



For immediate release
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Governor Richardson Urges Secretary of Defense to Restart US Soldiers Remains Recovery Program with North Korea

SANTA FE – Governor Bill Richardson today sent a letter to Dr. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense urging him to restart the Joint POW/MIA Accounting command to locate, recover and repatriate the remains of American servicemen in North Korea. The program was suspended the program in May 2005 by former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

“The time is right for the US to take the next step and work with the North Koreans to identify the additional American soldiers’ remains so they can be returned to their homeland, where they belong,” said Governor Bill Richardson. “Secretary Gates I urge you to restart Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command missions to recover the remains of American soldiers in North Korea and let those servicemen be returned to their families and placed to rest in the country they loved.”

In April North Korean military leaders turned over the remains of six American soldiers to a delegation led by Governor Richardson and former Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Principi. One soldier Cpl. Clem Boody was identified through DNA testing and his family was advised two weeks ago. The Department of Defense is continuing the identification process for the remains of the five other soldiers.

Letter follows:

September 10, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Sir,

I am writing to urge you to restart the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command missions to locate, recover and repatriate the remains of American soldiers in North Korea.

Last week the Department of Defense identified the remains of an American soldier repatriated from North Korea on my bipartisan trip in April 2007. Six decades after the end of the North Korean conflict the Defense POW/Missing Personnel Office (DPMPO) quickly and expertly identified that soldier as Corporal Robert Boody and provided vital closure to his family.

Among the several letters from his family--one member wrote to me and said "...I can never express to you the heartfelt gratitude and joy that I feel for the return of my uncle from North Korea. We never dreamed that Uncle Clem would be returned to us in our lifetime. I need to thank you for escorting the remains of my uncle and the remains of five other servicemen back to their homeland, the United States of America. I pray that the identity of the remaining five well be forthcoming."

I am confident that the DPMPO is utilizing every resource to identify the remaining five soldiers and return their remains to their family. But in North Korea, there are an estimated 8,100 US servicemen still unaccounted for and thousands of American families who deserve to have the same closure.

As you will recall, your predecessor Donald Rumsfeld suspended the DPMPO's participation in joint field activities in May 2005. This successful program had resulted in the recovery and repatriation of 229 remains between 1996 and 2005 the US and North Korea and provided vital closure for many American families.

Last April, during my negotiations with General Ri Chan Bok, North Korea's Commanding General at the Demilitarized Zone, the general was critical of the US withdrawal from the joint remains recovery initiative. During those negotiations, I personally handed over several letters from the families of a half-dozen US soldiers, whose remains are believed to be in North Korea. I emphasized that politics should not derail this important program, and urged the General to remain open to the possibility of joint recovery efforts for the sake of grateful American families who would see this as a gesture of good will on the part of North Korea. Overnight General Ri read those letters and was clearly moved by the desire among the families to identify the remains and have them returned home to the United States.

Having negotiated with the North Koreans several times, I understand how challenging that can be. But in this case, it was the US that withdrew from the joint recovery process as a result of the lack of progress during negotiations with North Korea over its nuclear weapons program. During my trip to North Korea in April, I urged the North Koreans to invite nuclear-weapons inspectors to oversee the shutdown of its nuclear reactor, which they did. I also emphasized the importance of North Korea moving forward with the six-party talks. As you know, progress has been made in terms of

disclosure of North Korea's nuclear weapons program and a timeline to dismantle that program.

The time is right for the US to take the next step and work with the North Koreans to identify the additional American soldiers' remains so they can be returned to their homeland, where they belong.

I'd like to conclude with the words of the same Boody family member. "It is important to us that we now have Uncle Clem back in the US. That he soon will be placed to rest in the country that he loved and so proudly fought for."

Secretary Gates I urge you to restart Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command missions to recover the remains of American soldiers in North Korea and let these servicemen be returned to their families and placed to rest in the country they loved.

Sincerely,

Bill Richardson