

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 27, 2010

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates:

We are writing concerning the December 28, 2009, forced repatriation by Thai authorities to Laos of about 4,000 Hmong asylum seekers from Laos. This occurred despite the efforts by both your departments, particularly Assistant Secretary of State Eric Schwartz and Army Chief of Staff General George Casey, with the support of Members of Congress and international humanitarian organizations, to find an expeditious solution to this problem consistent with international standards.

Some of the Hmong who were sent back to Laos had links with the United States and Thailand in the so-called "secret war" in Laos. Commencing in 1975 with the collapse of the U.S.-allied governments in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) had a commendable record of providing refuge to asylum seekers from these countries. Unfortunately, this forced repatriation by the Thai military, which runs counter to basic international refugee and human rights norms, has badly damaged the RTG's positive humanitarian reputation.

The RTG authorized the Thai military border committee, working with its counterpart Lao military border committee, to manage the involuntary repatriation of the Hmong asylum-seekers to Laos, contrary to a previous pledge by the Thai Foreign Minister that there would be no forced repatriation. There was virtually no transparency in the planning for the repatriation, or in the Thai screening process that preceded it. Moreover, we are deeply concerned that among the thousands of Hmong who were returned, many hundreds were reportedly "screened in" by the Thai authorities, and more than 150 had been interviewed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and deemed to merit protection. We still do not know exactly how many Hmong were forced back, who they are, to where they have been taken, or how they are being treated.

OSD 01469-10



We understand that General Anupong, Chief of the Thai Army Staff, was contacted by General Casey shortly before the forced repatriation, and asked that the Hmong not be forcibly returned so they could be properly screened and identified for possible resettlement. We are also informed that General Anupong plans to come to Washington to meet with U.S. officials in February.

Given the potentially dire consequences this action has for the Hmong, and the much broader implications such actions have for international refugee protection standards, we urge the Administration to take the following actions immediately:

-- Continue to strongly protest the forced repatriation and the lack of transparency to the Thai Government, and urge the Thai authorities to permit UNHCR to interview any remaining Hmong asylum-seekers in Thailand.

-- Request General Anupong to bring with him to Washington the names and biographic information of each of the Hmong from Petchuban Camp who were sent back to Laos, and any additional information on those among the group who were screened in by the Thai authorities. Thai officials have repeatedly promised they would provide such a list, but have failed to do so, and the visit would provide an obvious opportunity to meet this commitment. The General should also be encouraged to provide details of the Thai-Lao agreement concerning treatment of the Hmong who were forcibly returned.

-- Determine which, if any, senior Thai military officers who were involved in the repatriation had previously participated in U.S. military training programs or exercises.

-- Recognizing that the annual Cobra Gold military exercise involves U.S. cooperation with several other nations of the region in addition to Thailand, there is ample rationale for continuing with this year's exercise as planned. However, the Administration should consult with the appropriate congressional committees regarding whether Thai military officers and personnel involved in the forced return of the Hmong should participate in Cobra Gold exercises.

-- The U.S. Ambassador in Vientiane should request that the Lao Government verify the locations of Hmong returnees from Thailand, and allow prompt and unimpeded access for U.S. officials and international humanitarian organizations.

-- If the Lao Government does not permit access to the Hmong returnees by such officials and organizations, U.S. bilateral assistance and support for multilateral assistance for the Lao Government should be subject to prior review and consultation with Congress.

