The Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The Army Aviation Caucus encourages the Department to validate and deliver the Future Vertical Lift Strategic Plan to Congress. This plan will serve as an aviation roadmap and allow Congress and Industry to better invest in technologies to support future growth and operational requirements.

The Department’s August 2010 Report on the DOD Future Vertical Lift Strategic Plan submitted in response to Section 255 of the FY09 Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) outlines the essential role that vertical lift aircraft have and will continue to play in the conduct of the military’s combat and humanitarian operations, such as combat, combat support, MEDEVAC, combat search and rescue, and special operations to name a few.

As Congress and the President work to address major fiscal challenges going forward, the role of vertical lift in supporting our national security needs will only increase. DOD’s FVL Report outlines over 55 capability gaps with respect to the current fleet’s ability to meet current and future needs. While the Department has invested heavily in enhancing the survivability of fixed-wing platforms, investment in rotary wing aircraft has seriously lagged. Today, most all of our combat helicopters are based on Vietnam era designs. Over the past 10 years, we have lost nearly 600 Americans and over 400 vertical lift aircraft to hostile action and mishaps, many of which could have been avoided with emerging rotorcraft technology. Vertical lift platform loss rates are appalling when compared to fixed wing aviation, and the fact that vertical lift is an essential enabler to project combat and humanitarian power into remote areas increases the need for investment.

Performance shortfalls of the current fleet have necessitated employment of rotorcraft at their design limits, or the use of multiple or larger aircraft to do the mission of one, with an increase in operational cost and vulnerability. The recent tragic loss of 30 lives with the downing of a Chinook helicopter is an unfortunate example. The need to develop and flight validate rotorcraft technologies to increase speed, range, payload, survivability, and reduced life cycle costs outlined in the DOD FVL Report is clear and is recognized by both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees.

Accordingly, we look forward to the Department’s timely approval of the DOD FVL Strategic Plan so government and industry can make prudent investment decisions. It is therefore
imperative the DOD FVL Strategic Plan be approved to provide a firm basis for the Department to assess the out year funding necessary to address these needs, and provide industry the ability to focus its considerable Independent Research and Development resources.

Thank you for your personal attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Mo Brooks
Member of Congress

Mark Critz
Member of Congress

Robert Aderholt
Member of Congress

Robert Brady
Member of Congress

John Carter
Member of Congress

Renee Ellmers
Member of Congress

Randy Hultgren
Member of Congress

Walter Jones
Member of Congress

Rich Nugent
Member of Congress

Martha Roby
Member of Congress