

October 30, 2006

Donald Rumsfeld  
Secretary of Defense  
Department of Defense  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld,

On behalf of Military Families Speak Out we are requesting a meeting with you on November 9th, 2006 to share with you our experiences, and the experiences of our loved ones, with troop extensions in Iraq, the involuntary call-up of Individual Ready Reserve forces, multiple deployments, stop-loss orders and reliance on National Guard forces in the war in Iraq.

In July, you ordered the extension of 3,500 soldiers in the 172<sup>nd</sup> Stryker Brigade in Iraq, when they were supposed to be coming home from a year-long deployment. In August, the Marines announced a call-back of their Individual Ready Reserve force – a force that is supposed to be used only in times of national emergency. In September, 4,000 soldiers in the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division were extended in Iraq. In October, the Army announced it would be keeping 120,000 troops in Iraq until 2010 and that there would be more extensive use of National Guard and Reserve forces to allow this to happen. In addition, servicemen and women continue to be placed under stop-loss orders and held in the military after their years of service are up; many troops are experiencing multiple deployments. These aspects of “the back door draft” have had, and are having, devastating consequences for our loved ones and their families.

In preparation for the meeting, we are asking that you read the statements below – just a sample of voices of military families who, along with our loved ones, are bearing the brunt of your failed policies in Iraq.

We believe that the best course of action is to bring *all* of our troops home now, and take care of them when they get here. Our loved ones signed up to protect and defend the Constitution of this nation. That is not what they are doing in Iraq.

Below are statements from families impacted by your decisions. We believe that you, as Secretary of Defense, owe it to these families, to all military families, and to this nation, to honor their request for a meeting. As Secretary of Defense it is not only your job, but your moral duty, to hear what they have to say and to answer questions that they have. These families are members of Military Families Speak Out, which currently has a membership that includes over 3,000 military families. Many of these families have experienced the devastating impacts of the backdoor draft.

Please let us know a convenient time for you to meet with a representative group of these families. We look forward to meeting with you, and sharing our perspective, along with our anguish, fear and pain.

Sincerely,

Nancy Lessin and Charley Richardson  
Co-founders, Military Families Speak Out

“Twice as a mother, I have had to see my son off to war. Twice, I have embraced him on his return to ensure he really made it back. The pain and horror of what our family has gone through while he was gone is a shadow to the horrors of war he has endured. My son is a proud United States Marine. He has received a presidential unit citation and has honorably served his country at a great cost to his soul. Now is a time for healing. Yet, I find my family torn apart, our hearts wrenched in fear, that he will be called back into service and sent to the hell he has already twice survived. He is in the Marine Individual Ready Reserve and is on the short list for the involuntary recall. Our family, my son, has done enough for this war. Let us continue to heal. Let me help my son redeem his soul. Stop this back door draft.”

**Tina Richards of Salem, MO**

“My son has been involuntarily extended on his first tour in Iraq, he has now been involuntarily extended on his second tour; he was actually supposed to get out of the Army last May but was involuntarily extended and has no idea whatsoever when he will be released. He belongs home with his family, and his children deserve a father not a memory.” **Harry Meyer of Chattanooga, TN**

“This is our second time to experience an extension of our son's time in Iraq. The first was in April 2004 when the 1st Armor was packed and ready to go home to Baumholder, Germany. Bush extended their time 120 days and then he went on vacation after the announcement. On April 29, 2004 eight soldiers from the 1st Armor Baumholder, Germany were killed. They announced on the radio that 8 soldiers from the 1st Armor-- that should have been home with their families in Baumholder--were killed. I lost it that day and closed myself up in my office and cried. It was the start of the worst days of our lives.” **Tim and Laura Kahlor of Temecula, CA**

“Our son was in Iraq during shock and awe. He was honorably discharged and involuntarily reactivated last winter. He is now back in Iraq. He was told that half of the vets that have been reactivated have refused to report. 63 vets were ordered back in his group. Only 21 showed up. 4 of these vets were grandfathers in their 50s. Our nephew told us that in his third tour in Iraq there were 3 soldiers in his company who were convicted of violent crimes... The judge gave them the choice of prison or Army and Iraq. Our troupes have to carry grandfathers and rehabilitate violent criminals--who they also have to depend on to watch their backs.” **Kent Robertson of Hillsborough, NC**

“My son Michael is in the 172nd Stryker Brigade that was told in late July 2006 that they were to redeploy to Baghdad during the very hours that they were preparing to leave Iraq. They are still in Baghdad, and we at home cannot trust the Pentagon to bring them home at the end of this extension. Instead, we face each and every day fearing that unwanted knock on the door or a late night phone call. The redeployment is a symptom of the larger failures of this war and occupation.” **Rich Moniak of Juneau, AK**

"Both my son-in-law and nephew were deployed to Iraq with 1st Armored in OIF March 2003. Both were due to come home April 2004, but the 1st Armored was stop-loss extended at the very last minute. Some were already in Kuwait, on planes headed home when they were turned back to Iraq. My son-in-law expressed not only disappointment about this development, but new concerns about the course of the war in Iraq in which he said he and many other soldiers did not see a reason for continued military presence and encouraged me to continue efforts at home for military families and civilians to speak out and call for bringing the troops home.” **Lietta Ruger of Bay Center, WA**

"My son is in the 1st Armored Division in Iraq. I found out earlier that he is being extended in his tour for at least another 6 weeks. I am so very angry about this. When he returned home on leave just a few weeks ago he had lost so much weight it was frightening. He turned from a lean muscular young man into a bag of bones. He also told me that his whole unit was sick. I expect my son to be back home in a few months, but that won't placate my worry. When mine comes back, Paula's [another MFSO mom] son will be going. Then we'll worry with her. This news is very disturbing to me." **JoAnn Sohl of Palisades Park, NJ**

“On June 29, 2006, my fiancée was stop-lossed and redeployed to Iraq. There had been talk of upcoming deployment, but the date was always in question. It wasn't until a couple of weeks before the deployment that he was even informed that he had been stop lossed. He has now been deployed 3 times to "foreign wars." After his first tour in Iraq he was diagnosed with PTSD, but instead of getting medically discharged he was redeployed. We have been let down by the system that was supposed to be providing him care. He was receiving counseling 1-2 times per week and now gets none. I am terrified by what he is seeing and how it will affect him in the long term. I work as a registered nurse and can't believe the medical/mental health systems would further subject him to those conditions. I am unbelievably disappointed and sad that this is happening (not only to my fiancée, but to countless soldiers). Every experience we have had with the Army has led to dismay. He has been bribed with promotions and bonuses to re-enlist, but when he gets home we are getting out. He and I are both fed up with the lies and the cheating that goes on in this corrupt system.” **Debra of Seattle, WA**

“My son is a member of the 172nd Stryker Unit out of Fairbanks, Alaska. He was deployed to Iraq last August 2005 and expected to return home August 2006. He was due to leave the Army after this deployment. We found out only a few days before he was scheduled to return home that his entire unit had been not only extended for at least 4 months in Iraq but also were being relocated to Baghdad. In addition, members planning to leave the Army were told of a stop loss so they would have to put plans to leave the military on hold. My son had been offered a job

which of course could not be held for him. In addition, many members of his unit had already left to return to Alaska and had to be flown back. Equipment (including heavy vehicles) and supplies had already been shipped and had to be returned. I cannot even begin to imagine the cost of this process to the American taxpayer. The demoralizing effect of this entire process on the troops is my biggest concern. It's as if no one cares about these guys.” **Judy of Tampa, FL**

“My husband is in the PA Army National Guard. His unit was first activated and deployed to Bosnia in 2002. Stop-Loss orders were issues at that time. Then in 2005 a portion of his unit was again activated and deployed to Iraq. They just returned in June of 2006. The repeated deployment of his unit in such a short time has been stressful both financially and emotionally for many in the unit.

To ask a small number of Americans, both the military members themselves and their families, something like one percent of the American population, to endure repeated deployments is an unfair burden to place on their shoulders. It begins to feel like this administration and the American people see our military as nothing more than BOOTS ON THE GROUND, not the mothers and father, husbands and wives, and sons and daughters that are to us. That type of military service then becomes a form of slavery and not the honorable service to our nation that was originally intended.” **Beatrice Kay Jones of Mechanicsburg, PA**

“While my husband was in Iraq my mother in law was desperately searching for a kidney donor, as she has had Diabetes for the past 10 years and her kidneys are failing. My husband wanted to test to see if he were a match but he was not allowed to leave Iraq to get tested to see if he could possibly save his own mother's life! Instead my father in law donated a kidney and the operation failed, and now because of the antibodies that were built up, my husband can not donate, and my mother in law is still in grave health.

His deployment caused me severe anxiety to the point where I needed extreme psychotherapy treatments. I had to leave my job that I loved because the stress of having to leave my desk every time my husband called from Iraq was too much to bear. I think it is an outrage that the National Guard has been used at all, there purpose is to protect us from harm on our own country's soil!” **Francine of Queens, NY**

“Currently, my eldest son, David who has 2 teenage daughters and is missing the important blossoming part of their lives. Since 2003, he has been activated and re-activated from the Army Reserve. He served in Afghanistan for 6 months, was deactivated, and then reactivated to go to Iraq where he won the Bronze Star.

After 8 months there, he was deactivated then reactivated, then deactivated again. 3 months later, he was reactivated and sent to Louisiana to do hurricane relief, a relief to us all. 3 months ago, he was again reactivated and sent to Ft. McPherson, Ga. where he sees no end in sight for his active duty there. At least it's not in the killing fields of Iraq.” **Alice C. Brown of Canton, MA**

“My son served in the regular army from 7/29/02 through 7/29/06. He went to Iraq on 1/27/04 and returned from Iraq in March of 2005. He got out of the army with his accumulated leave on May 10th and enrolled in school. His brother had served in the Army for 3 years and they were both planning on attending school and rooming together. My son's ETS date was 7/29/06,

however he received a letter on August 5th that he had been stop loss'd. He is on his way to Iraq Tuesday and will be over there till January of 2008. I am very angry about this, I feel that my son served his time and was forced to return to a war that is wrong. The war in Iraq is not making our country safer from terrorism, and we have lost the respect and alliance of many other countries.”

**Jeanne Lind of Waupuca, WI**