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United States Senate

January 28, 2020

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The Honorable Matthew P. Donovan
Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness
4000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Donovan:

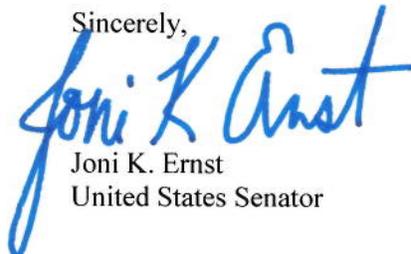
I write regarding the multiple American servicemembers who have suffered traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) as a result of the January 8, 2020 strike on the Ain al-Asad air base in Iraq. This letter seeks information on the security situation of our deployed forces who may be exposed to blast injuries in Iraq, and the plan of care to treat the injured servicemembers.

While TBI is often nearly invisible, the physical trauma is real, severe, and has long-term effects. These serious injuries have become prevalent among hundreds of thousands of our servicemembers. Research has found that TBI can result from blast waves generated by minor explosions even though there are no physical signs of head injury.

For this reason, I have worked with my colleagues on the Senate Armed Services Committee, as well as the Department of Defense on initiatives to improve research on TBI among servicemembers and strengthen DOD's capacity to track and mitigate blast pressure exposure. I applaud DOD's work to direct a longitudinal medical study on servicemembers' blast pressure exposure during combat and training, and I have received your interim report on the study methods and action plan. This year's FY20 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) also contained language I supported to require annual status reports on the longitudinal medical study, and to assess the feasibility for the Defense Occupational and Environmental Health Readiness System – Industrial Hygiene (DOEHRS-IH) to track TBI data. It is vital for DoD to accurately track TBIs and impacted servicemembers, as well as bolster prevention and effective treatments.

It is our duty to ensure the safety and health of our men and women in uniform as they defend our country. I would respectfully request a briefing on the January 8 attacks and any associated issues related to the TBIs experienced by these servicemembers within 30 days of receiving this letter. Please coordinate directly with my office by contacting Nic Adams (nic_adams@ernst.senate.gov), National Security Advisor and Anna Breen (anna_breen@ernst.senate.gov), Legislative Assistant.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator