

*"I know that if this had only been handled correctly in the first place we might have saved more lives."*

Rochester, NY – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today wrote to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Secretary of the Army John McHugh asking them to implement the recommendations of a series of reports detailing fatal flaws in the testing of body armor used by Marines and Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was Slaughter who called for the audit after learning that 80 percent of Marines serving in Iraq who were shot in upper body subsequently died due to inadequate body armor.

Slaughter served with both Panetta and McHugh in the House of Representatives and calls them both friends. A full copy of the letter is below.

The report recently released calls for the Army to more clearly define their testing standards and require that quality assurance tests are conducted at a higher standard.

"This report confirms what we've known all along: that the Army's equipment reviewal process did not live up to the high standards we must insist upon to protect our brave men and women in uniform," said Slaughter. "We ask so much from of our troops on the front lines, and they answer the call time and again. I'm pleased to see the military is taking the steps necessary to implement quality control processes that reflect the same kind of commitment to protecting our troops as they exhibit in protecting our nation."

In the fourth and final report, seven Army contracts for ballistic inserts awarded between 2004 and 2006 were examined. It was found that the Army Program Manager Soldier Equipment could only provide "limited assurance" that approved ballistic materials met the contract requirements. In total, these seven contracts produced 5 million inserts and cost \$2.5 billion.

[A copy of the report is available here.](#)

Slaughter was the first lawmaker to raise questions about the reliability of the military's testing system and called for an internal investigation at the Department of Defense.

## **Slaughter Crusading Alone**

An avid reader, it was a [January 2006 story in the New York Times](#) that first alerted Slaughter to the alarming high rate at which troops in theatre were dying due to inadequate body armor. She requested that DoD Acting Inspector General Thomas F. Gimble review their procurement policies for body armor and armored vehicles which lead to the four reports released since.

The New York Times piece was later nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

"I read a shocking piece in the New York Times and learned that 80 percent of Marines serving in Iraq who were shot in upper body subsequently died in large part due to inadequate body armor," said Slaughter. "I was absolutely stunned and knew action needed to be taken. I regret that it took a newspaper article and the subsequent investigations I called for to point this out. So while I'm glad the work got done and the reviews are being handled by DoD instead of contractors, I know that if this had only been handled correctly in the first place we might have saved more lives."

An initial report was released in March 2008. However, it was not thorough and Slaughter requested a more in depth investigation. Subsequent to her request, four additional reports found deficiencies have been detected in the quality of tests being conducted, instructions given to test administrators, the relationship with contractors and documentation of the testing procedures.

Following the January 29, 2009 report, the Army ordered a recall of more than 16,000 sets of body armor after it was revealed that they failed tests that would meet Army specifications.

[For more on Slaughter's work on the issue, please click here.](#)

**Slaughter's Letter to Panetta and McHugh:**

August 17, 2011

The Honorable Leon Panetta

Honorable John McHugh

Secretary of Defense

Secretary, U.S. Department of the Army

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1400 Defense Pentagon

Washington, DC 20301-1300

Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretaries Panetta and McHugh,

I am writing to follow up on the Inspector General (IG) of the Department of Defense (DoD) report released on August 1, 2011 entitled, "Ballistic Testing for Interceptor Body Armor Inserts Needs Improvement (Report No. D-2011-088)." This report concludes a series of audits performed by the Inspector General at my request.

In reviewing the report, I respectfully request an assessment of body armor and other safety equipment currently used by deployed forces, including the 5 million armor inserts identified by the IG, which the Army can only provide a "limited assurance" that they meet the life-saving specifications required. In addition, I request an update on the Army's implementation of the IG's ballistic testing recommendations, which will help ensure future armor meets all requirements.

While I am pleased with the extensive work performed by the Inspector General's office and the positive reception of the Army to the recommendations of the Inspector General, I am troubled by the conclusions of the latest report. The findings outlined by the Inspector General reveal a disturbing trend of negligence on the part of the Army in its oversight of critical testing procedures used to approve body armor prototypes and award contracts for full production.

The report revealed weaknesses in quality assurance procedures and noted that the Army did not consistently test ballistic inserts using agreed upon standards, failed to document critical decisions regarding the approval of First Article Tests and Lot Article Tests for a specific contract that eventually resulted in the procurement of 34,236 inserts at a cost of \$24.5 million, allowed contractor employees to perform "inherently government functions," and failed to require weathered and altitude tests despite being mandated in the Contract Purchase Description (COPD). Ultimately, the report concluded that the IG's office "could provide only limited assurance that approved ballistic materials for approximately 5 million inserts on seven contracts met the contract requirements."

As you may imagine, this report, like those preceding it, cast significant doubt on the contracting approval process and raise questions surrounding the quality and effectiveness of not only the interceptor body armor analyzed in these reports, but other critical equipment produced by private contractors for our brave men and women in harm's way. The IG's latest report demonstrates that the testing process for body armor was deeply flawed and now we owe it to the men and women serving abroad to determine with confidence whether or not armor and other life-saving equipment in the field is adequate.

I eagerly await the results of this assessment and appreciate your past and continued cooperation in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

Member of Congress