It is critically important that the United States treat flagrant violations of international refugee and human rights norms with the utmost seriousness, and that there are consequences when they occur. Until the repatriation was imminent, the U.S. Government did not adequately address the issue of Hmong seeking asylum in Thailand. We hope your departments will strengthen the

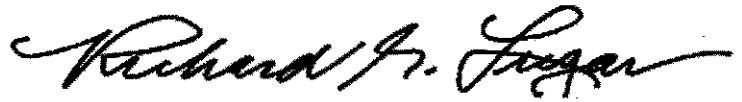
capacity to act expeditiously to protect and assist refugees of concern, and demonstrate that there are serious consequences when their rights are violated.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator



RICHARD G. LUGAR
United States Senator



RUSSELL D. FEINGOLD
United States Senator



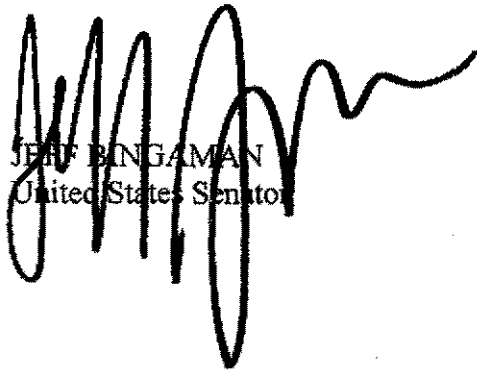
BARBARA BOXER
United States Senator



AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senator



AL FRANKEN
United States Senator



JEFF BINGAMAN
United States Senator

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 24, 2010

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to express our support for the President's budget request for additional non-dual status technicians for the National Guard. Specifically, the Department of Defense budget request for fiscal year 2011 includes an increase on the statutory limit on non-dual status technicians for the Army National Guard from 1,600 to 2,520.

It is our understanding that an increase in non-dual status technicians in the National Guard is required because our National Guard has transformed over the last two decades from a rarely-deployed strategic reserve to a frequently deployed operational force. The frequent deployments of dual status technicians, who both serve as citizen-soldiers and civilian employees of the National Guard, has affected the National Guard's ability to support critical on-going functions in each of our states. This provision of the President's budget request was intended to remedy this situation and ease the strain on our Guardsmen by allowing the hiring of additional non-dual status technicians, or permanent civilian employees who do not deploy.

As you may know, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees have so far diverged in their treatment of this issue. Although the House bill, H.R. 5136, increased the limit to 2,520, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) did not take similar action when marking up its bill, S. 3454. The SASC bill would provide you new authority to temporarily hire civilian employees to fill vacancies caused by deployments, but the Committee deferred taking further action on this issue pending the receipt of a report on the topic mandated by Section 417 of the National Defense Authorization Act for FY10 (Public Law 111-84).

In anticipation of full Senate's consideration of the bill and the eventual Conference Committee to resolve differences between the House and Senate versions, we ask that you ensure that the report required by Section 417 of the NDAA for FY10 is submitted to the House and Senate Armed Services Committees in a timely manner. We believe that it is important for the National Guard to be adequately manned, and hope that this report will set for the clear reasons for why the requested level of 2,520 non-dual status technicians will meet that critical goal.

OSD 08144-10



We thank you for your attention to this request and for your continued service.


Sincerely,


Joseph I. Lieberman
UNITED STATES SENATOR



Scott P. Brown
UNITED STATES SENATOR


Patrick J. Leahy
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Christopher S. Bond
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Robert C. Byrd
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Saxby Chambliss
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Barbara Boxer
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Lisa Murkowski
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Christopher J. Dodd
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Robert F. Bennett
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Charles E. Schumer
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Chuck Grassley
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Mary L. Landrieu
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Kay Bailey Hutchison
UNITES STATES SENATOR

John D. Rockefeller IV
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Orrin G. Hatch
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Tom Harkin
UNITES STATES SENATOR

James M. Inhofe
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Dianne Feinstein
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Lamar Alexander
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Jeff Bingaman
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Jim Bunning
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Michael F. Bennet
UNITES STATES SENATOR

David Vitter
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Roland W. Burris
UNITES STATES SENATOR

George V. Voinovich
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Mark Udall
UNITES STATES SENATOR

James E. Risch
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Mark Begich
UNITES STATES SENATOR

