

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2012

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
Pentagon, Room 3E880
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

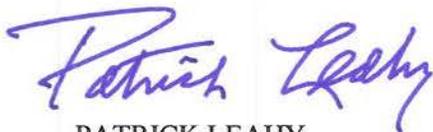
We share concerns, across party lines and chambers of Congress, that the fiscal year 2013 budget request for the Air Force does not sustain operational readiness in the most cost-effective and responsible manner possible. In particular, disproportionate cuts to the Air National Guard are unwarranted and dangerous considering the important role the Reserve Component has played in our overseas operations and domestic emergencies for the last decade.

We believe more data is needed to make a final decision about our future military manpower strategy, and we eagerly await the completion of force costing studies by the Institute for Defense Analysis, the Reserve Forces Policy Board, and studies by analysts in your office and the Government Accountability Office pursuant to last year's defense bill. We believe these reports will highlight the effectiveness of the Air Guard and Reserve and their ability to maintain low operating expenses. We hope you will wait for the conclusions of these reports before making any irreversible cuts to the Reserve Component.

On that note, Air Force leaders said in a recent hearing that they are reconsidering the current budget plan based on a proposal offered by the Council of Governors. We hope that the Air Force will seriously consider the proposal made by the Council. We believe that members of Congress will eagerly review the outcome of the Air Force's decision in light of its merits and compare them to the Council's proposal.

Thank you for your service to our country, and we stand ready to assist you in any way we can.

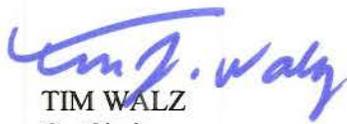
Sincerely,



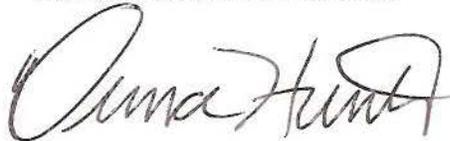
PATRICK LEAHY
Co-Chair
Senate National Guard Caucus



LINDSEY O. GRAHAM
Co-Chair
Senate National Guard Caucus



TIM WALZ
Co-Chair
House National Guard and Reserve Caucus



DUNCAN HUNTER
Co-Chair
House National Guard and Reserve Caucus

CC:
The Honorable Michael Donley, Secretary of the Air Force
General Norton Schwartz, Chief of Staff of the Air Force