

DUNCAN HUNTER, CALIFORNIA, CHAIRMAN
CURT WELDON, PENNSYLVANIA
JOEL HEFLEY, COLORADO
JIM SAXTON, NEW JERSEY
JOHN M. McHUGH, NEW YORK
TERRY EVERETT, ALABAMA
ROSCOE G. BARTLETT, MARYLAND
HOWARD P. "BUCK" McKEON, CALIFORNIA
MAC THORNBERRY, TEXAS
JOHN N. HOSTETTLER, INDIANA
WALTER B. JONES, NORTH CAROLINA
JIM RYUN, KANSAS
JIM GIBBONS, NEVADA
ROBIN HAYES, NORTH CAROLINA
KEN CALVERT, CALIFORNIA
ROB SIMMONS, CONNECTICUT
JO ANN DAVIS, VIRGINIA
W. TODD AKIN, MISSOURI
J. RANDY FORBES, VIRGINIA
JEFF MILLER, FLORIDA
JOE WILSON, SOUTH CAROLINA
FRANK A. LOBIONDO, NEW JERSEY
JEB BRADLEY, NEW HAMPSHIRE
MICHAEL TURNER, OHIO
JOHN KLINE, MINNESOTA
CANDICE S. MILLER, MICHIGAN
MIKE ROGERS, ALABAMA
TRENT FRANKS, ARIZONA
BILL SHUSTER, PENNSYLVANIA
THELMA DRAKE, VIRGINIA
JOE SCHWARZ, MICHIGAN
CATHY McMORRIS, WASHINGTON
K. MICHAEL CONAWAY, TEXAS
GEOFF DAVIS, KENTUCKY

IKE SKELTON, MISSOURI
JOHN SPRATT, SOUTH CAROLINA
SOLOMON P. ORTIZ, TEXAS
LANE EVANS, ILLINOIS
GENE TAYLOR, MISSISSIPPI
NEIL ABERCROMBIE, HAWAII
MARTY MEEHAN, MASSACHUSETTS
SILVESTRE REYES, TEXAS
VIC SNYDER, ARKANSAS
ADAM SMITH, WASHINGTON
LORETTA SANCHEZ, CALIFORNIA
MIKE McINTYRE, NORTH CAROLINA
ELLEN O. TAUSCHER, CALIFORNIA
ROBERT A. BRADY, PENNSYLVANIA
ROBERT ANDREWS, NEW JERSEY
SUSAN A. DAVIS, CALIFORNIA
JAMES R. LANGEVIN, RHODE ISLAND
STEVE ISRAEL, NEW YORK
RICK LARSEN, WASHINGTON
JIM COOPER, TENNESSEE
JIM MARSHALL, GEORGIA
KENDRICK B. MEEK, FLORIDA
MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO, GUAM
TIM RYAN, OHIO
MARK E. UDALL, COLORADO
G.K. BUTTERFIELD, NORTH CAROLINA
CYNTHIA McKINNEY, GEORGIA
DAN BOREN, OKLAHOMA

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

ROBERT S. RANGEL, STAFF DIRECTOR

June 13, 2005

The Honorable Donald L. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

It is clear to me the most important key to our success in Iraq is the development of the Iraqi security forces, and the infrastructure that supports and sustains them. I know you share that assessment. However, I recently sat through a briefing by the Joint Staff on the subject, and while we are making progress, it is painfully slow indeed. We have no choice but to accelerate the training of Iraqi forces so that we can hand the mission off to them as soon as possible. It is a race against time: either the American people will sour on this war and demand our withdrawal prematurely, or the American Army will break.

Iraq now represents a crisis that didn't exist when we began the war two years ago. Even as public support for the war ebbs lower and lower, the United States Army is on the brink of collapsing. Indeed, it may be that serious damage has been done to it already. In any case, it will not recover fully for years, and that is a national security threat we can ill afford.

This month, the Army's recruiting numbers are far below its goal, and this is an unmistakable trend. Although retention is holding, the toll is shaking the very foundation of American social structure. Army marriages, broken under the strain of an unsustainable operations tempo, are failing at an ever increasing rate. That is a sure sign of more troubles ahead.

To meet a critical need in the short term, the Army has reduced quality standards on its accessions. It is retaining problematic recruits and relaxed commissioning qualifications for its officers. Anybody with a sense of history can understand the inherent risk in these policies, and they strike me as unwise. Additionally, I understand that the Army will soon approach Congress

for authority to offer enlistment bonuses of up to \$40,000. That is a huge sum, and while I support it, I am doubtful it will have the effect the Army is looking for.

I wonder how long we can continue throwing money at this recruiting problem. It is not the expense, because we can pay the cost if we align our national priorities properly. Instead, it is about precedents and principles. This insurgency is essentially a war of ideologies and therefore one must ask: What message do we send to our enemy when they can recruit suicide bombers as fast as they need them but we cannot entice our young men and women to serve without large sums of cash up front?

Mr. Secretary, as you know, I have always been a proud supporter of our troops; I have advocated pay raises for our service members and benefit increases for their families for years. No one has been more consistent than I in calling for increased endstrength, which I think would have alleviated many of these problems, had it been enacted in a timely manner. I cannot fault the Army for using everything in its power to attack this manpower challenge, but this is not the Army's problem. It is the nation's problem.

I do not believe the youth of America is unwilling or incapable of serving their country for reasons other than a large bonus, but I think their country is not making a clear and compelling argument about why they should. Therefore, Mr. Secretary, I urge you to develop a comprehensive vision of how the Department of Defense will approach the Army's crisis.

In the absence of a unifying national message urging young Americans to consider military service, I will develop my own, and I will not miss an opportunity to deliver it. Frankly, it is becoming easier for me to articulate why it is important that we not lose in Iraq than it is to describe why we must win. It is not just about the dangers of losing a nation with the potential for representative self-government after so many years of tyranny, or about allowing a viper's nest of terrorism to flourish in the heart of the Middle East. Those reasons are powerful geopolitical considerations, but there are other compelling reasons for America as well.

Essentially, my message to these young people will be this: the issue is no longer just about what is good for the war in Iraq – this is about what is good for the long term health and security of our nation. While our nation's policies in Iraq have been poorly formulated at the strategic level by our civilian leadership – Congress included – the policy guidance has been superbly executed at lower levels by our military. Right now, the strength of our national effort is in the high quality of our military forces. We need high quality people to continue to step up to serve. If they will not, the military we built out of the ashes following the Vietnam war into the finest force in history will atrophy to the point where it will be unready to fight the next time it is called upon—whether that is responding to a terrorist attack, deterring a conflict on the Korean Peninsula or across the Taiwan Strait, or somewhere else we can't yet foresee. I sincerely hope that the Department of Defense will do everything it can to raise this issue to the forefront of the national consciousness.

Mr. Secretary, before the war in Iraq began I sent the President two letters outlining my concerns about how the war was going to be conducted and how the aftermath would be handled. Sadly, many of my concerns regarding the aftermath have been realized. I was right then, and I am right now. The training of the Iraqi security forces must take on even greater urgency, and we must act to avoid the concerns I have described in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ike Skelton", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ike Skelton
Ranking Democrat

cc: Honorable Duncan Hunter