Al Franken
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Bill Nelson
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Richard Burr
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Bernie Sanders
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Evan Bayh
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Kay R. Hagan
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Patty Murray
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Robert Menendez
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Blanche L. Lincoln
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Frank R. Lautenberg
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Johnny Isakson
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Edward E. Kaufman
UNITES STATES SENATOR

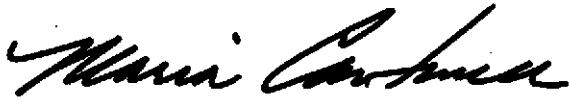

Kirsten E. Gillibrand
UNITED STATES SENATOR


Ron Wyden
UNITES STATES SENATOR


Amy Klobuchar
UNITED STATES SENATOR


Daniel K. Akaka
UNITES STATES SENATOR


John Barrasso
UNITES STATES SENATOR



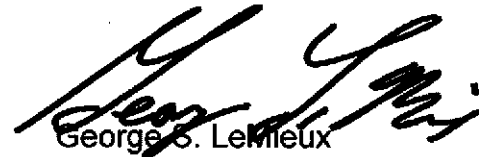
Maria Cantwell
UNITES STATES SENATOR



Susan Collins
UNITED STATES SENATOR



Claire McCaskill
UNITES STATES SENATOR



George B. LeMieux
UNITES STATES SENATOR



Richard J. Durbin
UNITES STATES SENATOR

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

September 27, 2010

Dear Secretary Gates:

We are writing to urge you to request at least \$75 million for the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) within the Operations and Maintenance, Defense-wide account in the FY 2012 President's Budget Request for the Department of Defense.

Both the Congress and key officials in the Department of Defense (DOD) have recognized that accelerating development, population growth, and loss of habitat on non-military lands pose a serious threat to the sustainability of key military installations, ranges, and airspace, and to the military's ability to conduct the realistic testing and training that are so critical to military readiness.

These challenges will only intensify in the near to mid-term. The "Grow the Force" initiative, the global restationing of forces, implementation of BRAC 2005, fielding of new weapons systems, and the pressing need to retrain forces as they redeploy from Iraq and Afghanistan will all significantly increase pressures on our remaining military installations and ranges. We must get ahead of these pressures if we are to preserve readiness over time.

In 2002, Congress provided you and the Secretaries of the Military Departments authority in section 2684a of title 10, US Code, to partner with state and local governments and conservation organizations to identify and protect key areas necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of these vital installations, ranges, and airspace. Your department implemented this authority by establishing the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI). DOD and the Congress have worked together since 2002 to amend and improve section 2684a to make it an even more effective tool to protect and enhance readiness.

The REPI program has already proven to be a great success. In fiscal years 2005 through 2009, DOD used REPI authority to provide over \$130 million to support installation projects and leveraged in excess of \$150 million in partner contributions. Since FY 2005, REPI-funded projects have been or are being implemented at more than 50 installations and ranges throughout the country. Additional FY 2011 projects are expected to be initiated in the coming months, with more new projects anticipated in FY 2012.

DOD and RAND Corporation assessments have validated the effectiveness of REPI, but also concluded that the program needs additional resources to meet the challenges that encroachment is posing to military installations and ranges. The RAND report, entitled "The Thin Green

OSD 11791-10



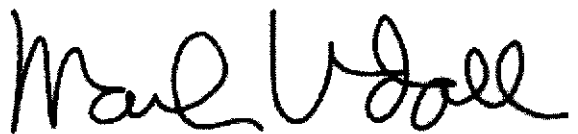
Line," concluded that the REPI program is underfunded, that opportunities for effective action to protect bases are being lost, and that the cost of effective action will only increase over time. RAND recommended a funding level of approximately \$150 million per year throughout the FYDP and beyond.

However, for the last three fiscal years, budget requests for the REPI program have remained flat, at a level of approximately \$40 million per year, only about one-third of the amount needed to meet requirements developed and validated by the Services and the OSD staff.

