

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 19, 2007

Dear Colleague:

We invite you to join us in sending the attached letter to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates requesting a comprehensive review of the personality disorder process for U.S. service personnel who have served honorably in Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. There are indications that personality disorder discharges are being used as a tool to quickly discharge service members who have service-connected mental health conditions, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Even more troubling is the suggestion that such discharges are being used to avoid paying disability and medical benefits.

The Department of Defense's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Fourth Edition, otherwise referred to as the DSM-IV, cautions behavioral health specialists against a premature diagnosis of personality disorder when mitigating circumstances are present, such as evidence of PTSD or TBI. Yet despite these clear guidelines, there is evidence that military discharge boards are willing to issue personality discharges under circumstances where other war-related injuries are a factor in the inability of service personnel to perform their assigned duties.

The *Washington Post* deftly illustrated an example of this problem on June 17, 2007 in a piece entitled "*The War Inside*." According to the *Post*—after serving a combat tour in Iraq—Army Specialist Jeans Cruz returned to Ft. Hood, Texas crippled by the mental anguish of his combat experience. Notes from his medical files indicate "major depression," and "anger from Iraq, nightmares, flashbacks." The Army was so concerned that it even went so far as to have Spc. Cruz sign a "Life Maintenance Agreement," a document stating that he agreed "not to harm himself or anyone else." But the Army ultimately discharged Spc. Cruz with a "personality disorder—in essence finding that Spc. Cruz's medical problems had nothing to do with his service in Iraq.

Another egregious example of the misuse of the personality discharge process was recently chronicled by reporter Joshua Kors in a piece entitled: "*How Specialist Town Lost his Benefits*." As our letter to Secretary Gates explains, Spc. Jon Town was injured and sustained major loss of hearing in a rocket attack in Ramadi, Iraq in October, 2004. His injuries ultimately resulted in memory loss and depression, ending his military career. But instead of sending Spc. Town through the medical board process, the Army elected to give Spc. Town a "personality disorder" discharge, depriving him of disability benefits and guaranteed VA care for his injuries. We have attached a copy of both articles for your review.

We strongly believe that even one improper discharge that could deny a service member lifetime benefits and care is cause for grave concern. As such, we believe that the Secretary of Defense should undertake a prompt and thorough review of the personality disorder discharge process. We also believe that a Special Discharge Board should be created to assist the Military Board of Corrections for each service in reviewing petitions for service members discharged with personality disorders who served honorably in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We hope you will join us in this worthy effort. Please have a member of your staff contact James Pitchford of Senator Bond's staff at 4-5721 or Ann Norris of Senator Boxer's staff at 4-1659 if you have any questions or would like to express support for this issue by signing the attached letter.

Sincerely,

Jim Bond

Barbara Boxer

Barbara

Jim