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Bipartisan Letter Sent to Defense Secretary Gates, House and Senate Leaders

Washington, Apr 17 -

Today Rep. Bruce Braley and Sen. Tom Harkin led an Iowa delegation letter to the leadership of the House and Senate Armed Services Committee and Defense Secretary Robert Gates asking for the Chief of the National Guard Bureau be given full membership on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"The National Guard is a critical component of our military, serving at unprecedented levels at home and abroad," Braley said. "As we increasingly rely on the National Guard to serve as an operational force, the voices of the men and women in the National Guard deserve to be heard at the Department of Defense. Giving the National Guard a seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff will improve communication and coordination between the Guard and the Pentagon, and would help prevent errors like the one that occurred with nearly 600 members of the Iowa National Guard's 1-133rd who were denied GI Bill educational benefits."

"While the roles and responsibilities of our National Guard have been elevated, their status in the decision-making process has not followed suit," said Harkin. "There is a serious disconnect between the National Guard and the Department of Defense, a disconnect that impacts Iowa troops and their families. That must change. The brave men and women of our National Guard deserve a voice in the decisions and policies made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff - they deserve a seat at the table."

Senator Grassley and Representatives Latham, Boswell and Loeb sack joined Braley and Harkin in signing the letter. The letter was sent to the Chairman and Ranking Member of House and Senate Armed Services Committees. These committees are responsible for drafting the annual defense authorization bill, which establishes policies for the United States military.

The letter praised the action taken in the FY08 Defense Authorization Bill to strengthen the National Guard Bureau, and encouraged the Armed Services Committees to continue these actions through establishing a National Guard seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff.