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July 6, 2009

The Honorable
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for S. 1126, Air America Veterans Act of 2009

Dear Senator Feinstein:

I'm writing to you to request that the Senate Intelligence Committee, which you chair, support and, more importantly, take early and favorable action on S. 1126, the Air America Veterans Act of 2009, introduced by Senator Reid on May 21st. In a "Dear Colleague" letter to you of the same date, Senator Reid encouraged your co-sponsorship of this Bill. As noted in his introductory remarks, this legislation will help correct an injustice for those who so honorably and memorably served our country in times of crisis. It requires the Director of National Intelligence to submit a report within 180 days of enactment to Congress on the advisability of providing Federal retirement benefits to the remaining Air America U.S. National employees or their surviving spouses.

From February 1968 through September 1974, I served Air America as Assistant Legal Counsel, stationed with my family in Taipei and Bangkok. There is a long and rather sad history to the efforts of Air America employees to gain these benefits -- benefits to which I firmly believe they were legally entitled at the time of their service as chronicled in the enclosed attachment which I authored.

As discussed in the attachment to this letter, Senator Reid first attempted to gain approval for more substantive legislation on October 4, 2005, during the 109th Congress, with the Department of Defense Emergency Supplemental Appropriation. That amendment would have granted retirement benefits under the Civil Service Retirement and Disability System to Air America employees (or their surviving spouses) who had at least five years of recognized Federal service, including Air America employment. It failed to pass due to Senator John Warner's objections to another Amendment in the unanimous consent package.

Since that time, action has been delayed on legislation granting retirement benefits to Air America employees. Legislation (such as S. 1126) requiring an intelligence community

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report on the advisability of granting benefits has been repeatedly introduced in each successive Congress. Action has never been taken. In the meantime, more and more eligible beneficiaries of these retirement benefits have passed on. Thirty-five years and still no tangible recognition for this distinguished and unique service to the United States. Numerous plaques, awards and accolades, but nothing else to acknowledge efforts which no one else was able (or willing) to provide.

Your support for this long-delayed and meritorious report legislation and the implementation legislation which must follow would be deeply appreciated by the Air America community, even more so should you also choose to co-sponsor this Bill as requested by Senator Reid. If you or your staff have questions on any of the points raised in the attachment on the merits of the proposed Air America Veterans Act, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Gary B. Bisson

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Enclosure