



October 14, 2009

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Gates,

The undersigned would like to thank you for your leadership in trying to restore discipline to weapons procurement. The Pentagon's budget signaled to defense contractors that they would be held accountable for programs that fail to meet reasonable cost, schedule, and milestone requirements. We particularly commend how this budget established that the Pentagon's priorities should be based solely on national security interests. This is why we ask you to make it unmistakably clear to Congress that the Department cannot tolerate earmarking funds that are more urgently needed to support our troops in the field.

Unfortunately, the appropriations process has demonstrated that Congress is not committed to basing defense spending on the best interests of our national security. As it stands right now, the Department of Defense might be given a budget that requires it to buy additional weapon systems the Department does not want, including as many as 800 lesser earmarks, 10 unneeded C-17 aircraft, and an additional DDG-51 destroyer. But even worse, it appears that the budget that will be given to the Department will reduce already insufficient funds for troops in the field.

We are concerned that the money for these programs and other earmarks has been drawn from Operations and Maintenance (O&M) accounts. These funds pay for troops training and for maintenance, repairs, and spare parts for their equipment. In contrast, these earmarks place the parochial interests of the future ahead of the needs of the troops today. This money could also be better used for other priorities. For example, we are concerned about reports that U.S. Special Forces in Pakistan and Afghanistan lack sufficient heavy-lift helicopters for "white missions" to recruit and train local antiterrorist militias and engage the enemy in remote areas. Without these helicopters, troops must use land vehicles, exposing troops unnecessarily to improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

You have already significantly changed the culture of earmarking that dominates defense procurement, but we believe that you could also help convince Congress that defense spending should prioritize our national security needs. We urge you to make your objections known in the strongest possible terms as the House and Senate Appropriations Committees rapidly finish their work on the 2010 Defense Appropriations bill. We look forward to working with you to implement and sustain further efforts to restore discipline procurement, acquisition, and contracting at the Pentagon.

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