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United States Senate

October 25, 2016

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

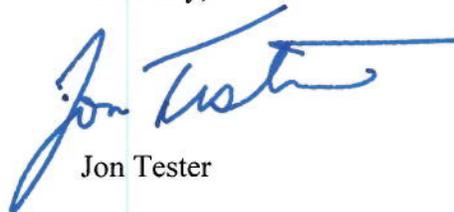
I write to urge you to include a critical and timely provision in the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would authorize a debt forgiveness program for National Guardsmen and other service members who were negatively impacted by improperly administered reenlistment bonuses.

As you know, it is increasingly clear that numerous members of the National Guard have inadvertently incurred debt through faulty practices by military recruiters, who offered improper amounts of bonus payments to incentivize reenlistment for service in Iraq and Afghanistan a decade ago. After a recent audit completed by the California National Guard found that many of these bonuses were allocated based off of incomplete or inaccurate paperwork, the Pentagon sought repayment of these bonuses. That effort subsequently led to financial hardships for many of the affected Guardsmen, though they were put in this situation through no fault of their own.

Though I am encouraged that Secretary of Defense Ash Carter has ordered the Pentagon to stop seeking repayments from affected California Guardsmen, there remains no official process to properly or fairly adjudicate debt relief for other or future service members in similar situations. To right this wrong, I respectfully urge you to prioritize the addition of language in the FY 2017 NDAA to formalize and authorize such a process. Doing so is critical to ensure that any future service members who are financially impacted in a negative manner by a similar clerical or human error have a path for recourse.

I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester

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