

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 13, 2013

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

General Martin E. Dempsey
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Department of Defense
9999 Joint Chiefs of Staff Pentagon
Washington, DC 20318

Dear Secretary Hagel and Chairman Dempsey:

We write to express our deep concern regarding the Air Force's plan to divest the A-10 Thunderbolt II. The A-10 provides close air support (CAS) capability unmatched by any other aircraft in the Air Force's inventory. The A-10 plays an essential role in helping our ground forces and special operators accomplish their missions and return home safely. We oppose any effort that would divest the A-10, creating a CAS capability gap that would reduce Air Force combat power and unnecessarily endanger our service members in future conflicts.

We appreciate that the Air Force confronts significant budget pressure and uncertainty that require difficult decisions. However, as you and your staffs assess the Air Force's budget recommendations for fiscal year (FY) 2015, we urge you to scrutinize the Air Force's proposals, as well as the assumptions underlying those proposals. The budget the Department of Defense (DoD) submits to Congress early next year must be based on realistic assumptions that place a priority on operational capability, combat readiness, and the safety of our service members in harm's way.

DoD must make every effort to protect programs that function as core components of our nation's combat power and military readiness. It would be unconscionable to further cut an asset like the A-10 for budget reasons—increasing the risks our service members confront in ground combat—when equivalent savings could be achieved elsewhere in the Air Force budget without reducing operational capabilities. It would be difficult for DoD to justify the divestment of the A-10 while the Air Force continues to expend millions of dollars on conferences, air shows, and bloated headquarters staffs—while also struggling to meet statutory audit deadlines.

The A-10 certainly qualifies as a core component of our nation's combat power and military readiness. The A-10 represents the Air Force's best CAS aircraft—one whose unmatched survivability, maneuverability, and lethal armaments are surpassed only by the deeply-ingrained CAS culture of its pilots. As the report for the FY 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee states, "The A-10 has served as the Air Force's primary close air support asset, having been designed for that specific mission with characteristics that permit it to operate and maneuver at low altitude and slow speeds. The aircraft is also heavily armored to ensure the highest survivability for the pilot and vital aircraft systems." In short, many soldiers and Marines are alive today because of the unique capabilities of the A-10, as well as the focused CAS training and dedicated CAS culture of A-10 pilots.



No other fixed-wing CAS assets are as proficient as the A-10 in conducting visual support operations below 800 to 3,000 foot ceilings with limited visibility. We ask you to consult closely with the geographic combatant commanders and report back to us so that all parties fully appreciate that divestment of the A-10 would significantly undercut the ability of combatant commanders to conduct inclement weather CAS support when exact target coordinates for GPS-guided bombs are not available, or when friendly forces are in close proximity to the enemy. We see this loss of capability as an unacceptable risk, and do not believe that combatant commanders would willingly accept this reduction in CAS capability and increased risk to the service members under their command.

Despite clear evidence that the A-10 provides essential and unmatched CAS capabilities, for reasons we believe are short-sighted and primarily budget-driven, the Air Force has cut or is cutting three squadrons of A-10s at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana; Spangdahlem Air Base, Germany; and Fort Smith, Arkansas. Moreover, based on reports related to the Air Force's FY 2015 proposals for the A-10 and an apparent Air Force document entitled "CAF Force Generation Model" (dated 19 Jul 2013), we are deeply concerned that the Air Force's ill-advised effort to divest the A-10 may be accelerating. Yet, such an Air Force divestment of the A-10 would run counter to a long-standing congressional belief that the A-10's past combat performance, low operating costs, and unique CAS capabilities warrant the allocation of finite resources to ensure the A-10 remains part of the fleet for years to come. That is why Congress blocked the Air Force's effort to cut A-10 force structure even deeper in FY 2013.

That is also why Congress has supported the investment of significant resources to modernize the A-10 fleet—including state-of-the-art cockpit displays, digital data links, advanced targeting pod integration, full laser and GPS-guided munitions integration, and best-of-class integrated threat countermeasures. These modernization efforts will help ensure that the A-10 can continue to provide cutting-edge, one-of-a-kind close air support for years to come. An Air Force acceleration of its plan to divest the A-10 would represent an irresponsible waste of the modernization tax dollars that we have invested in the A-10 and a disregard for congressional intent.

An Air Force plan to divest A-10s may be based on two questionable—and potentially dangerous—assumptions. The first assumption is that the United States will not be fighting wars like Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom in the future. While we hope the U.S. can avoid such conflicts in the future, should they emerge unexpectedly, we have an obligation to ensure that our service members have the best resources at their disposal. The United States has had a poor track record predicting conflicts. When the U.S. military enters a conflict without sufficient training, resources, and capabilities, the cost is measured in the lives of our brave service members. We have a responsibility to not make those mistakes again.

