

MIKE ROGERS
8TH DISTRICT, MICHIGAN

133 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4872
(202) 225-6830 FAX
1327 EAST MICHIGAN AVENUE
LANSING, MI 48912
(517) 702-8000
(517) 702-8842 FAX
(877) 333-MIKE Toll-Free
www.house.gov/mikerogers
DEPUTY WHIP

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2208

COMMITTEE:
PERMANENT SELECT COMMITTEE ON
INTELLIGENCE
ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEES:
ENERGY AND AIR QUALITY
ENVIRONMENT AND
HAZARDOUS MATERIALS
HEALTH
COMMERCE, TRADE AND
CONSUMER PROTECTION

Testimony Before the House Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee
Legislative Hearing on Pending Bills, Including H.R. 5037
The Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act
Congressman Mike Rogers (MI)
April 6, 2006

Chairman Miller, Ranking Member Berkley, thank you for convening this important hearing. The issue I will discuss today is the importance of respect for America's fallen heroes.

American military men and women, who give their lives in service to the nation, deserve to be buried peacefully and with dignity. America needs a chance to put its collective arms around these families and say, 'you have the right to grieve peaceably and to bury your loved ones with dignity and respect.'

I have introduced legislation along with Chairman Steve Buyer, Congressman Silvestre Reyes and Chairman Jeff Miller to shelter grieving families from demonstrators trying to disrupt funeral services.

The legislation, the Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act, currently has 55 cosponsors and is supported by the American Legion - Department of Michigan, American Veterans (AMVETS), the Disabled American Veterans, the Fleet Reserve Association, Gold Star Wives of America, the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Military Order of the Purple Heart - Department of Michigan, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Veterans of Foreign Wars - Department of Michigan, the Vietnam Veterans of America and We Care America.

This common-sense measure would prevent disruption of military funerals at national cemeteries beginning an hour before and continuing until an hour after the service, and keep protestors at least 500 feet away from mourners during any demonstration. It also includes a sense of Congress that all fifty states should adopt similar legislation affecting all military funeral and burial sites. The restrictions contained in the legislation mirror identical, in fact word for word, language which has been approved by the U.S. Supreme Court to eliminate any doubt concerning the Constitutionality of H.R. 5037.

Since first announcing this legislation, my office has received more than 25,000 comments from concerned Americans from all over the nation and even the world. From Baghdad, Iraq to my hometown of Brighton, Michigan, we have heard from families who have lost a loved one in combat, we have heard from veterans, we have heard from the Patriot Guard Riders, we have heard from students, parents, grandparents and concerned citizens. And we have heard from those who are serving in harm's way as we speak. Please allow me to share two of the more moving messages:

"Over the last six months my unit has taken over 30 casualties in some of the most vicious areas south of Baghdad. The thought of their families having to face protesters after their memorials insights a rage I have never known before. These "protestors" mock all that we have accomplished here, the lives that have been forever changed, and the lives that have been lost, using our most valued doctrines of faith and freedom as their defense. I can not thank you enough for your dedication to this effort. I can only hope that your colleagues will join you in this battle."

Sergeant Ashley A. Voss
Baghdad, Iraq

"Thank you for creating and seeking to help grieving families of our American heroes. My husband and I support your act 100%. Our son Sergeant Trevor Blumberg was killed in action in Iraq on September 14, 2003. We know the pain and horror in losing a heroic son; no less than to have to face cruel, inhumane people who cannot dignify your time of grief." Please continue to place these families in America's hearts and minds. Nothing less is deserved."

Mrs. Janet M. Blumberg
A Proud Parent of an American Hero

Mr. Chairman, America has a responsibility to ensure that the families of our fallen heroes can grieve in peace and with dignity. It is a matter of ensuring both a sense of decency and civility. I appreciate you and Ranking Member Berkley convening this important hearing and I would be happy to entertain any questions that you may have.