

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 7, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We write to express our support of a transition of U.S. forces in Afghanistan from a combat role to a training, advising and assistance role next year, as Defense Secretary Leon Panetta stated was his intention on February 1st, 2012. Although we would prefer a more rapid reduction of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, the statement made by the Secretary is a positive step towards ending the decade long war.

It is time to bring our troops home from Afghanistan. The United States intervened in Afghanistan to destroy al Qaeda's safe haven, remove the Taliban government that sheltered al Qaeda, and pursue those who planned the September 11th attacks on the United States. Thanks to the exceptional service and sacrifice made by the American Armed Forces and our allies, those objectives have largely been met. We should continue to confront America's enemies wherever they are through targeted counterterrorism operations and end the large scale counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan.

We simply cannot afford more years of elevated troop levels in Afghanistan. We are spending roughly \$10 billion in Afghanistan each month at a time when we're making tough sacrifices at home. Your recent budget calls for \$88 billion more for the war in Afghanistan in 2013. If this money is appropriated, we will have spent a total of \$650 billion in Afghanistan. A majority of Americans worry that the costs of the war in Afghanistan will make it more difficult for the government to address the problems facing the United States at home. They're right.

Our troops and their families have made unimaginable sacrifices during the past ten years of war in Afghanistan. Over 1,900 American troops have been killed and over 14,300 have been wounded. Thousands more return home with invisible wounds that will make it difficult to ever again enjoy life the way they did before the war.

There is strong bipartisan support in Congress to change course in Afghanistan. The majority of Americans want a safe and orderly drawdown of forces in Afghanistan. In May, the U.S. House of Representatives nearly passed an amendment to the FY 2012 National Defense Authorization Act requiring a plan to accelerate the drawdown of troops from Afghanistan. A similar amendment introduced by Senators Merkley, Lee, T. Udall, and Paul was passed by the U. S. Senate on November 30th.

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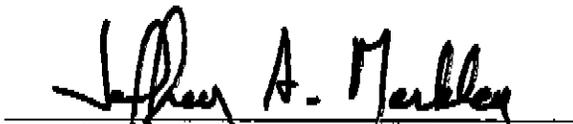
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We look forward to reviewing the report required by Section 1221 of the FY2012 National Defense Authorization Act, which will set benchmarks to evaluate progress toward the assumption by the Afghan government of lead responsibility for security in all areas of Afghanistan. In light of the comments made by Secretary Panetta on February 1st, we would also be interested in learning more about how quickly U.S. troops will be coming home, the number and purpose of troops that might remain in Afghanistan and for how long a period, and the costs and savings of accelerating the completion of combat operations. Nonetheless, we welcome his announcement and encourage you to take every possible step to end the large scale combat operations in Afghanistan and transition our effort to a targeted counterterrorism strategy.

Sincerely,



Senator Max Baucus



Senator Jeff Merkley



Senator Rand Paul



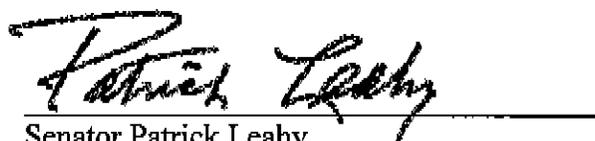
Senator Ron Wyden



Senator Joe Manchin



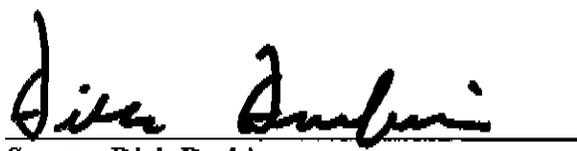
Senator Mike Lee



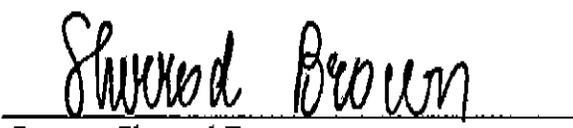
Senator Patrick Leahy



Senator Tom Harkin



Senator Dick Durbin



Senator Sherrod Brown

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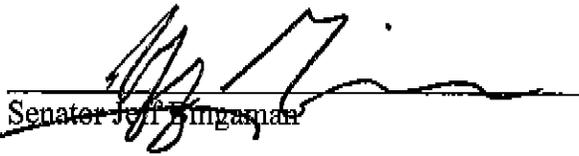
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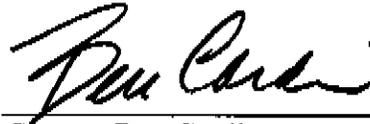
Senator Bernie Sanders



Senator Al Franken



Senator Jeff Bingaman



Senator Ben Cardin



Senator Tom Udall



Senator Patty Murray



Senator Maria Cantwell



Senator Sheldon Whitehouse



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand



Senator Bob Menendez



Senator Frank Lautenberg



Senator Herb Kohl



Senator Barbara Mikulski



Senator Charles Schumer