The second assumption related to A-10 divestment appears to be that other aircraft currently in the Air Force inventory can replace the CAS capabilities of the A-10. The F-15, F-16, B-1, and B-52 are incredibly effective aircraft that are important components of the Air Force inventory, yet none of these aircraft can fully replace the capabilities and focus of the A-10 in many CAS situations. Technological advancements in weapons and sensors will not make a "multi-role" aircraft designed for other missions—and with a pilot who only spends a portion of their time training for CAS missions—comparable to the A-10, an aircraft and crew with a

singular focus on CAS missions. Experience in Iraq and Afghanistan clearly demonstrate the A-10's well-documented capability to operate effectively in combat below 800 foot ceilings/2 miles visibility and still provide effective CAS within 50 meters to save the lives of our troops when engaged in close combat with the enemy. In fact, the ability of the A-10 to operate in these conditions close to the point of engagement often results in faster re-attack times and lower civilian casualties.

For these reasons, in terms of maintaining the health of the A-10 fleet with pilot training, sufficient flight hours, utilization of active component squadrons, software upgrades, and modernization funding, it is essential that the Air Force not take any additional steps toward divestment. It is also important that the Air Force reverse any actions taken in recent months that could make an A-10 divestment a foregone conclusion before Congress can exercise its constitutional oversight role.

We look forward to reviewing DoD's close air support study that was mandated by the FY 2014 NDAA report approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee. Most importantly, we ask you and your staffs to closely scrutinize the Air Force's FY 2015 proposals as they relate to the A-10.

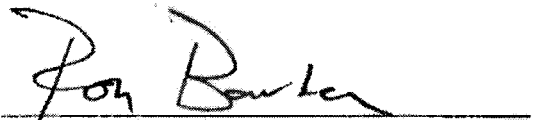
There is no question DoD must make difficult budget decisions. However, as we work together to best protect our nation and address our fiscal challenges, the last cuts we should make are ones that would deprive our troops of the capabilities they need to accomplish their missions and return home safely.

Thank you for your distinguished service to our nation.

Sincerely,



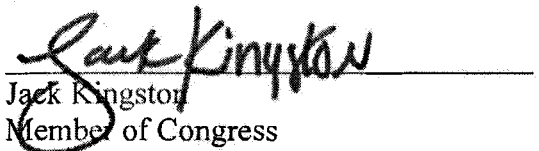
Kelly A. Ayotte
United States Senate



Ron Barber
Member of Congress



Mark Pryor
United States Senate



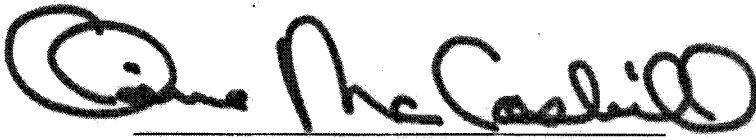
Jack Kingston
Member of Congress



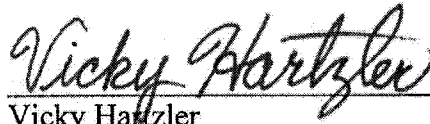
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United States Senate



Austin Scott
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Claire McCaskill
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Vicky Hartzler
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David Vitter
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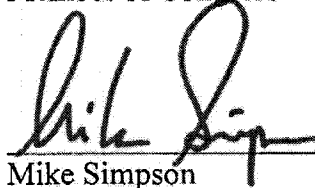
Richard Burr
United States Senate



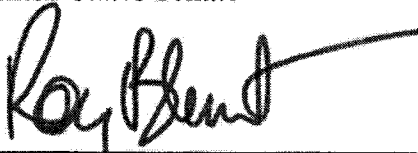
Candice Miller
Member of Congress



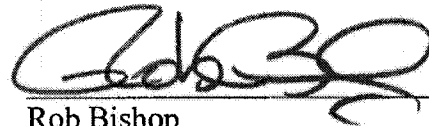
Mike Crapo
United States Senate



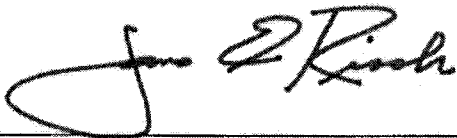
Mike Simpson
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Roy Blunt
United States Senate



