

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 22, 2008

The Honorable Robert M. Gates  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

It has come to our attention that U.S. troops are facing delays returning home from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait as a result of the bankruptcy of ATA Airlines. We write to inquire about the circumstances surrounding these delays and to request your prompt attention to this matter.

The parents of two different Vermont soldiers have contacted our offices to express frustration that their sons are facing delays in coming home. First and foremost they wish to know when their loved one will be returning home, and second, they want answers about how this delay was allowed to happen.

As a result of the troop surge, many of the service-members participating in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom have had their deployments extended from 12 to 15 months. Ask any of these men and women when they are going home and most can give you a precise day and time. The same is true of their families who have been eagerly anticipating the return of their loved one. To be told within days of shipping out that your trip home has been delayed until a date uncertain is demoralizing. Unnecessary delays also result in additional troops remaining in a war zone beyond when their presence serves any constructive purpose for the war-fighting effort.

In light of these facts, we hope you can provide specific information as to how many service members' return flights have been delayed, for how long, and what steps the Department is taking to ensure their prompt and safe travel home.

We look forward to your prompt response to this inquiry. We also expect that everything possible is being done to facilitate the timely return of troops from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. After completing their service to our country overseas, our men and women deserve a safe return home without delays.

Sincerely,



PATRICK J. LEAHY  
U.S. Senator



BERNARD SANDERS  
U.S. Senator



PETER WELCH  
U.S. Representative