

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4504

COMMITTEES:
BUDGET
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR,
AND PENSIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

June 8, 2007

The Honorable Preston M. "Pete" Geren, III
Acting Secretary
United States Army
101 Army Pentagon, Room 3E560
Washington, D.C. 20310-0101

Dear Secretary Geren:

I am writing to you on a matter of great importance and urgency. It has come to my attention that soldiers serving in Iraq from my state of Vermont do not have the proper equipment to carry out their mission. In particular, many soldiers from my state are responsible for clearing Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and other such munitions from areas in Iraq and do not have enough of the RG-31 Medium Mine Protected Vehicles (MMPVs). In addition, I have heard of shortages of the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles (MRAPs), Buffalo Mine Protected Clearance Vehicles, Huskies, and other equivalent models. These vehicles are crucial to protect our soldiers, particularly those who are ordered to clear IEDs. As I am sure you know, IEDs are responsible for at least seventy percent of U.S. injuries and deaths in Iraq.

Military experts tell us that using these vehicles could reduce our casualty levels by close to 60%. These soldiers are trying to do their jobs and protect themselves and, more importantly in their eyes, protect their fellow soldiers from being killed by these devastating weapons. How can we ask these soldiers to clear IEDs without this protection?

I am further troubled by reports that a request for RG-31 vehicles was made as far back as February 2005 and that this request was not acted on for over a year. Even when this request was acted on, only 185 RG-31's were given when 1,169 were requested. In addition, a June 7, 2007 *Inside Defense* news report states that the Army has only requested 2,500 MRAPs when the need is far greater.

I do not understand how this could have occurred. Because of this failure, soldiers from my state and across the country are now forced to perform their dangerous job to find road side bombs before they kill more U.S. servicemen and woman in Humvees which are not strong enough to deflect IED or Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP) explosions. It seems that procurement and decision-making mistakes were made in the past and now they are being repeated. This is unacceptable.

Soldiers have already lost their lives due to the fact that they were in vehicles not built for this difficult mission.

I am writing to request that you take immediate action to deliver the proper RG-31s or similar strength vehicle to all the soldiers that need them, especially those that are clearing IEDs. In addition, I would like to know what assistance you need from Congress in securing these vehicles whether it be a change in law or increased funding. It is unacceptable that our soldiers do not have these vehicles and we in Congress must know what actions are needed from the Legislative Branch to speed this process forward. I expect that you will conduct a thorough investigation of this matter so that our service members who are most likely to come in contact with IEDs or EFPs receive the appropriate vehicles as soon as possible. I would also like to know what actions you are taking to reform your procurement process and communication system so that the needs of our soldiers on the ground are communicated directly and immediately up the chain of command.

In the short term, I would like to know what steps you are taking to increase the safety of those soldiers assigned to clearing IEDs with substandard equipment.

Senator Joseph Biden has already written to the President with these similar concerns. I join Senator Biden in those concerns and his request of the President to inform Congress about what is needed to immediately rectify this situation for all of our forces in Iraq and other combat zones.

Due to the urgent nature of this request, I would like a response to this letter in writing within the next week. Please contact me, or have your staff contact Janko Mitric in my Washington office at 202-228-6350 if you have any questions about this request.

I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator

cc: Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense
Major General Michael D. Dubie