

October 1, 2003

Honorable Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Our nation's National Guard units are serving a vital role in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Already, more than 2,500 Mississippi citizen soldiers have been mobilized under Operation Enduring Freedom. We are proud that the President has called on our men and women to serve and protect our democracy.

Thank you for instituting the new fifteen-day leave policy to guardsmen and women who are serving in Iraq. I know many of them wish to see their families, even if just briefly, during their vital service to our nation.

However, I have learned that many of these soldiers have only been provided transportation as far as Baltimore or Atlanta, at which point they are then responsible for their travel home. This is a great disservice to our citizen soldiers and their families.

Many of our soldiers are finding it difficult to afford transportation on short notice from these departure points to Mississippi. In light of the financial burdens many of our Guard families are enduring, the added expense of travel home is scandalous. While I realize that we all must make sacrifices and that our guardsmen and women are prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice to protect our freedoms, I am disappointed that the U.S. Government will not provide travel assistance home. Therefore, I respectfully request that the Department of Defense assist these soldiers with their travel to be with their loved ones.

Thank you for the consideration of my request.

Very truly yours,

RONNIE MUSGROVE