Rob Bishop
Member of Congress



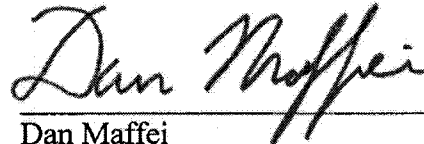
James Risch
United States Senate



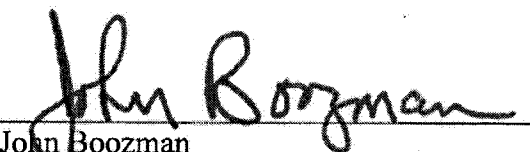
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United States Senate



Dan Maffei
Member of Congress



John Boozman
United States Senate



Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress

Ted Cruz

Ted Cruz
United States Senate

Carolyn M'Carthy

Carolyn McCarthy
Member of Congress

Roger Wicker

Roger Wicker
United States Senate

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Ander Crenshaw
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Grace Napolitano
Member of Congress

Ann McLane Kuster

Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress

Dan Kildee

Dan Kildee
Member of Congress

Tim Bishop

Tim Bishop
Member of Congress

Emanuel Cleaver II

Emanuel Cleaver II
Member of Congress

Chris Stewart

Chris Stewart
Member of Congress

Ann Wagner

Ann Wagner
Member of Congress

Cc: General Mark A. Welsh III
Air Force Chief of Staff
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670



DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1010 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1010

FEB 08 2014

The Honorable Ron Barber
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Barber:

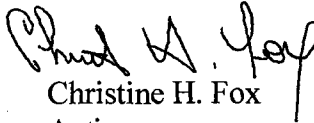
Thank you for your November 13, 2013, letter expressing support for the A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft and asking the Department of Defense (DoD) to review the Air Force's fiscal year 2015 (FY15) proposals as they relate to the A-10. I am responding to your letter on behalf of Secretary Hagel and General Dempsey.

I can assure you that, as part of the DoD's FY15 Program and Budget Review, the Department's senior leaders evaluate budget recommendations put forward by all the military services and defense agencies. The fiscal constraints imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011, even as adjusted by the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013, have forced the Department to make difficult choices to best balance force structure, readiness, and modernization. To avoid a readiness crisis and the loss of capabilities needed to keep our technological edge, DoD is seeking to retain only the people, equipment, and infrastructure that we can support and afford to keep trained and ready. In addition, we are continuing to work aggressively to find savings in headquarters costs and other overhead activities.

Because we are currently building DoD's FY15 budget submission, all of the Department's proposals are pre-decisional, and will remain so until the President delivers his FY15 budget request to the Congress. I look forward to sharing with you our analysis to support specific decisions following the budget submission.

Thank you for your support of the Department of Defense and for your service to our Nation.

Sincerely,


Christine H. Fox
Acting



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DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1010 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1010

MAY 01 2014

The Honorable Ron Barber
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Barber:

Thank you for your February 6, 2014, letter to the President regarding the proposed A-10 fleet divestiture. As you correctly note, the current fiscal environment has forced the Department of Defense to make difficult choices across a range of mission areas to ensure it can continue to meet all requirements of the defense strategy.

The 2015 President's Budget proposal does include divestiture of the A-10 fleet over the next five years. That divestiture in no way represents a lessening of the Air Force's firm commitment to its role as the primary force provider for close air support (CAS). It is important to note that seven other Air Force aircraft types are capable of performing this critical mission and have provided exemplary CAS for combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, since 2006, over 80 percent of CAS sorties have been flown by aircraft other than the A-10. These assets are capable of replacing the A-10 in the CAS mission in both current and future scenarios. Additionally, the A-10 is optimized to conduct operations against fielded enemy forces and cannot conduct other missions critical to the success of the joint force such as air superiority, suppression of enemy air defenses, and homeland defense. Since current fiscal constraints require us to shrink our force, the Air Force must retain more flexible multi-role aircraft capable of conducting a wider variety of missions in order to meet the Defense Strategic Guidance. Extensive classified analysis has shown that gradually retiring the A-10 in order to preserve funding for investments in the remaining fourth and fifth generation aircraft fleets result in the lowest overall risk in future operational environments.

Using a transparent Total Force approach, the Air Force sought to leverage Air National Guard and Reserve Forces by re-missioning units with similar airframes whenever possible. For example, all Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve A-10 squadrons are programmed to receive replacement flying missions, with four of the six squadrons receiving F-16s or F-15Es. This will help ensure we retain the CAS expertise of these exceptional Airmen and protect our Armed Forces in close combat.

We understand your concern over the A-10 divestiture and would be happy to have our experts meet with you and your staff to explain the importance of this proposal for the Air Force's ability to field a capable force for decades to come. Thank you for your continued support of the Department of Defense and for your service to our Nation.

Sincerely,

Christine H. Fox
Acting



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