

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 1, 2026

The Honorable Dan Driscoll
Secretary
Department of the Army
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

General Christopher LaNeve
Acting Chief of Staff of the Army
Department of the Army
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Secretary Driscoll and General LaNeve:

We write to request a briefing to better understand your decision to eliminate the drone battalion of the 173rd Airborne Brigade. We are particularly keen to understand the data, analysis and process used to cancel this innovative unit established less than a year ago, and if this decision was based on Department of Defense leadership guidance or was an Army-internal decision.

We have deep concerns that eliminating this specialized drone unit will limit our ability to learn from allies, particularly the Ukrainian Armed Forces, and hinder our efforts to modernize drone warfare at the speed necessary to compete on the modern battlefield. This specialized unit was a prudent response in a moment when the character of warfare is changing faster than a conventional formation's ability to adapt.

Both the Ukraine-Russia War and the ongoing conflict in Iran have demonstrated our need to make significant improvements in drone warfare—lessons learned from our Ukrainian allies who have proven their ability to innovate and compete in this space. For over four years the Ukrainian Armed Forces have fought and adapted on the frontlines against one of the United States' most powerful near-peer adversaries. As a result, Ukrainian military technology -- particularly in drone warfare -- is battle tested and provides valuable insights to the U.S. military and defense industrial base. This drone battalion was ideally placed to capture these lessons and insights.

This is in part why we supported the Army's January 2026 establishment of a "tactical unmanned systems battalion" in the 173rd Airborne Brigade, to study the lessons from Ukraine and develop new concepts for fighting with drones and other unmanned systems. These six hundred soldiers specializing in drone warfare were designed to be a dedicated force, known as the "Unmanned Assault Battalion," that could deploy anywhere drone expertise was required – a force multiplier across the entire formation.

The DOD's commitment to Ukraine and European security has been uneven and inconsistent—the reoccurring efforts to cut European force posture, the delayed spend plan of appropriated funds for aid to Ukraine, and the transfer of U.S. Army Europe funding to reimburse the Department of Homeland Security. Within this context, we are concerned that the elimination of the Unmanned Assault Battalion is yet another worrying signal of fledgling resolve in the European theater or of using the resources available out of Ukraine to the benefit of our own forces. We are supportive of the transformative initiatives the Army has taken under Secretary Driscoll's leadership in this area and would like to see that momentum maintained even as

uniformed leadership changes.

We understand that, at its core, the 173rd is an infantry battalion and that the elimination of this unit is part of General LaNeve's "back to basics" approach from his message to the force published on August 18th. However, this message also says soldiers need to "learn, innovate, and adapt faster" to prepare for the next war, and eliminating this battalion, without announcing a new home for this specialized drone capability runs counter to that. It hurts our ability to acquire the critical knowledge and skills that can be gained from working with and learning from Ukrainian soldiers.

We respectfully request the Army brief us on how it intends to continue learning lessons on drone warfare from Ukraine in the absence of the Unmanned Assault Battalion. We request this briefing to occur no later than September 21st, 2026.

Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely,



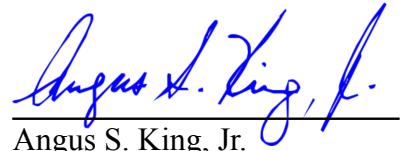
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Michael R. Turner
Member of Congress



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator