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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3703

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The Honorable Leon Panetta  
Secretary of Defense  
US Department of Defense  
1400 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Panetta,

I am writing to bring your attention to an issue of significant concern. During a recent trip to Afghanistan I visited troops serving in several locations, including Kabul. While these brave Americans are putting their lives on the line every day, I fear that the Department of Defense is not paying enough attention to a danger they face every day; the toxic air pollution in the Afghan capital. Based on preliminary assessment, Kabul ranks near the top in terms of worldwide rankings of hazardous airborne contaminants. Measured levels in Kabul were worse than Beijing and even Lahore, Pakistan, considered by atmospheric scientists to have some of the worst pollution in the world.

As you are no doubt aware, Kabul sits in valley at high altitude. Physically, it is an environment where pollutants can't disperse quickly. Kabul's lack of infrastructure, sanitation problems, and recent population boom have resulted in dangerously high airborne contaminant levels. Levels of individual hazardous compounds, such as carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, and ozone are all significantly above EPA primary and secondary standards, and levels of particulate matter are more than 1000 percent higher than World Health Organization recommended levels. The Afghanistan National Environmental Protection Agency has advised Kabul residents to wear masks to protect them from particulate matter, and Afghan sources estimate over 3,000 deaths in Kabul annually can be attributed directly to hazardous air quality.

While I know the mission of our personnel often requires repeated exposure to dangerous environments, I fear that the effects of airborne toxins in Kabul may not be fully realized until much later. I urge the Department of Defense to conduct studies so we know exactly what our troops and other Americans in Kabul are breathing, and I ask that we make every effort to minimize or mitigate their exposure. I also strongly believe we must also take steps now to ensure assistance is available in the future.

I ask that you mandate an addition to the records of US personnel who have served in Kabul, stating the individual was exposed to hazardous levels of airborne contaminants. While I sincerely hope that our troops do not develop long term health issues as a result of their service, I believe a specific written statement will facilitate treatment for problems that can be directly attributed to the pollution in Kabul, especially for those who have left military service prior to the onset of symptoms.

Thank you for your swift attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

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