

January 27, 2012

The Honorable John McHugh
Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Room 3E700
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Secretary McHugh:

I write because of my concern about the death of Private Danny Chen, after he was reportedly subject to repeated humiliation and assaults by his fellow soldiers in Afghanistan because of his Chinese American heritage. This hazing, based on Private Chen's national origin, constituted an egregious violation of his civil rights. As his employer, and also as an institution of the U.S. Government, the Army has a responsibility to deter such discrimination and, when it occurs, to investigate and punish the perpetrators. I am very concerned about the case, and want to ensure that the U.S. Army is taking very seriously its obligation to prevent internal prejudices from threatening its unity of mission.

When charges were initially filed against the alleged perpetrators in this case, several of my colleagues wrote to you about the importance of combating hazing and discrimination based on national origin. I support their efforts and was gratified by your initial response. This incident, and the Army's response to it, has important implications for our nation's Asian American community.

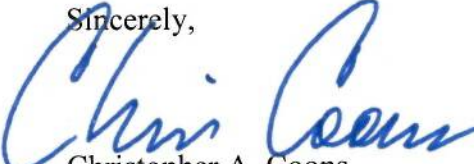
Specifically, the recommendation by the recent Article 32 hearing to not pursue involuntary manslaughter charges, and discussions over the location of any future courts martial have sparked frustration among many in the Asian American Community, which I take very seriously. In the interest of underscoring your commitment to the well-being of all of your soldiers, and without prejudicing any ongoing criminal proceedings, could you please provide in writing:

1. A description of the court martial process, including key similarities and differences to the civilian criminal justice system;
2. A description of how decisions are made, particularly in what charges to seek and where trials are held;

3. A summary of how you engage the public at large, and Asian American communities in particular about a case with such broader impact;
4. A description of the Army's program to support the valuation of diversity and to prevent national origin-based hazing and harassment; and
5. Any recent reports or assessments by the Department of the Army on national origin-based hazing and harassment.

Thank you for the work you do for our men and women, and I look forward to continuing to work with you for the benefit of our nation.

Sincerely,



Christopher A. Coons