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Congressmen Holden, Shuster, Gerlach and Dent visit PA Guardsmen prior to Deployment to Iraq

Washington, DC –Congressmen Holden, **Shuster**, Gerlach, and Dent returned from a two day trip to Camp Shelby, MS and Fort Polk, LA, where they were visiting members of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard's (PARNG) 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), which is set to deploy in January for Iraq.

Upon their arrival at Camp Shelby, the four Congressmen met with Lieutenant General Thomas G. Miller and Major General J. Michael Bednarek, where they were briefed on First Army's mission guiding the PARNG's training prior to deployment to Iraq. Colonel Marc Ferraro, who will be commanding the 56th SBCT in Iraq, was also in the briefing.

The following morning the four Congressmen met with the soldiers of the 56th SBCT, listening to their opinions on training to date as well as their pending deployment to Iraq.

Following this session, the Colonel Ferraro briefed the four Members on the Stryker Brigade Combat Team's role in the United States Armed Forces. From there, the Members toured the base and met with more soldiers from the 56th SBCT.

That afternoon, the Congressmen flew to Fort Polk, where they met with more soldiers training there, and then received a briefing on the 56th SBCT's mission in Iraq. Upon the conclusion of this briefing, the four Members were taken to the field to witness the Strykers first hand and meet with more soldiers from the unit.

"The morale is high, and based on my conversations with the Generals and our soldiers, the Pennsylvania National Guard once again has the best this country has to offer," stated Congressman Holden. "I wish them the best of luck on their mission and know they will be successful."

"The citizen soldiers of the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team are among the best fighting units in the National Guard," **Shuster** said. "The morale of the soldiers is high and there is no question that they will do their jobs with precision and honor. Having the chance to give some of my constituents serving in the brigade my personal thanks for their service on Veterans Day was especially meaningful."

"This trip reminded our delegation that Pennsylvania is extremely fortunate to have some of the best-trained National Guard troops in the nation and to have a Stryker Combat Brigade based in Pennsylvania," Gerlach said. "These brave men and women are putting their lives on hold to defend our country, so I was grateful for the chance to personally thank members of the 111th Infantry, 108th Field Artillery and others for their service and sacrifices. Our state is extremely proud of these soldiers and wishes them success and Godspeed on their mission."

"I was honored to spend Veterans' Day with Pennsylvania's newest generation of heroes, the citizen-soldiers of the Pennsylvania National Guard 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team – the nation's only Stryker Brigade composed solely of Guardsmen," Congressman Dent said. "Their devotion to duty is truly inspiring. I wish the 56th SBCT great luck and success on their mission, and I look forward to welcoming them home from a job well done."

Photo caption: Congressman Shuster (left) and his District Director Jim Frank (right) meet Lt.Col. Sam Hayes and Sgt. Jim Buchannon (center). Lt.Col. Hayes is the son of former Pennsylvania Agriculture Secretary Samuel Hayes and a native of Tyrone. Sgt. Buchannon is a resident of Altoona and is employed by McAleers Plumbing and Heating.

For additional photos and interview requests for Congressman Shuster please contact Jeff Urbanchuk at 202-225-2431 or jg.urbanchuk@mail.house.gov.