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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

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Kevin Cross
Center for Justice, Peace, and Environment
P.O. Box 400
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Dear Kevin:

Thank you for contacting my office regarding the war in Afghanistan. I am glad that James Thompson was able to meet with you after all.

I certainly agree that the United States should not take lightly any decision to place more servicemembers in harm's way. Our experiences in Iraq have shown the complexities of battling against insurgents, and our young men and women in uniform are depending on us to avoid mistakes made in the past.

That said, I firmly believe that Afghanistan should be a central focus in our foreign policy strategy to keep America safe. Stabilizing Afghanistan remains an essential American national security interest. The U.S. must continue to assist the fledgling government in Kabul to provide security and territorial integrity for the people of Afghanistan.

On March 27, 2009, President Obama announced a comprehensive plan for dismantling al-Qaida and its allies in Afghanistan. To that end, the President committed another 17,000 troops to the region. He also committed another 4,000 noncombat troops who will train the Afghan Army and national police in an effort to expand the number of Afghan security forces. President Obama's new approach is still being implemented at this stage, and many of these forces are not yet in place.

This situation in Afghanistan has not improved in some time. On August 30, 2009, General McChrystal – the commanding officer in Afghanistan – submitted a strategic assessment of the Afghan mission to Administration officials. In this assessment, Gen. McChrystal outlined his concerns with our current strategy. Many in and out of the government have questioned whether more troops are needed in the region.

This is a difficult and complex question. Before making any decision to send more troops to Afghanistan, we must give the Administration time to analyze Gen. McChrystal's report and work with military commanders in the region to develop a clear strategy. The McChrystal report asserts that a new strategy must be put in place to put greater emphasis on protecting Afghan citizens and helping to lay the groundwork for improved security and governance. At the same time, he warned against committing more resources to the war without a new strategy in place.

Our efforts in Afghanistan must include a renewed commitment to diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and non-military support. We must also quicken and expand the training of Afghan security forces so that the people of Afghanistan can work to protect their own country. And finally, we must work to educate and empower Afghan women, who have been disempowered under the rule of the Taliban. While we must respect cultures unlike our own, political repression of women can never be passed off as a cultural necessity. As a father of three young girls, I believe empowering Afghan women holds part of the key to growing the Afghan economy, improving education and infrastructure, and achieving U.S. security goals.

As we work to empower the Afghan people and dismantle terrorist organizations in the country, I will do everything in my power to provide our servicemembers in the region with the tools they need to get the job done. As Congress works with the Pentagon to develop a responsible way forward, I will keep your thoughts in mind.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. F. Bennet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator