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February 27, 2007

The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Christopher "Kit" Bond
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Leahy and Senator Bond:

The nation's Governors appreciate the work of the House and Senate National Guard caucuses in their support of the Guard in our states through the introduction of the National Guard Empowerment Act of 2007. Your legislation represents a major step in ensuring the men and women of our Guard are well organized, trained, equipped, compensated and supported to accomplish federal and state missions.

Governors agree with the overall objectives of the National Guard Empowerment Act. We support the goal of enhancing the role and authority of the Chief of the National Guard Bureau within the Department of Defense. The chief, as head of the National Guard and primary liaison between governors and the Defense Department, must have significant input in all decisions affecting Guard budgets and other resources to make sure it is fully prepared for all domestic and foreign missions. The chief must also be recognized as the authoritative leader on all issues regarding funding, equipping and re-equipping, and compensating the Guard.

As you work to pass this legislation to enhance the National Guard, we believe three fundamental principles should guide your efforts. First, the dual mission should be preserved and promoted. As the only reserve component that performs both state and federal missions, the National Guard has unique standing among the services. Located in more than 3,000 communities throughout the nation, Army and Air National Guard units are a ready, rapid response force already located on or near the scene for handling Homeland Security missions. They also serve as an effective added resource to state and local emergency response efforts in the event of natural disasters and acts of terrorism. These critical roles must not be forgotten in any restructuring or rebalancing of the force. The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) should reaffirm these activities as an integral part of the ongoing mission of the National Guard and ensure they are provided the funding, training and other resources necessary to fully meet the additional responsibilities inherent in today's homeland defense environment.

Second, it is critical that the Guard receive training and equipment to handle both its state and federal missions. While Governors commend the Army and the Air Force for their efforts to enhance training and better equip and National Guard, more needs to be done. Many states and territories are experiencing equipment shortages in critical mission areas such as responding to forest fires and other emergencies because equipment remains in the combat zone after deployment. Greater attention must be paid to reequipping

Army National Guard units returning from active duty abroad to ensure they are prepared to fulfill domestic missions or train for possible redeployment.

Finally, employers who support our National Guard men and women require assistance. Governors understand and appreciate the vital role that employers of Guard members play and the sacrifice they make in supporting our citizen-soldiers. Several states are following the lead of private employers to fill gaps between civilian pay and active-duty pay for state employees who are also members of the Guard. As the War on Terror continues, we must examine relief for employers such as tax credits and enhancing federal measures to address pay gaps for activated Guard members.

Thank you again for your support and commitment to the Army and Air National Guard. We look forward to working with you to recognize, promote and enhance this critical national resource.

Sincerely,



Governor Michael F. Easley
Co-Lead on the National Guard



Governor Mark Sanford
Co-Lead on the National Guard