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From the Office of
HON. ROBERT W. KASTENMEIER
SUITE 2232 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

For Immediate Release

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- A bill providing amnesty for Vietnam era draft evaders and military deserters was introduced today, June 12, by Congressman Bob Kastenmeier (D., Wis.), Chairman of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts, Civil Liberties and the Administration of Justice. In addition to draft law violators and deserters, the bill also grants relief to servicemen who have been charged with refusing to obey an order which, if followed, could have resulted in their contributing to the death of another human being.

"My bill is an attempt to respond to the failure of the President's clemency program while bridging the differences of opinion between those who favor an absolute, unconditional approach to amnesty and those who favor the President's more limited program," Kastenmeier stated.

The Kastenmeier proposal differs from unconditional amnesty bills now pending in his Subcommittee by requiring that those seeking relief sign a certificate swearing that any violations of law they may have committed resulted from opposition to the Vietnam War. These certificates would be submitted to the Secretary of Defense in cases involving military violators and to the Attorney General in cases involving civilian violators. Upon submission of the certificate, full rights of citizenship would be restored without the necessity of performing alternate service. However, military violators would not

be entitled to V.A. benefits. Violations occurring between January 1, 1966 and May 1, 1975 would be covered by the bill.

This differs from the President's clemency approach in that it eliminates the need for a clemency board to review individual cases and does not require alternate service as a precondition to amnesty.

Kastenmeier's bill was drafted on the basis of over a thousand pages of testimony received during extensive hearings held by his Subcommittee both before and after the implementation of the President's clemency program.

"That the President's initiative has failed to achieve the goal of national reconciliation is apparent from the fact that fewer than one-fifth of the 120,000 young men eligible participated," Kastenmeier said.

"My Subcommittee's recent hearings revealed that a primary reason for the failure of the President's program to attract more participants was its requirement that they perform alternate service, a requirement many viewed as punitive. Further, it simply does not make sense, in a period of high unemployment, to take large numbers of positions out of an already tight job market to meet the demands of an alternate service program."

Chairman Kastenmeier indicated that the question of the President's clemency program will be taken up in the near future when his Subcommittee will meet to consider a draft report reviewing the program. At that time the Subcommittee will also consider the Kastenmeier bill as well as other amnesty proposals introduced in the 94th Congress.

The Wisconsin Congressman concluded, "Hopefully, the full Judiciary Committee and the Congress will also have an opportunity during this session to consider a proposal on this issue.