



U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0552

September 17, 2009

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Howard "Buck" McKeon
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
2340 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Skelton and Ranking Member McKeon:

After eight years of some of the most intense combat since the Vietnam War, there have been only five recipients of the Medal of Honor in Iraq and Afghanistan. Today, President Barack Obama will posthumously present the sixth Medal of Honor of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to Sergeant First Class Jared C. Monti during a ceremony at the White House. Sergeant First Class Monti was killed in Gowardesh, Afghanistan, in June 2006 on his third attempt to rescue a wounded soldier while simultaneously directing fire support that killed 22 enemy fighters. He is the first soldier to receive this award for combat heroism in Afghanistan, a decision that I strongly commend.

Sergeant Monti is a national hero whose story will take its rightful place among the proud history of our nation's military and inspire generations of Americans. Still, among all the examples of combat heroism in both Iraq and Afghanistan, there has yet to be a single living Medal of Honor recipient to date. This fact continues to raise questions about the criteria for determining Medal of Honor Award recipients, which appears to have been subjectively raised to include actions only resulting in death.

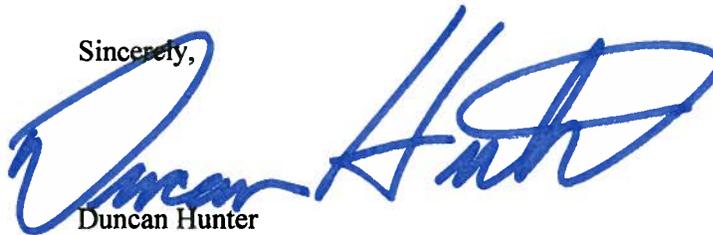
For this reason, I worked with my colleagues on the House Armed Services Committee to include a provision in the Fiscal Year 2010 National Defense Authorization Act that requires a review of this criteria be initiated by the Secretary of Defense, specifically to consider current standards for awarding the Medal of Honor. While I do in fact support a thorough review of this matter, I feel it is important to emphasize that Congress should have no direct role in the awards process, especially when determining award recipients.

Therefore, I recommend that as the House and Senate Armed Services Committees move into conference on the National Defense Authorization Act, consideration be given to creating an independent panel, consisting of members from different veterans organizations or previous Medal of Honor award recipients, to review and make recommendations on award nominations. This panel should not have authority to overturn decisions, nor should its recommendations be binding. It should only act as an intermediary between the service branches and the Department of Defense, taking award nominations into consideration and making recommendations as necessary.

Creating an impartial review panel is a logical step toward maintaining fairness in the Medal of Honor awards process and ensuring actions consistent with the history of this award are rightly

recognized. Thank you for your consideration of this matter. I am available to meet with you anytime to discuss this proposal in greater detail.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Duncan Hunter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "H".

Duncan Hunter
Member of Congress