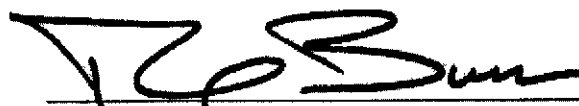
Despite these inadequate budget requests and in recognition of the success of the REPI program and the compelling need to protect our key installations, ranges, and airspace, since FY 2006 Congress has consistently increased funding for the REPI program significantly above the amounts requested in the President's Budget Request. We are currently considering an additional increase in FY 2011. However, Congress can't do this alone; we believe that it is past time for the Department of Defense to include an increase in the level of funding for the REPI program in the FY 2012 budget request.

In our view, REPI needs to be funded at a level of at least \$75 million in FY 2012 if it is to continue to be successful in addressing encroachment, preserving the readiness of our Armed Forces, ensuring the long range sustainability of our installations, ranges, and airspace. We respectfully urge you to request funding for the Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative at this level for FY 2012, with steady funding over the FYDP until our key installations, ranges, and airspace are fully protected and the military's ability to conduct critical testing and training over time is assured.

Sincerely,



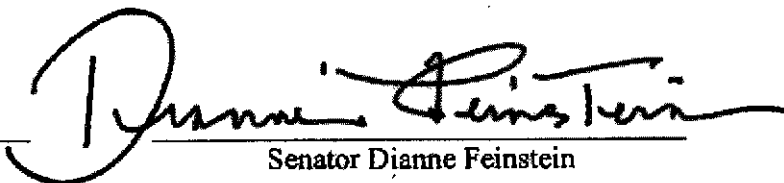
Senator Mark Udall



Senator Richard Burr



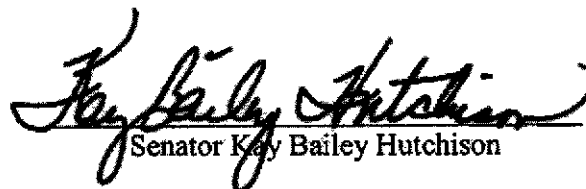
Senator Daniel Akaka



Senator Dianne Feinstein



Senator Patty Murray



Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison



Senator Jim Johnson



Senator Charles E. Schumer



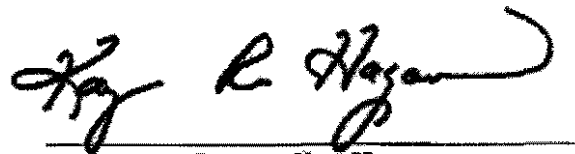
Senator Bill Nelson



Senator Ben Cardin



Senator Amy Klobuchar



Senator Kay Hagan



Senator Roland W. Burris



Senator Michael F. Bennet



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand



Senator Al Franken

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

October 18, 2010

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary
Department of Defense
The Pentagon, Room 3E718
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

I am writing with regard to the process by which service members are medically separated or retired from the military. My office has worked with several constituents who have had negative experiences with the process. In light of these reports, I would like to request that your staff provide a briefing for my office to understand how the process works, and what steps are being taken to improve it for our service members. Specifically, I would respectfully request that your Department brief my office on the following matters:

- the causes of the dramatic gap between the disability rating percentage the same individual may receive from the military and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA);
- the Disability Evaluation System (DES), and any other joint efforts between the Department of Defense and VA to overcome the difficulty and confusion medically retired service members often encounter in navigating both Departments' disability evaluation systems;
- the role of Physical Evaluation Board Liaison Officers (PEBLOs) assigned to service members going through the medical board process. Some concerns have been raised that these liaisons may act more as advocates for the board than as genuine liaisons; and
- the steps being taken to ensure that service members diagnosed with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and PTSD get the appropriate medical retirement to which they are entitled. This should include a discussion of the briefing given to soldiers with documented injuries regarding the differences between a medical discharge and an honorable discharge, and more generally, how injured soldiers are enabled to make significant decisions while still recuperating or receiving treatment.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. Should you have any questions, or to set up a briefing, please contact Jeff Lomonaco on my staff at (202) 224-1043 or jeff_lomonaco@franken.senate.gov.

