

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 30, 2023

The Honorable Frank Kendall III  
Secretary of the Air Force  
1670 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Kendall,

We appreciate your willingness throughout the year to engage us and our staff in our efforts to recapitalize Air National Guard (ANG) and Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC) fighter squadrons. Absent intervention, the ANG is slated to lose two fighter missions in the next three years or will be forced to continue operating with older models. With that growing sense of urgency in mind, we request that you consider a stopgap measure to ensure there is no loss of Total Force fighter capability or combat capacity: fleet leveling.

Fleet leveling is an efficient interim solution to the challenge facing the Air Force – how to deter China with both the capacity and capability of advanced fighters, given fiscal and production constraints. Fleet leveling temporarily balances fighters across active duty, ANG, and AFRC squadrons to allow time for industry production capacity to catch up with demand. Most importantly, fleet leveling prevents the closure of fighter squadrons across the Total Force, thereby preserving critical capacity that would otherwise be forever lost.

As you are certainly aware, pilot and maintenance manning across the Air Force are both at alarmingly low levels. It takes more than a decade to produce an experienced fighter pilot. Unlike the active component, closing an ANG and AFRC fighter squadron results in the permanent loss of hundreds of deeply experienced personnel. That experience, and the millions of taxpayer dollars invested to train them, are lost forever. This loss also generates additional costs and training requirements to replace that experience. Fleet leveling the fighter force will ensure that the experience resident in ANG and AFRC fighter squadrons remains accessible for our Nation's defense in this decisive decade.

We, along with you and other senior leaders at the Department of Defense, undoubtedly view the threat posed by our adversaries as a reason to ensure that our military is ready to respond to any crisis. That means also ensuring that all our fighter wings in active-duty, reserve, and ANG units are well-equipped.

Currently, ANG and AFRC fighter bases across the country are facing uncertainty as they are either losing their fighters missions all together or are waiting on new aircraft to recapitalize their aging aircraft. The first two ANG fighter squadrons scheduled to lose their missions, Selfridge in Michigan and Warfield in Maryland, for example, have combat-proven fighter pilots,

maintainers, and support personnel that are ready to defend the Homeland and provide front-line support across the globe. Our Nation must retain these Airmen and ensure that the ANG can continue to provide affordable capacity to the Total Force.

Losing ANG and AFRC fighter units without a replacement is counter to those efforts and will undoubtedly create fighter capacity shortfalls and capability gaps that leave our Nation vulnerable to our adversaries. Fleet leveling maintains existing fighter squadrons, preserves combat capacity essential to Great Power Competition, and allows procurement to catch up to demand. It can also help bolster ANG bases with aging pre-block F-16s and F-15Cs. Should these pilots be called to service at the request of Combatant Commanders or our military at large, fleet leveling will ensure that these pilots are ready and able to answer the call.

We ask that you provide us and our staff with the Air Force's assessment of fleet leveling, along with any logistical challenges and help that Congress can provide. We also kindly request a briefing from your staff to better evaluate all available options to recapitalize ANG and AFRC fighter units. Our goal is to ensure invaluable fighter experience and capabilities can continue to be leveraged in support of our nation's defense. We are committed to preserving the critical role that ANG and AFRC fighter squadrons play in our Nation's defense and ask that you share any considerations or plans related to Total Force fighter recapitalization as they become available.

Sincerely,



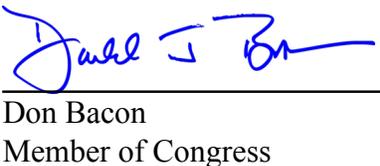
---

John James  
Member of Congress



---

John Hickenlooper  
United States Senator



---

Don Bacon  
Member of Congress



---

Mike Crapo  
United States Senator



---

Jason Crow  
Member of Congress



---

Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator



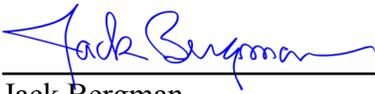
---

Brittany Pettersen  
Member of Congress



---

Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



---

Jack Bergman  
Member of Congress



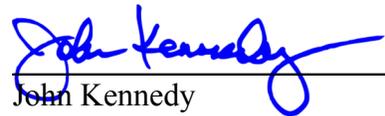
---

James E. Risch  
United States Senator



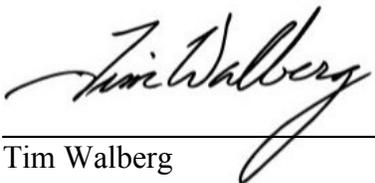
---

David J. Trone  
Member of Congress



---

John Kennedy  
United States Senator



---

Tim Walberg  
Member of Congress



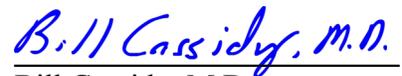
---

Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator



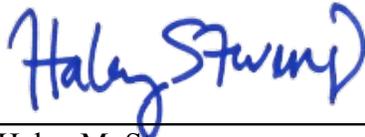
---

Elissa Slotkin  
Member of Congress



---

Bill Cassidy, M.D.  
United States Senator



---

Haley M. Stevens  
Member of Congress



---

Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



---

Ted Cruz  
United States Senator



---

Lisa C. McClain  
Member of Congress



---

Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



---

Michael K. Simpson  
Member of Congress



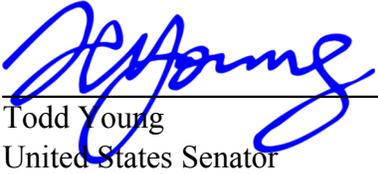
---

John Thune  
United States Senator



---

Bill Huizenga  
Member of Congress



---

Todd Young  
United States Senator



---

Shri Thanedar  
Member of Congress



---

Gary C. Peters  
United States Senator



---

C. A. Dutch Ruppertsberger  
Member of Congress



---

Mike Braun  
United States Senator



---

Michael Waltz  
Member of Congress



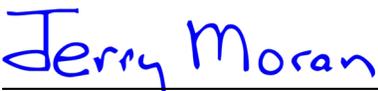
---

Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



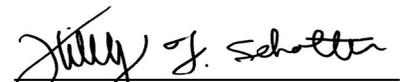
---

John R. Moolenaar  
Member of Congress



---

Jerry Moran  
United States Senator



---

Hillary J. Scholten  
Member of Congress



---

Kweisi Mfume  
Member of Congress



---

Debbie Dingell  
Member of Congress



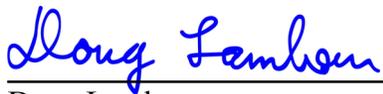
---

John P. Sarbanes  
Member of Congress



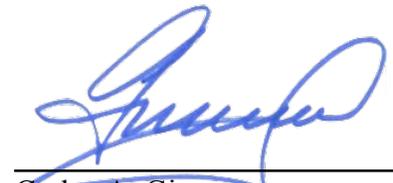
---

Andy Harris, M.D.  
Member of Congress



---

Doug Lamborn  
Member of Congress



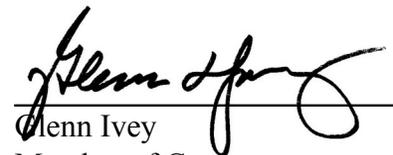
---

Carlos A. Gimenez  
Member of Congress



---

Dusty Johnson  
Member of Congress



---

Glenn Ivey  
Member of Congress



---

James R. Baird, PhD  
Member of Congress



---

Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress



Steny H. Hoyer  
Member of Congress



Jim Banks  
Member of Congress



Brad Finstad  
Member of Congress



Russ Fulcher  
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress



Angie Craig  
Member of Congress



Elijah Crane  
Member of Congress