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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Governor Tours Picatinny Arsenal Emphasizes Commitment to NJ Troops and Veterans**

Gov. Christie Whitman today toured the Picatinny Arsenal, emphasizing her commitment to NJ's troops and veterans. Approximately 90 percent of Army weaponry is developed and designed at the Picatinny Arsenal. The arsenal modifies old weaponry and researches and develops new weapons.

" It is important to honor our veterans, as we did during Memorial Day Weekend. It is also important to let our armed forces know that we support them," said Gov. Whitman. "The Picatinny Arsenal has provided valuable contributions to supporting our defense interests. It is important to continue to support our military installations."

The Governor and Congressman Rodney Frelinghuysen were shown around the arsenal by Brigadier General and Post Commander John Geis. While visiting, the Governor viewed the Advance Warhead section of the arsenal as well as Installation and Community Partnering Activities sections. The Governor also inspected a Crusader Tank and watched a live fire demonstration

The Picatinny Arsenal covers 6,500 acres and is home to a number of tenant organizations including the U.S. Army TACOM Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center (TACOM- ARDEC), Program Executive Officer for Ground and Combat Support Systems, several Project Managers and various other related activities.

Approximately 3100 people work at the arsenal. About 100 of the employees are military personnel the rest are civilians. About half of the employees work exclusively on scientific and engineering endeavors.

#### **Governor Christie Whitman's Accomplishments for Veterans**

- **Property Tax Relief.** Gov. Whitman added \$5.5 million to the Fiscal Year 1999 budget to refund disabled veterans who paid property taxes not knowing that they were exempt from such levies. Under state law, veterans who are fully (100 percent) and permanently disabled because of a wartime, service-related injury or disease, are not required to pay property taxes.
- **Veterans Homes Funding.** Gov. Whitman increased funding for New Jersey Veterans Homes by more than \$1 million in Fiscal Year 1999.
- **Veterans Homes.** The Governor has worked to ensure that the state's three veterans homes are providing the best care possible while operating

efficiently.

- A new \$42 million, 332-bed veterans home in Menlo Park was completed in early 1999. This facility also provides for adult day care to reduce the number of institutionalized veterans.
  - The Veterans Haven for homeless vets at Ancora was expanded from 30 to 50 beds.
  - All three veterans homes in New Jersey received the state's highest level of certification for long-term care facilities, putting veterans homes in the top 10 percent of all nursing homes in the state.
  - Improvements in management and operations were implemented, reducing the cost to residents by an average of \$1,000 over the past three years.
  - Plans to privatize Paramus Veterans Home were rejected by the Governor.
  - She allowed the exclusion of federal VA compensation for service-connected disability from consideration in determining the amount of maintenance a family should pay to keep residents in NJ Veterans Homes. For 1997, this initiative saved veterans in New Jersey a total of \$278,000.
- Income Tax Exemption. Gov. Whitman signed a law to exempt military pensions from New Jersey state income tax.
  - Veterans Preference for Personnel. Veterans preference was extended for state appointments and promotions for former members of the Coast Guard who have received the Medal of Honor or Navy Cross, and for veterans of Somalia and Bosnia.
  - Veterans Affairs Clinic. As the federal government has focused veterans health care funding to the warmer regions of the South and West, Gov. Whitman has fought vigorously along with the state congressional delegation to retain health care benefits for veterans in the Northeast. These efforts led to the dedication a Veterans Affairs Clinic at Fort Dix in 1998.