

KELLY AYOTTE LETTER TO PANETTA, CLINTON:

August 24, 2011

Dear Secretary Panetta and Secretary Clinton,

As you know, the Soldier's Creed includes the following words: "I will never leave a fallen comrade." These words that are memorized by our soldiers are as true for our Nation as they are for our soldiers. In this spirit, I urge you to resume joint search and recovery operations in North Korea so that we can fulfill our moral duty as a Nation to find and bring home the remains of American military heroes missing in action from the war in Korea.

During the Korean War, nearly 1.8 million members of the United States Armed Forces served in theater along with the forces of the Republic of Korea and 20 other Allied nations under the United Nations Command to defend freedom and democracy in the Korean Peninsula. Almost six decades have passed since the armistice with North Korea was signed in 1953, and the Defense Prisoner of War/Missing Personnel Office of the Department of Defense still lists more than 8,000 members of the United States Armed Forces as Prisoners of War (POW) or missing in action (MIA) who remain unaccounted for. There are 43 missing soldiers from the State of New Hampshire alone.

Over six years ago, in May 2005, the U.S. government halted Korean War MIA recovery operations in North Korea, citing concerns about the safety of U.S. personnel involved due to increased U.S.–North Korea tensions. I am encouraged to learn that Ambassador Stephen Bosworth, the Special Representative for North Korea Policy, recently provided a letter to the North Koreans seeking to resume talks related to the resumption of recovery operations in North Korea. I am also encouraged the North Koreans have signaled their willingness to resume discussions. I welcome these positive developments, but more must be done to resume recovery operations as soon as possible.

Today, as you know, most Korean War veterans are in their 80s, and the U.S. Veterans Administration says close to 1,000 Korean War veterans who served during the conflict die each day. We cannot wait any longer to resume this critical work. For the sake of our fallen and missing soldiers and their families, I ask you to resume joint search and recovery operations in North Korea as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
Kelly A. Ayotte
U.S. Senator