Sincerely,



Al Franken
United States Senator

OSD 12965-10



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 2, 2010

The Honorable Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Gates:

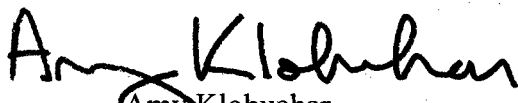
We write to request your assistance on behalf of active and retired military personnel and their families who are served by Minnesota's Fairview Health Services. Fairview Health Services has recently indicated its intention to terminate its contract with TRICARE for the Fairview Columbia Park group of clinics. This decision is likely to negatively impact the health security of more than 1,200 veterans in our region.

According to Fairview Health Systems, the four clinics in the Fairview Columbia Park group have participated for several years in the TRICARE Gold Status program. Clinics that participate in the program are able to refer patients amongst themselves, a benefit which cuts down on cost and paperwork for administrators, physicians and patients. In the hope of achieving ease of referrals between all of its clinics, Fairview Health Services has twice sought "Gold Status" for the other clinics in its network. Both times, and as recently as this summer, the Department of Defense has denied their request. It is our understanding that Fairview Health Systems was provided no explanation for why these decisions were made.

This has made it difficult for Fairview Health Services to allow these clinics alone to continue participating in the TRICARE Gold Status program. As a result, Fairview Health Services has been forced to make the decision to withdraw entirely from the TRICARE network.

In light of these events, we are hoping that you can clarify the reason why Fairview Health Services was denied full acceptance into the TRICARE Gold Status program. Veterans who have served our country honorably deserve continued, high quality care at these clinics, and we look forward to working with you to address this matter. Thank you for your consideration of this issue.


Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator

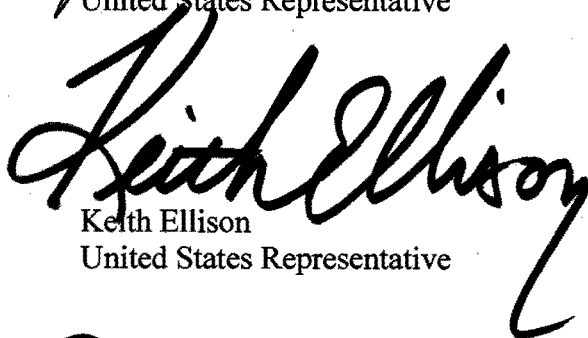

Al Franken
United States Senator


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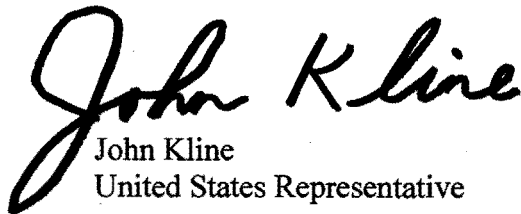



Jim Oberstar
United States Representative


Tim Wais
United States Representative



Keith Ellison
United States Representative


Betty McCollum
United States Representative


John Kline
United States Representative



Erik Paulsen
United States Representative


Michele Bachmann
United States Representative



Collin Peterson
United States Representative

CC: Rear Admiral Christine Hunter

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 15, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary, Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon, Room 3E880
The Pentagon, VA 20301-1155

Dear Secretary Panetta:

As you and your colleagues implement the new Defense Strategic Guidance, we appreciate your continued commitment to service members and their families.

Joining Forces is a national initiative that mobilizes all sectors of society to give service members and their families the opportunities and support they have earned. Our states strongly support Joining Forces and are actively engaged in making this initiative a reality.

Working with our respective Adjutant Generals, the National Guard established outreach and reintegration programs designed to assist service members in receiving the best services from the appropriate Federal, state or local agencies.

