United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 8, 2013

The Honorable Charles T. Hagel
Secretary Of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-0001

Dear Secretary Hagel,

We respectfully request that you reconsider the precedence that the Department of Defense has given to the newly created Distinguished Warfare Medal.

While we support the Defense Department's decision to authorize a new decoration – the Distinguished Warfare Medal – as a way to recognize silent warriors, such as drone pilots and cyber warriors, we adamantly oppose the decision to elevate this award above those earned in direct combat. We recognize that military awards should be updated as the tactics of warfare change. Yet, we maintain that heroism and personal courage in combat do not change from generation to generation, and should be held sacred and awarded accordingly.

We believe that medals earned in combat, or in dangerous conditions, should maintain their precedence above non-combat awards. Placing the Distinguished Warfare Medal above the Bronze Star and Purple Heart diminishes the significance of awards earned by risking one's life in direct combat or through acts of heroism. Moreover, the Distinguished Warfare Medal's placement directly above the Soldier's Medal – an award for bravery and voluntary risk of life not involving conflict with an armed enemy – diminishes the precedence given to acts of individual gallantry in circumstances other than combat.

We have listened to the many Veterans in our states that have contacted us about the precedence of this award and agree that combat awards are sacred, and their precedence is best left undisturbed to preserve the legacy of service in combat and bravery.

The United States Senate previously recognized the importance of the Purple Heart. In 1985, the Senate approved an amendment that changed the precedence of the Purple Heart – elevating its precedence directly above the Meritorious Service Medals. For almost 30 years, that precedence has been left unchanged.

With your direct combat experience, you know too well that generations of Americans have risked their lives in combat, and many have paid the ultimate sacrifice. The precedence of combat awards recognizes these acts of heroism and should remain our military's highest honors.

Thank you for your consideration into this matter.

Sincerely,

JOE MANCHIN III
United States Senator

JON TESTER
United States Senator

DEAN HELLER
United States Senator

JOHN BOOZMAN
United States Senator

KELLY AYOTTE
United States Senator

MARK BEGICH
United States Senator

ANGUS S. KING JR.
United States Senator

JOE DONNELLY
United States Senator

PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator

BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator

CLAIRE McCASKILL
United States Senator

JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER IV
United States Senator

MARK R. WARNER
United States Senator

JEANNE SHAHEEN
United States Senator

MARY L. LANDRIEU
United States Senator

LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator

DEBBIE STABENOW
United States Senator

HEIDI HEITKAMP
United States Senator

TIM JOHNSON
United States Senator

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senator

TOM UDALL
United States Senator

RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senator