SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

MAR 25 2009

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARIES OF THE MILITARY DEPARTMENTS
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PERSONNEL AND READINESS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
INSPECTOR GENERAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
DIRECTOR, ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

SUBJECT: DoD Policy Regarding Media Access to Dignified Transfers at Dover Air Force Base

On February 27, 2009, I determined that the DoD policy governing media access to the dignified transfer of fallen service members at Dover Air Force Base (AFB) would be modified to allow media access, when approved by the immediate families of the individual fallen. I tasked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to lead an intradepartmental working group to develop recommendations for the necessary implementation guidelines and the earliest possible implementation date. I appreciate the assistance your offices provided to the working group and commend the participants for their very thorough review of this issue. Nothing we do is more important than caring for the families of our fallen Service members and the initiatives described herein will enhance the morale and welfare of all members of the armed forces and their families.

I have reviewed and approved the working group's recommendations and direct the Department to take the following actions regarding media access to dignified transfers at Dover AFB in order to implement this policy on April 6, 2009.

(1) The Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, in coordination with the other addressees on this memorandum, will revise necessary DoD issuances to implement the approved recommendations, including:

(a) Deceased Service members' remains will be recovered from the theater of combat operations and returned to CONUS via the Dover Port Mortuary without delay unless very specific extenuating circumstances presented by the immediate family of the

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fallen dictate otherwise and can be reasonably accommodated by the Department of Defense.

(b) The Primary Next of Kin (PNOK) will make the family decision regarding media access to dignified transfers at Dover AFB.

(c) The option to allow media access will be briefed to the PNOK at the time of initial notification or as soon as practicable thereafter.

(d) Media access to dignified transfers will only be permitted with PNOK approval. Media contact, filming or recording of family members will be permitted only if specifically requested by the PNOK.

(e) Media access approved by the PNOK will waive the current DoD policy on 24-hour delay in release of casualty information to the media and/or general public for that specific case.

(f) Family members (PNOK plus two additional family members) may travel to Dover AFB via Invitational Travel Authorizations to attend the dignified transfer with additional family members authorized by the Secretaries of the Military Departments on a case-by-case basis.

(g) At the discretion of the Secretaries of the Military Departments, and at the request of the PNOK, the Service Casualty Assistance Officer or Family Liaison Officer may escort and/or accompany the PNOK to the dignified transfer.

(h) Develop a long-term plan to obtain the preference of individual Service members regarding media access to dignified transfers should they become a casualty while on active duty.

(2) The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs and the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs will develop a Communications Plan to announce and explain the new policy to Members of Congress, the media, and the general public, including:

(a) Media access to dignified transfers will only be permitted with PNOK approval.

(b) Media contact, filming or recording of family members will be permitted only if specifically requested by the PNOK.

(c) If the PNOK approves media access, believed-to-be names will be released in response to media queries.

(d) Explain the new policy to military personnel.

(e) Explain the new policy to family members.

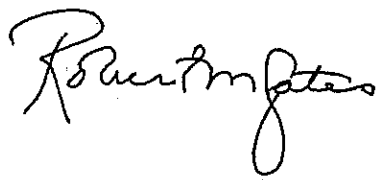
(f) Publish updated Public Affairs Guidance, as appropriate.

(3) The Secretary of the Air Force, with support from the other addressees on this memorandum, as required, will take all necessary steps, such as procuring any necessary equipment and developing the necessary procedural guidance, regarding implementation of this policy at Dover AFB. Additionally, these steps will include provisions for manpower and funding, both for immediate implementation and for long-term sustainment of this policy. The procedural guidance will include at a minimum:

(a) A Media Operations Plan that addresses procedures for conducting dignified transfers when media is present.

(b) Family Support for dignified transfers including the availability of grief counseling and chaplain support.

(c) Instructions on family member photography of the dignified transfer.

(d) Photography by the Department of Defense of media access-approved dignified transfers for later presentation to the family.

I expect your personal attention in ensuring that all elements of this new policy are fully ready to take effect on April 6, 2009.