Through the FY11 Defense Appropriations, approximately \$16 million was distributed to continue state programs through your Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program for 12 months; therefore, they will not have enough funding to finish the current fiscal year let alone continue into FY13. By May, without additional funding, these programs will begin to end.

The FY12 Defense Appropriations, Section 9010 allows continued funding, but only through "the amounts appropriated or otherwise made available by title IX." Due to the ongoing challenges faced by returning service members, continuity of these outreach and reintegration programs remains critical.

We ask that you provide the necessary funding to allow National Guard outreach and reintegration programs to continue the good work they are doing.

In our respective states, we see first-hand the unique challenges faced by our constituents who serve in the National Guard. Members of the National Guard confront unique professional and personal challenges with each deployment.

Through these programs, we continue to make great strides in supporting service members and their families throughout the deployment cycle, from preparing them for mobilization to transitioning them back into their communities. This assistance can be particularly helpful for service members and families who have little experience with the military-civilian transition process.



OSD002105-12

These local programs are designed to address such serious reintegration issues as health care, employment, financial, legal, housing, and suicide prevention. Much of this outreach is done through face-to-face meetings to better assess fundamental needs.

National Guard personnel are not the only service members who benefit from the extensive outreach and visibility of these programs. Reservists, as well as recently separated veterans returning to the states from active-duty service, are often referred to our programs for help. In light of the pending reductions in force structure, we anticipate more returning veterans will need assistance.

These programs interact with local communities by building strong working relationships with elected officials, employers, educators, social workers, veterans' service organizations, clergy and other interested parties. This empowers communities to better understand the specific needs, sacrifices and hardships of their military families and become more directly involved in solving those issues.

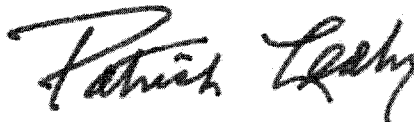
Finally, these programs complement the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program in that they deal with an array of day-to-day problems faced by service members between monthly drill weekends and the scheduled 30-day, 60-day and 90-day Yellow Ribbon events.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for your consideration of this request for continued funding for our states' National Guard outreach and reintegration programs.

Sincerely,



BERNARD SANDERS
U.S. Senator



PATRICK J. LEAHY
U.S. Senator



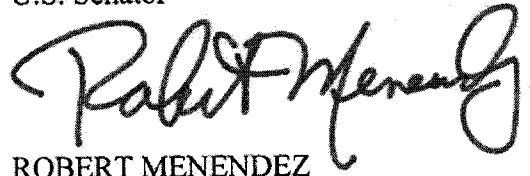
PATTY MURRAY
U.S. Senator



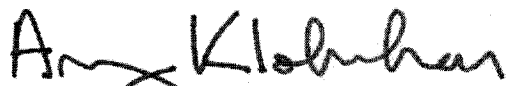
RON WYDEN
U.S. Senator

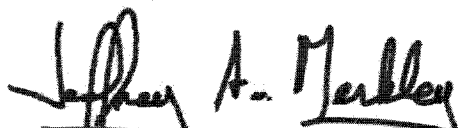




FRANK LAUTENBERG
U.S. Senator





ROBERT MENENDEZ
U.S. Senator


AMY KLOBUCHAR
U.S. Senator

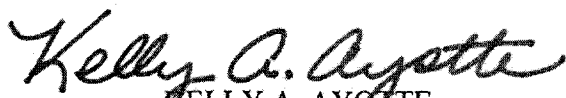

JEFF MERKLEY
U.S. Senator

 
JEANNE SHAHEEN
U.S. Senator

MARK E. UDALL
U.S. Senator

 
MICHAEL F. BENNET
U.S. Senator

AL FRANKEN
U.S. Senator


KELLY A. AYOTTE
U.S. Senator

cc: Mr. David L. McGinnis, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs
General Craig R. McKinley, Chief National Guard Bureau