

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 13, 2013

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are concerned by press reports that the Department of Defense (DoD) is considering a plan to close all stateside commissaries. We would strongly caution against such a plan. Our military and their families have consistently sacrificed for our nation, and these servicemembers and their families derive important value from the commissary program, both for their livelihood, and for morale.

Earlier this year when you visited Camp Pendleton you said that military base operations cutbacks and commissary closures are “not how a great nation should be treating its military and military families.” We agree with you. The commissary benefit is highly valued by military men and women, saving beneficiaries thousands of dollars a year.

Congress enacted a proposal to establish the Military Compensation and Retirement Modernization Commission, which will make its report within the next two years. The Commission’s charter is to undertake a comprehensive and balanced analysis of the entire range of compensation and benefits and make recommendations to the Administration and Congress on the best mix to achieve our national security goals and care for our military. The Commission should be allowed to fully review the commissary program before any action is taken to close all commissaries in the United States.

The reported proposal to close commissary stores at domestic installations fails to take into consideration a number of factors. It does not recognize the tremendous contribution that these United States operations make to military family well-being by stretching their household purchasing power and keeping military families from making difficult tradeoffs. In addition, closure may have unintended consequences across the Department in personnel and logistical areas that would result from the closure of these stores.

Commissaries support a multitude of Administration priorities including advancing small business, supporting military family quality of life, accountability, diversity, and opportunities for the blind and severely disabled. It also represents a partnership that combines the best of the private sector with the best of the public sector to deliver vital services to deserving military beneficiaries.

Further, commissaries are major employers of veterans and family members with nearly 64 percent of the workforce having a military affiliation. In October 2011, you and the First

Lady presided over an event at Langley Air Force Base where you launched a major initiative to hire veterans and family members. The industry that supports commissaries kick-started the Joining Forces hiring initiative by pledging to hire 25,000 Veterans and military family members. It reached this goal and is pledging to hire another 25,000.

We realize that all Federal programs must share in the effort to get government costs under control. On November 20, 2013, the Director of the Defense Commissary Agency testified to Congress that his agency has cut some \$700 million a year from the cost of operating this system, demonstrating a commitment to a government that works in an efficient and economical manner.

We write to urge that any action that is taken to close commissaries be done in full consultation with Congress and with the benefit of careful deliberation and analysis.

We appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tim Kaine", written in a cursive style.

Tim Kaine

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark R. Warner", written in a cursive style.

Mark Warner