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Contact: Katie Laning, Courtney Rowe

(202) 224-4843

Lincoln Praises Arkansas' 39th Infantry Brigade

Washington – U.S. Senator Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) today praised the Arkansas National Guard's 39th Infantry Brigade following the announcement that its soldiers will likely deploy to Iraq later this year for their second tour of duty in that country. While honoring their continued service to our state and country, Lincoln also expressed concern at the military's increasing dependence on citizen soldiers fighting in Iraq.

“The men and women of the 39th Infantry Brigade fought bravely in Iraq and should be immensely proud of their service to our nation,” Lincoln said. “Now, as our country once again turns to these citizen soldiers, we must ensure that they have the proper training and equipment and the necessary care upon their return. Any lack of these resources is unacceptable to our troops who have already sacrificed so much on our behalf.

“The members of the 39th, as well as all of our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, will remain in our thoughts and prayers in the months to come. Their commitment demands a strategy worthy of their service, one that better reflects the reality that progress ultimately lies with Iraqis taking responsibility for their own future. Congress has passed legislation that sets measurable benchmarks for the Iraqi government, and I believe this new direction is critical if we are to see any progress in Iraq.”

The 39th Infantry Brigade, Arkansas' largest National Guard unit comprised of approximately 3,000 soldiers, is one of four National Guard units expected to begin a 12-month deployment to Iraq in December 2007. The four brigades include 13,000 troops who would deploy as replacement forces for units currently in Iraq.

The 39th Infantry Brigade returned from its first mission to Iraq in February 2005 following an average 17-month deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Lincoln noted that the Department of Defense's decision to possibly deploy these troops marks the first time in the Iraq War that full Guard units would be called on for a second tour of duty. The Pentagon has made changes to its Reserve Force Management Policy by removing all the limitations on how often Guard and Reserve forces can be deployed. Previous military policy allowed for members to have five years at home after a deployment before becoming eligible to deploy overseas again.

Currently, approximately 1,500 Arkansas National Guard soldiers and airmen are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are expected home later this year. Fifty-five service members with Arkansas ties, including 22 members of the Army Reserve and National Guard, have been killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2004, Lincoln traveled to Fort Polk, Louisiana, to help send off members of the 39th Infantry Brigade upon their first extended tour of duty in Iraq. In 2005, Lincoln welcomed home the Arkansas soldiers at a celebration at War Memorial Stadium in Little Rock.