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Washington, DC — Representatives Doris Matsui (D-CA) and Tom Petri (R-WI) introduced the Troops to Teachers Improvement Act. This would allow more schools across the nation to benefit from the Troops to Teachers program, which assists retiring military personnel start second careers as school teachers. "Reforming the program ensures that veterans teach in high-need schools first and foremost, but are not locked out of the program based on the geographic makeup of their communities," Representative Matsui said. "This means that in my own district of Sacramento, CA, 40% — nearly 150 more schools — can participate in this program, and schools across the country benefit as well — in Ohio, 56% more schools can participate in the program — 77% in New Jersey, 45% in Michigan. At a time when there is an overwhelming need for highly-qualified math and science teachers, expanding the Troops to Teachers program has never been more important." "The intention was to increase the pool of available teachers widely across the country to 'high need' schools, and that's how the Pentagon implemented the program," Representative Petri said. "But when management of the program was moved to the Education Department a few years ago, that Department interpreted the law to define 'high need' much more narrowly, meaning that participants in the program would have to teach in schools with an exceptionally large percentage of students from low-income families." Troops to Teachers is a unique program that provides stipends to retiring military personnel to teach in school districts with large low-income populations and a shortage of teachers in math and science. Since its authorization in 1993, nearly 10,000 veterans have participated in the program - bringing important math, science, and foreign language expertise to our classrooms. Unfortunately, because of a drafting error in the No Child Left Behind Act, the Department of Education restricted the number of school districts in which veterans can fulfill their teaching requirement and receive the stipend. The Petri-Matsui legislation would correct that error and expand the program so that if no high-need school exists within 50 miles of a veteran's home, veterans would be eligible to fulfill their obligations in schools that serve low-income students under the original definition of high-need. Petri and Matsui term their bill a compromise between Congress' original intent and the Education Department's interpretation. ###