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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-0916

October 26, 2016

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Carter:

I write to express my deep concern regarding recent reports of the Pentagon ordering thousands of veterans, many of whom have served multiple combat tours, to return re-enlistment bonuses and student loans repayments awarded to them nearly a decade ago.

It is particularly egregious that, as reported by the *Los Angeles Times*, the improper payment of these bonuses, some totaling more than \$15,000, was due to mismanagement by National Guard officials – not malfeasance on the part of the brave men and women who protect our country.

Forcing innocent soldiers and veterans to repay these funds 10 years after they went to war on the nation's behalf is obscene and unjustified. The Pentagon needs to back off and leave them alone. They did their part and answered our nation's call to serve at a time when we needed them most.

I am also frustrated by reports that the Pentagon is unaware of the true scope of this issue, and that your department has acknowledged Guardsmen from other states may also be facing similar orders to return this money.

While the California National Guard has been the subject of investigations, we need accurate information to ensure that service members from other states – particularly Florida – have not been subject to this outrageous abuse. The Florida National Guard is one of the largest state Guard organizations in the country with more than 11,600 soldiers and airmen.

To that end, I respectfully request that your office (1) identify any instances of Florida service members who are or have been subject to bonus recoupment proceedings due to the mistakes of Defense Department officials and (2) describe steps that the Defense Department is taking to rectify this situation, both nationally and with respect to Florida.

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I'm hopeful the Pentagon will reverse course on this reprehensible demand and keep its promise to these service members. This policy inflicts financial stress on our nation's heroes, erodes trust in the military and sets a dangerous precedent. These soldiers left their families, fought overseas for days on end and some returned home with physical and invisible injuries. They should not be punished for a mistake they did not make.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Vern Buchanan", written in a cursive style.

Vern Buchanan
Member of Congress