

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

February 27, 2012

The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Panetta:

I am writing to you to share the concerns I've heard from constituents regarding the change the Department of Defense recently announced in its Post Deployment/Mobilization Respite Absence (PDMRA) policy. The change may adversely and unfairly affect members of the Minnesota National Guard's storied 1/34th Brigade Combat Team (BCT) who were serving courageously in Kuwait at the time the change was made. I therefore respectfully ask that the new policy not be applied to service members' deployment that began prior to the announcement of the policy change.

As you know, PDMRA is a program to recognize service members who are required to deploy or mobilize above DoD rotation frequency thresholds by awarding them administrative absence days. The recent modification to DoD Instruction 1327.06, Change 1, altered the PDMRA program guidance by changing accrual rates for qualifying deployments or mobilizations effective October 1, 2011. Going forward, members of the reserve component will now receive fewer administration absence days for each month of mobilization that is eligible for PDMRA benefits. In addition, Change 1 to DoD Instruction 1327.06 permits the Secretary of the Army to use a deployment-to-dwell ration of 1:5 for Reserve Component members, which would reduce the number of service members eligible for PDMRA benefits. Finally, the new accrual rates are variable: either two administration days per month or one depending on the location of deployment.

Whatever the merits of this change, what seems clear is that it should not be applied to service members who were deployed when the change was made. Members of the 1/34th BCT from Minnesota were serving in support of Operation New Dawn at the time the change to PDMRA program guidance was made. This is not the first time the Red Bulls have encountered problems with their earned PDMRA benefits. Within days of being sworn in to the Senate in mid-2009, I cosponsored a bill that redressed the failure to compensate service members, including those in the 1/34th BCT, for eligible service because of a problem with implementation of the program. (The brave members of the Minnesota National Guard did in that case receive their PDMRA benefits.) Now, members of the 1/34th BCT deployed to Kuwait with a certain understanding of how they would accrue PDMRA leave while serving our nation. And they have served courageously. It is unfair to take away benefits they were promised when they deployed.

I am concerned we are once again entering a lengthy period of confusion and delay in the provision of their benefits. For instance, there is considerable confusion about whether the new program guidance will apply to the 1/34th's mobilization before October 1, 2011, or only after; whether the Secretary of the Army will apply the new deployment-to-dwell ratio, and for which periods of time; and whether their deployment would qualify for one day per month of administrative leave or two.

I believe the surest way to avoid confusion, delay, and unfairness in the case of the 1/34th BCT and others in the same situation is to clarify that the new program guidance does not apply to qualified mobilizations for members of the Reserve Component that began before Change 1 to DoD Instruction 1327.06 was promulgated. I respectfully request that you undertake such a step.

Thank you for prompt attention to this very important matter. If you have any questions, or if there is any assistance I can provide, do not hesitate to contact me, or Jeff Lomonaco on my staff, at (202) 224-5641.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Al Franken", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Al Franken
United States Senator