

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 27, 2008

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

Dear Secretary Gates:

As we begin review of the budget request for the Department of Defense for Fiscal Year 2009, we remain concerned that the rapid acquisition systems designed to support our fighting forces are not working as well as they should. A Naval Audit Service Report on the Marine Corps Urgent Universal Need Statement Process issued September 28, 2007 concluded, "The UUNS process, at the time of our audit, was not effective." Since that time, the Marine Corps authorized one of its senior civilians to conduct case studies on several items urgently requested by commanders in Iraq, including the Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles. These case studies, while not definitive in and of themselves, also point to trends and problems in the system as a whole.

We know that the Marine Corps has made some improvements, but we are concerned that they and the other services have not come far enough. For example, an urgent needs request for Explosively Formed Penetrator (EFP) protection was submitted on February 17, 2005 as part of the first MRAP Urgent Universal Needs Statement. On January 13, 2007 that request was renewed, yet we are still five or six months from fielding even limited quantities of EFP protected vehicles. In addition, the Army's delays in initially fielding better body armor, up armored humvees, and MRAPs appear to be symptoms of the same problems.

It is essential that we fix this system. The enemy is quick and adaptable, which makes it imperative that we are too. Our front line forces must be supported by a modern system that quickly meets their needs, not a slow and lumbering bureaucracy better suited to the last century. As important, our military men and women and their families deserve to know that we are giving them the best possible equipment when they need it.

It is difficult to reform while engaged in the fight, but we believe we must if we are going to win the fight. We applaud your decision to initiate an IG investigation of the MRAP issue, but we urge you to conduct a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of all of our wartime acquisition processes, in all of the services and at the joint level, building on the work done by the Army with the Commission on Army Acquisition and Program Management in Expeditionary Operations.

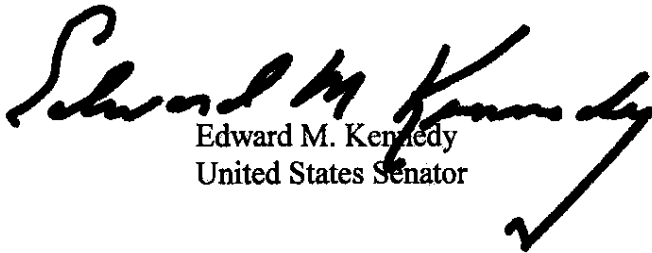
Such a comprehensive, Department-wide review should, at a minimum, address the following questions: Are we capturing the lessons learned? Are we measuring performance appropriately? How much influence do budgetary constraints play on decisions? Is there an appropriate balance between urgent wartime needs and long-term military readiness? Do we need to modify laws or regulations to become more nimble, while still providing the accountability and reliability the American people expect? In answering these questions, the MRAP and related case studies will be informative as examples of problem areas and, as the past year showed with MRAP, ways in which problems were overcome. We believe the existing case studies done within the Marine Corps and reviews like that done by the Naval Audit Service will also be helpful.

If the effort to provide EFP protection is any guide, unfortunately, we are still not accelerating our development and fielding efforts adequate to meet the current threat. It is time for a comprehensive effort to give the American military the full benefit of the nation's production and development capacity.

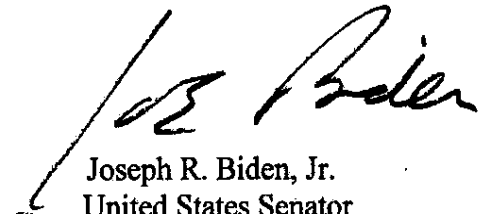
Sincerely,



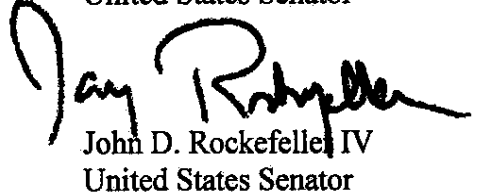
Christopher S. Bond
United States Senator



Edward M. Kennedy
United States Senator



Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
United States Senator



John D. Rockefeller IV
United States Senator