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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6250

January 9, 2014

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense
United States Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for the Department's letter in response to our request for information regarding the status of plans to implement recommendations to improve and reorganize the POW/MIA accounting components within the Department of Defense.[1] While we are encouraged by your efforts to demand accountability, including the review by Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation (CAPE), we remain concerned that the Department is not adequately or expeditiously addressing the serious problems in the accounting community. The Department can and must do better.

In order to ensure that the Department moves forward with improving the accounting mission and bringing necessary change to the structure of the accounting components, we have included two reporting requirements in the 2014 National Defense Authorization Act.[2] First, to ensure accountability and transparency in the accounting mission, the Department must provide greater detail on the actual numbers for missing service members, across conflicts. In addition, the Department must report on the number of missing service members who are not likely to be recovered due to a variety of factors. It is time that families are given honest answers about the chances of their loved ones being found, identified, and brought home.

Second, the Department must engage in a comprehensive analysis of the status of the accounting components and identify specific areas where reform is needed. In addition, the legislation requires the Department to assess whether a single, central command focused on this important mission would be feasible and advisable. The Department is also required to analyze alternative means to achieving the accounting goal. This analysis must also take into account the evaluations performed by CAPE, the Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

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[1] Letter from Under Secretary James N. Miller to Chairman Claire McCaskill and Senator Kelly Ayotte (Oct. 26, 2013); Letter from Chairman Claire McCaskill and Senator Kelly Ayotte to Secretary Chuck Hagel (Sept. 13, 2013).

[2] H.R. 3304, Sec. 581.

The Department will have six months to submit these reports to Congress. We look forward to a timely and thorough response. We will expect that, once viable alternatives are identified, the Department will begin immediately to implement a substantive reform of current components and policies to better achieve accounting goals and to better serve as stewards of our tax dollars.

In the meantime, we request that the Department provide Subcommittee staff with a briefing when the CAPE evaluation is complete. The briefing should include detailed information about how the Department is moving forward to implement the recommendations of GAO, and how it plans to develop personnel files for unaccounted for service members.[3] We also request that, prior to the briefing, the Department provide a complete and unredacted copy of the CAPE evaluation, including any attachments, to the Subcommittee.

Please contact Sarah Garcia with Senator McCaskill's Subcommittee staff at (202) 224-5602 or Brad Bowman with Senator Ayotte's staff at (202) 224-3324 with any questions. Please send any correspondence relating to this request to the Subcommittee's clerk at Kelsey_Stroud@hsgac.senate.gov.

Sincerely,

Claire McCaskill
Chairman
Subcommittee on Financial and
Contracting Oversight

Kelly Ayotte
Member
Subcommittee on Financial and
Contracting Oversight

cc: Ron Johnson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Financial and
Contracting Oversight

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[3] Government Accountability Office, *DOD's POW/MIA Mission: Top-Level Leadership Attention Needed to Resolve Longstanding Challenges in Accounting for Missing Persons from Past Conflicts* (July 17, 2013) (GAO-13-619).