator Daniel K. Akaka

March 13, 1991

Mr. President, with the indulgence of my colleagues, I would like to make a few, general comments in support of the pending Desert Storm package.

Mr. President, having destroyed a numerically superior force and the furtive dreams of a dictator, our Armed Forces are finally returning to long-awaited homecomings and the arms of a grateful Nation. Now it is time for Congress to address the direct financial costs of this war as well as the less measurable, but more painful, costs inflicted on our soldiers and their families.

S. 578 authorizes supplemental appropriations for Fiscal Year 1991 to cover part of the estimated \$60 to \$68 billion costs of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. According to OMB, over \$54 billion have been committed by allied countries, of which less than \$18 billion has been received. S. 578 establishes a \$15 billion Desert Shield Working Capital Account to pay for the costs of the war not covered by these foreign contributions.

I am pleased that measures to address the domestic impact of the war on military personnel and their families have also been included in S. 578. Provisions for education and family support services for families of

active-duty personnel and transitional medical and mental health benefits for military personnel are just a few of the assistance measures that are included in the omnibus bill.

Mr. President, I would also like to point out that S. 386, legislation recently considered and approved by the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and specifically affecting veterans of the Gulf War, is included as a separate title in this Persian Gulf package. As a member of the Committee, I was pleased to work closely with Chairman Cranston and other panel members in developing this title.

In essence, the veterans provisions would extend to Gulf veterans eligibility for a variety of VA programs and entitlements, including pensions, medical care for certain mental health conditions, drugs and medicines for disabled or needy veterans, readjustment counseling, funeral and burial payments, home loan guaranties, and reemployment rights. Our legislation would also establish a toll-free hotline for information concerning readjustment and mental health services available to veterans and their families.

I am especially pleased by the provision to extend readjustment counseling service (RCS) benefits to veterans of Beirut, Grenada, Libya, Panama, and now the Persian Gulf. In spite of VA's meagre Fiscal 1992 budget request for RCS and related programs, I hope that this initiative will encourage VA to accept fully the vital role that vet centers play in bringing our veterans all the way home, especially

those hundreds of thousands who suffer from PTSD but remain untreated. My only disappointment is that we were unable to obtain agreement to extend these same benefits to WWI, WWII, and Korean-era veterans as well.

I am also very enthusiastic about the provisions requiring employers to make efforts to requalify or retrain returning servicemembers for jobs they were forced to vacate because of the Gulf conflict, and also to make "reasonable accommodations" for returning disabled veterans. If our Nation embarks on a course of military action that uproots thousands of men and women from their ordinary working lives and places them in harm's way, the least we can do is to ensure that their jobs are waiting for them when they return, particularly those who have sacrificed health and limb in our behalf.

In closing, Mr. President, I urge my colleagues to support this important measure. Our government has no higher duty than to care for those who served our country in wartime. The men and women of our Armed Forces are to be commended for their heroic efforts in bringing the Gulf conflict to a quick and decisive end. Their brave efforts and unselfish sacrifices will be honored as long as the world values the ideals of liberty and common justice.

Thank you, Mr. President. I ask that my full, written statements on S. 578 be included at the appropriate place in the record.