United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 23, 2011

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are gravely concerned about recommendations proffered by the Defense Business Board with regard to America's military retirement, primarily those recommendations altering and/or cutting the military retirement benefits which our career military members who are currently serving our great nation have been promised and are relying upon to assist with their retirement needs.

While deficit reduction is essential, balancing the budget and curbing costs in the U.S. Department of Defense by cutting retirement benefits to those now serving is patently unfair to our military members and their families and puts in jeopardy the recruitment and retention of our nation's future all-volunteer force. We have heard from countless veterans and constituents asking that Congress do the right thing by ensuring that these important benefits are not pulled out from under those who are working hard for what they have been promised.

The current retirement system is a considerable enticement in preserving a career voluntary military force, and any proposed changes must be calculated in that light. Many of our constituents have stated that the current retirement system was a major factor in their decision to choose to serve, or to continue serving in uniform. Contrary to the belief of some, military service is not comparable to the private sector; and a retirement system that works for a civilian career may not necessarily be appropriate for the military.

On this subject, you have said, "People who have come into the service, who have put their lives on the line, who have been deployed to the war zones, who fought for this country, who have been promised certain benefits for that – I'm not going to break faith with what's been promised to them." We believe, as do our constituents, that we must follow your lead and ensure that our government upholds the promises we have made to our military.

Certainly, Congress will be looking to you regarding cuts in defense spending; yet it is our worry that some members will also look to these recommendations by the Defense Business Board. We encourage you then to ensure the security of America's military by relaying to Congress your deep commitment that our nation not undertake any detrimental changes or reductions in military retirement for those who are serving. While our nation must cut spending and balance the budget, we simply cannot do it on the backs of America's military and their families.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter. Please be assured we will assist you in this effort in any way that we can.

Sincerely,

E. Benjamin Nelson
United States Senator

James Inhofe
United States Senator

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator

Jim Webb
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Richard Durbin
United States Senator

Mark Begich
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

Kay Hagan
United States Senator

Robert Casey
United States Senator

Daniel Akaka
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator