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For Immediate Release

Event: Friday rally and march turn focus on returning Iraq war veterans, condemn lack of medical and social support for soldiers coming home disabled and homeless.

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Time: 5:00 p.m.

Place: Pioneer Courthouse Square

Friday rally and march turn focus on returning Iraq war veterans, condemn lack of medical and social support for soldiers coming home disabled and homeless.

The *Portland Peaceful Response Coalition's* Friday rally and march turns once again to the plight of veterans and those currently serving the US armed forces, condemning the Bush administration for ignoring their safety in Iraq and abandoning them when they return. "We have the disgraceful move only last week of US Army officials barring *Denver Post* reporters from Fort Carson because the newspaper published an article about soldiers unhappy with their health care," said Regina Hannon, a volunteer with the PPRC and a regular Friday rally attendee.¹ "We see that when a few genuine reporters try to get this kind of news out to the broader public, they're punished by a military bureaucracy that is intent on suppressing these views."

The *Denver Post* was also dropped from an e-mail list used to issue official US army statements and to send invitations for related events. A *Post* reporter was told by the army that she would not be allowed to attend a deployment ceremony to which other reporters were permitted. "And what would Donald Rumsfeld say to these soldiers about their healthcare?" asked Hannon, "If he were to be questioned directly about this issue I'm sure his response would be, "you go with the health care you have, not the health care you want."

The punishment of the *Denver Post* and the recent grilling of Donald Rumsfeld by US soldiers stationed in Iraq come at a time when new reports are emerging of the plight of returning Iraq war veterans. "The *New England Journal of Medicine* is reporting that the true impact on young US service men and women in Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is being hidden by an advanced battlefield medical response that's saving many more soldiers from injuries than in past wars," explained William Seaman, another PPRC volunteer. "Unfortunately, with the commercial media focus almost entirely on battlefield deaths, this medical advance has also meant that the true human cost of these wars and occupations have been very understated."²

According to Atul Gawande, a Harvard professor and surgeon at Boston's Brigham and Women's Hospital and author of the report, only about 10 percent of U.S. soldiers injured in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan have died, contrasted with about 25 percent for American soldiers injured while fighting in Korea, Vietnam and even during the first Gulf War. The upshot is that for each combat death, there are approximately ten troops injured, and many of these injuries are extremely serious. "When we hear that 10 soldiers were killed in fighting, we all draw a mental picture about what that means," explained Gawande. "But you have to multiply that number by 10 to find out how many (soldiers) were injured ... and that suggests a very different level of violence."³

And what is happening to these Iraq war veterans when they return home the US? "Homeless shelters are reporting that they are beginning to see Iraq war veterans showing up for social support that our government is not providing," said Seaman.⁴ "We see once again the dramatic hypocrisy of those who have backed this war, and shrouded their criminal attitudes with lies about how they 'support our troops', lies that these young men and women are now paying for with shattered lives"

"Homeless veterans from Iraq are just starting to show up at some homeless shelters in the country," said Mark Benjamin, a reporter who has covered veterans' issues doggedly since the beginning of the Bush wars. "I found 60 - 50 of them have been in touch with the veteran's administration, the Department of Veterans Affairs. I found another 10 at a group of homeless shelters in Los Angeles called U.S. Vets." Benjamin said that most disturbing is that most of the people that are professionals in this area, such as advocates for homeless veterans, are very concerned that these veterans are showing up so soon. "The other very disturbing trend is that there is a correlation between mental problems and homelessness, and the number of troops coming home from this war with mental problems is quite shocking," said Benjamin.

Regina Hannon sees another disturbing link between the plight of these returning veterans and the punishment of the *Denver Post* by the US army. "Hasn't this administration touted the fact that our troops are in the front line of 'the fight for freedom'?", asks Hannon. "How can that be if right here in America the freedom of speech of these soldiers is being suppressed as is the freedom of the press to print the issues which are so important to those very troops?" Hannon said she is stunned by the hypocrisy of these acts by the US military and the Bush administration. "We are not allowed to see the coffins of all the dead troops returning home and now, we are not going to be allowed to read about the health care concerns of our soldiers and those who did make it home."

1. “Denver Post barred from Fort Carson after report on soldier's health-care complaints”, Associated Press, Thursday, December 9, 2004
2. “US Medical Advances May Mask Wars' Human Cost”, By Greg Frost, Washington Post, Reuters, Wednesday, December 8, 2004.
3. Content and quotations of this paragraph have been paraphrased from “US Medical Advances May Mask Wars' Human Cost”, By Greg Frost, Washington Post, Reuters, Wednesday, December 8, 2004.
4. “Veterans Return From Iraq Disabled and Homeless”, Monday, December 13th, 2004, Democracy Now! <http://www.democracynow.org/>