



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

April 17, 2008

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

Dear Robert:

I am writing to express concern with the recent increase in stop-loss numbers, which in December 2007 was reported at 10,801 soldiers.

In January 2007, I urged you to limit the involuntary extension of soldiers' tours. In response, you sent a memo to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other military leaders encouraging them to minimize the use of the stop-loss policy for active duty and reserve components.

While there was an immediate decrease in stop-loss following your directive, the numbers began to increase in August 2007.

I share the President's desire both for a successful outcome to the war in Iraq and his commitment to the brave men and women that so honorably served our nation. It is in this regard I express my deep concern DOD finds it necessary to utilize stop-loss to meet our manpower needs. As you work with the President and the branches of the military, I urge you in strongest terms to limit the use of this policy.

When soldiers deploy for a tour abroad, they and their families literally count the days until their return home. Due to a variety of reasons, we are extending tours and recapturing those who have sought to retire and leave the military. This policy harms morale, places an undue burden on the families of soldiers, and damages the military leadership's credibility. I believe this policy will harm recruitment efforts.

Congressman
Christopher Shays
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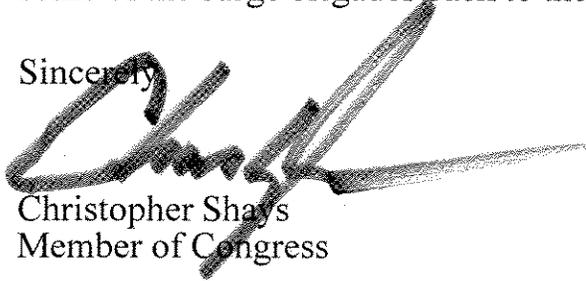
While our citizen-soldiers have responded admirably to their increased role in meeting our military's manpower needs, the policy change extending the cumulative time on active duty for the Iraq or Afghan war beyond 24 months betrays their trust, separates families and threatens to devastate the likelihood that active duty soldiers will follow-up their service with time serving in the Reserves.

The bottom line is our troops and their families deserve realistic estimates about the length of their deployment.

While I am concerned with stop loss, I am pleased President Bush and the Department of Defense announced shorter deployment lengths for U.S. soldiers in Iraq from 15 to 12 months, starting in August.

This will reduce the strain on the force and provide our troops with the needed recuperation to be with their families and to reestablish their bond with their community. This change in policy will ensure troops have at least a year at home between deployments. Additionally, because the surge has worked so well, and security is more stable, we will be able to withdraw some of the surge brigades back to the US by the end of July.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Shays", written over the word "Sincerely,".

Christopher Shays
Member of Congress

CS:jm