



Reply from Senator Harkin

1 message

Senator@harkin.senate.gov <Senator@harkin.senate.gov>
To: pruntyld@gmail.com

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TOM HARKIN
IOWA

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1502

(202) 224-3254
Fax: (202) 224-9369
TTY: (202) 224-4633
<http://harkin.senate.gov>

COMMITTEES:
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APPROPRIATIONS
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LABOR, AND PENSIONS
SMALL BUSINESS

May 8, 2013

Mr. Lyle Prunty
1803 E Mound St Apt 7
Algona, IA 50511-1211

Dear Lyle:

Please allow me to apologize for the delay in getting this response to you. Please know that your input is valued, and allow me to share with you my thoughts on this critical issue.

I appreciate hearing your thoughts about the use of drones - or remotely piloted aircrafts (RPA's) - to target terrorists and for other military operations.

The development of RPA's has dramatically changed the way war is conducted, giving the military access to areas and targets that would be inaccessible via traditional piloted aircraft. Because they are unmanned, RPAs have reduced casualties among our troops and also enabled our military to undertake missions that previously would have been unsafe. It is for these reasons that the number of missions using RPA's has increased substantially in recent years - resulting in a number of successful attacks on terrorists who are actively attempting to attack the United States.

I believe it is critical that Congress exercises careful scrutiny and thorough oversight of the military's use of these weapons. While RPA's enable our government to better target terrorists who wish us harm, we must remain vigilant to prevent their misuse, the abuse of authority, and arbitrary action. For instance, I am deeply concerned with the risk to

civil liberties and due process, as well as the amount of collateral damages and the loss of civilian lives that has resulted from some RPA strikes

Throughout our history, but especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, critical issues of national security have too often been decided in secret without appropriate public engagement and oversight. Under the banner of security, we as a nation have far too often betrayed our highest values. I vigorously opposed the Bush Administration when it eavesdropped on Americans without a warrant or court order, when it utilized interrogation techniques long considered immoral, ineffective, and illegal, and when it intentionally put detainees beyond the rule of law.

President Obama has sought to rid our national security apparatus of the secrecy and worst abuses that characterized the years immediately after 9/11. With respect to RPA's, I am heartened that the Justice Department made available the legal justification for the use of RPA's to the Senate Committee on Intelligence. Similarly, I am pleased that due to increased public scrutiny, the Obama Administration made clear that a domestic strike involving RPA's has never occurred and that it could not envision a situation where it would be legal or ever be ordered. But more and can should be done to provide due process and to ensure the civil liberties of American citizens, including a robust role for Congress, such as a hearing that was held on April 23 before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the use of RPA's.

Despite these positive steps, I continue to share your concerns regarding the use of RPAs, particularly without established standards for their use and appropriate oversight. After thorough consideration, however, I have concluded that my concerns are less about the technology itself, which can be used for both good and ill in military, commercial, and law enforcement capacities, than with the need for that technology to be deployed within an appropriate legal framework and with sufficient checks and balances that ensure the protection of our civil liberties. Ultimately, it is up to the public and its elected officials to remain vigilant to ensure that our government strikes an appropriate balance that both ensures national security and protects our fundamental values. Please rest assured that I will continue to fight to ensure proper oversight and prevent abuse of executive authority.

Thank you for sharing your views with me, and do not hesitate to let me know how you feel on any issue that concerns you.

Sincerely,

Tom Harkin
United States Senator