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## President Bush Thanks Troop-Support Groups

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By **Samantha L. Quigley** / **American Forces Press Service**

**WASHINGTON, Feb. 28, 2007** - President Bush today thanked a group of people who have dedicated their time and energy to supporting U.S. troops.

"One of the most enjoyable things I do as the president is to hear stories of my fellow citizens, stories of compassion, stories of care," Bush said today at the White House following a meeting with representatives of volunteer organizations that are members of the Defense Department's America Supports You program.

America Supports You is a Defense Department program highlighting the ways Americans and the corporate sector support the nation's servicemembers.

"I've just talked to social entrepreneurs who have decided to help improve the lives of our servicemen and women and their families. There are some remarkable acts of kindness by people who ... have taken it upon themselves to serve their country by helping a neighbor in need.

"And whether it be helping the chaplains help kids, or whether it be ... helping a family of the injured, whether it be working at Walter Reed or supporting troops getting ready to go into combat, these good men and women really represent the very best of America," Bush continued.

He urged all Americans to do what they can to help support military members and their families, and suggested people visit the American Supports You Web site, [www.AmericaSupportsYou.mil](http://www.AmericaSupportsYou.mil), to find ways to help.

"If you really do want to participate like these citizens have, (on this Web site) you can find a way to contribute your time, your money, your talents to really send a message that America supports these brave volunteers who are out defending their country in the war on terror."

Bush said he enjoyed hearing from the volunteers at the meeting. "I'm proud to be the president of a country with so many decent citizens," he said.

Before the meeting with the president, the volunteers were treated to a luncheon sponsored by the America Supports You program and heard from the program's founder, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Allison Barber.

Barber, who heads the Defense Department's internal communications and public liaison programs, said servicemembers returning from war today are returning to heroes' welcomes, unlike their Vietnam-era counterparts. "Vietnam' has not happened yet because of you," she said.

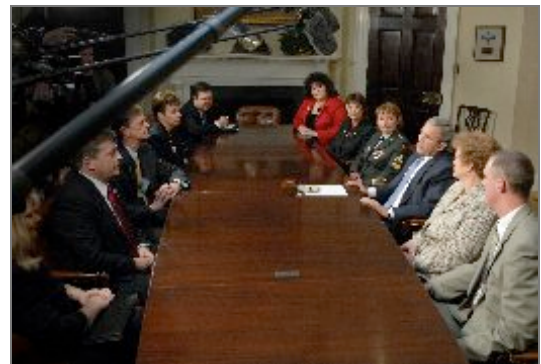
The attendees represented groups that send care packages, provide financial assistance and raise the morale of troops and their families overall. During the luncheon, they got a chance to discuss issues near and dear to their organizations. Most agreed that financial needs are among the biggest concerns of servicemembers and their families.

"We can be emergency aid and make sure their lights don't get turned off and so forth, but the issue is (that) by the time things get to that level, where they reach that kind of stress, it's really caused a lot of damage," Ray Clifford, executive director of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes, said. "We're looking at programs that are much more proactive."

The coalition is working with Walter Reed Army Medical Center here on a program that would offer military spouses part-time employment loved ones recover.



President Bush meets with representatives of "America Supports You" troop-support groups at the White House, Feb. 28. America Supports You is a Defense Department program that spotlights and facilitates support for the nation's servicemembers by the American public and the corporate sector. Dept. of Defense photo by William D. Moss



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Clifford's organization also offers families of severely wounded servicemembers a boost at the holidays. The gift check program provides families \$500 checks, but privacy issues have stymied the distribution of many of the checks, he said.

Barber assured Clifford that officials were working to make it easier for these groups to help military families.

Representatives of groups offering morale support to troops and their families said they're seeing an increase in issues related to long and frequent deployments. Jill Boyce, president of Deployed Soldier's Family Foundation said, said this has very little to do with income levels.

"Whether they have financial needs or not, (long or repeated deployments are) really taking a toll on their family lives," Boyce said. "Especially (with) the long deployments or repeated deployments, ... I see a lot of marriages going through a tough time and the children going through a tough time."

With postage seemingly always a concern for care package groups, they were given some potentially good news today. While the U.S. Postal Service can't offer a break on postage, officials are considering an America Supports You stamp that would raise funds for America Supports You groups, much as the pink ribbon stamp raises funds for breast cancer awareness and research, Barber said.

She concluded the meeting by thanking the representatives for their ambassadorship on behalf of the America Supports You program, as well as working to keep America's support and appreciation of the troops high.

"America Supports You wins if every servicemember and family that needs assistance gets assistance," Barber said. "We can't do it without you."

The groups attending the luncheon and the visit with the president include Adopt-a-Chaplain, Boatsie's Boxes, the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes, Deployed Soldier's Family Foundation, Helping Our Heroes, Landstuhl Hospital Care Project, Operation Care and Comfort, Operation Second Chance, Operation Thank You, and SI Yellow Ribbon.

(Kathleen T. Rhem of American Forces Press Service contributed to this report.)

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