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## United States Senate

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October 17, 2008

The Honorable Pete Geren  
Secretary of the Army  
1600 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Secretary Geren:

I am writing to ask for your personal and immediate attention to a set of tragic incidents at Fort Carson in Colorado Springs. This week, a soldier who had recently returned from combat confessed to the rape and murder of a 19 year old woman. Before the murder, the soldier had received counseling due to "irregularities" during a mental health screening, but had been declared fit for duty with no further treatment. News articles in my state report that several other members of the 4th Brigade Combat Team have been suspected or convicted of homicide since their return from Iraq.

These incidents raise a number of troubling questions that merit serious scrutiny and attention.

First, I would ask that the Army conduct a swift and thorough review of the service records of soldiers who have been involved in violent crimes since returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. In the Army's effort to meet its target recruiting numbers, the service has been issuing an increasing number of waivers to recruits who may not meet educational or moral standards. Were any of the soldiers involved in these violent incidents at Fort Carson granted any such waivers, including felony criminal waivers, serious misdemeanor criminal waivers, or medical waivers related to mental health? Furthermore, I request information on how many of those soldiers had been flagged for "irregularities" or further mental health counseling prior to their crimes, and how the Army responded.

I am also deeply troubled that in the 7th year of combat operations in the Middle East, the Army continues to struggle to provide quality mental health care for our soldiers. In addition to these tragic violent crimes, the Army's rates of suicides and suicide attempts have risen year after year. Although the Army has taken steps to implement screenings and provide counseling after a deployment, the Army is clearly overwhelmed by the scope of the problem. Too much time has been wasted studying the problem at the expense of implementing real solutions.

I have become convinced that because of the scope and nature of the problems related to combat stress, Army medical providers alone are unable to effectively address these challenges. I therefore request that you personally review the pilot project proposed in Section 7 of Senate Bill 3008 (S.3008), the Honoring Our Nation's Obligation to Returning (HONOR) Warriors Act. This pilot program would allow Fort Carson to utilize outside entities to provide soldiers tools that can help them proactively manage combat stress. Special Forces units within the Army have begun implementing similar programs with their own funds. Army Medical Command, as I understand it, has so far resisted this type of program. I ask that you immediately review the idea and employ it as a pilot program at Fort Carson.

Finally, I request that you immediately visit Fort Carson to learn what measures are being taken, what more could be done to prevent similar tragedies in the future, and what additional resources are needed.

Thank you in advance for your personal attention to this problem and these tragedies.

Sincerely,



Ken Salazar  
United States Senator

Cc: LTG Eric B. Schoomaker, Surgeon General of the Army  
MG Mark Graham, Commanding General, Division West, First Army and Fort Carson  
COL Kelly Wolgast, Commander, Evans Army Community Hospital