

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 27, 2009

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

Dear Secretary Gates:

We are writing to request a meeting with you in relation to the electrocution death of Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth.

As you know, we held a July 11, 2008, Senate Democratic Policy Committee hearing that looked into the death of Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth and 12 other U.S. soldiers electrocuted on Army bases in Iraq. Following the hearing, we requested that the Pentagon conduct a theatre-wide investigation into KBR's work on electrical installations in Iraq.

It is our understanding that an Army investigator has now reclassified the cause of Staff Sgt. Ryan Maseth's death from "accidental" to "negligent homicide" on the part of contractor Kellogg, Brown, and Root and two of its supervisors.

We respect that there are limits on your ability to discuss this matter, given that it remains the subject of an active criminal investigation. Without interfering with that investigation, we would like to discuss with you the process that the Department of Defense intends to follow in order to ensure full accountability for any contractor misconduct relating to electrocutions of U.S. troops.

In particular, we believe that Cheryl Harris, the mother of Staff Sgt. Maseth, is entitled to know what procedures the Department will follow to ensure accountability and the safety of the troops. Given this, we would request to have Ms. Harris join in our meeting.

We would note that Ms. Harris has been given a number of contradictory explanations about the cause of her son's death, and that she has been fighting for many months to have the Department get to the bottom of this issue. The Army originally told Harris her son was electrocuted because he carried an electrical appliance into the shower. The Army later retreated from that account, saying Staff Sgt. Maseth was electrocuted by wires hanging above the shower, an account that was also inaccurate.


It's time for some straight talk about accountability.

We would be happy to have the meeting at our Senate offices, or to visit you at the Pentagon, should that be more convenient. Our staff will be in contact with your office to arrange the meeting.

Sincerely,



Byron L. Dorgan
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey
United States Senator