

November 10, 2011

The Honorable Michael Donley  
Secretary of Air Force  
The Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330

General Norton Schwartz, USAF  
Chief of Staff of the Air Force  
The Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330

Dear Secretary Donley and General Schwartz,

Recent reports of gross mismanagement and mishandling of remains at Dover Air Force Base were appalling and have undermined the confidence that the American public has in the military's performance of its sanctified mission at Dover. The honor and respect that we afford our fallen is woven into the fabric of America as tightly as any of our most time-honored traditions. I call on you to act immediately to ensure that there is full and decisive accountability for those responsible for the failings at Dover. Further, you must act to protect the whistleblowers who brought the failures at Dover to light. Finally, in light of concerns raised by the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) in reviewing the Air Force Inspector General's (IG) investigation into the mishandling of remains at Dover, I call all you to immediately seek an outside review of the Air Force IG's independence. The mission of an IG cannot be compromised to protect the interests of an institution, as may have happened here.

As you know, a report issued by the Air Force IG found failures in leadership and in protocols at Dover Air Force Base's Port Mortuary, where the remains of America's fallen are repatriated and prepared for return to their families. The IG found that body parts were lost, and, in one instance, an arm bone of a fallen Marine was sawed off without the consent of the family. The IG further found "gross mismanagement" by leaders at Port Mortuary; a conclusion that is patently clear to anyone who reads the details of the report. However, the accountability meted out to those responsible appears to have stopped well short of what the situation dictates.

The Air Force cannot address major failings in leadership and management with half-hearted corrective action and the assignment of limited individual responsibility. Accountability must be swift and decisive. This must be the case at Dover to guarantee that the mistakes that brought dishonor on the repatriation process never occurs again and to send a clear message that such failings will not be tolerated.

In addition, I am concerned that OSC is now investigating allegations of retaliation against the whistleblowers who first raised concerns about the practices they were witnessing at Port Mortuary. Any reprisal against a federal whistleblower is unacceptable. As you may know, I have won hard-fought protections for whistleblowers during my tenure in the Senate. Whistleblowers are often the eyes and ears that help ensure accountability within the federal government. I expect you to take all necessary measures to ensure that whistleblowers within the

Air Force are being shielded from punishment or intimidation. I seek information on what is being done to protect the Dover whistleblowers and for you to remedy any possible retaliation they have faced for their actions.

Finally, I am deeply troubled that OSC has produced a disturbing analysis of the Air Force IG's investigation. First, OSC rightly expressed concern that the disciplinary action taken against the three mortuary officials named in the investigation were insufficient; as we learned from Arlington National Cemetery, management matters. But the most disturbing part of OSC's analysis is that the Air Force IG, on multiple occasions, failed "to acknowledge culpability for wrongdoing", at times seeming to ignore or dismiss evidence uncovered in its own investigation. This led the Air Force IG, according to OSC, to produce findings that were "not supported by the evidence present."

The mission of an IG cannot be compromised in order to protect the interests of the institution it serves. An IG must maintain full independence and credibility. OSC's report brings into question whether the Air Force IG, in investigating Dover's Port Mortuary, was acting with an unbiased focus on the facts. Instead, the IG may have acted to protect the Air Force at the expense of the facts. Questions regarding the independence and credibility of an IG are of the gravest nature and must be quickly investigated and resolved. I call on you to initiate an outside investigation into the independence and operations of the Air Force IG.

As you know, you came to lead the Air Force at a time when questions of the Air Force's commitment to a culture of full accountability for leaders who act improperly was in question. You have admirably restored great confidence in the Air Force's commitment to excellence and its intolerance of poor leadership. I urge you to sustain that confidence by ensuring that the unacceptable, tragic events uncovered at Dover's Port Mortuary are dealt with in the most serious manner.

Sincerely,



CLAIRE MCCASKILL  
United States Senator