

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

August 6, 2009

The Honorable Ike Skelton  
Chairman, House Armed Services Committee  
United States House of Representatives  
2206 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515-2504

Dear Chairman Skelton:

First, we wish to convey our sincerest appreciation for your leadership on the FY10 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). In its current form, the NDAA will strengthen our nation's military readiness and demonstrate our commitment to service members and their families.

As you consider the NDAA in conference, we would like to express our strong support for Section 1047, entitled "Combat Air Forces Restructuring," which was included in the version passed in the House of Representatives.

Section 1047 would prohibit the retirement of an additional 249 legacy aircraft that were announced in the United States Air Force's Combat Air Forces Restructuring plan released on May 18, 2009, until 90 days after the Secretary of the Air Force submits a report to Congress that answers several concerns held by Air Guard units, Active Air Force and members of Congress regarding the Air Force's force structure. This section would also authorize \$344.6 million for the continued operation and maintenance of the aircraft.

The purpose of Section 1047 is to preserve our nation's air defense capabilities while the Air Force conducts a thorough analysis of its restructuring plan, and provides Congress with an explanation and justification for its plan. The Air Force owes it to our service members, and we owe it to the taxpayers, to be transparent and to ensure this course of action has been properly vetted.

The Air Force's proposal impacts fighter wings at 14 Active Duty bases and seven Air National Guard units across the country; many would face substantial aircraft reductions while others would lose entire fighter wings. As a matter of national security, the sudden announcement to accelerate the retirement of fighter aircraft is deeply concerning; even more so when you consider that the Air Force had already projected shortfalls in their required 2200-aircraft fighter inventory beginning in fiscal year 2017 with the expectation that this shortage will reach approximately 800 aircraft by fiscal year 2024. It is further reported that the anticipated aircraft replacement—the F-35, Joint Strike Fighter—is already two years behind schedule.

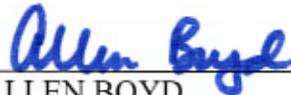
The Combat Air Forces Restructuring language in the House bill is a sensible solution that would allow the existing fighter aircraft to remain operational until the Air Force submits a detailed plan. In requesting this plan, we are executing a fundamental responsibility of Congress to provide the necessary oversight so that every agency, including the United States Department of Defense, pursues an effective strategy that will make our country safer and stronger.

We urge you to retain the Section 1047 language in the conference report that will protect fighter aircraft across the country and require the Air Force to answer several reasonable concerns.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH  
Member of Congress



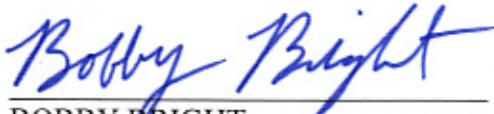
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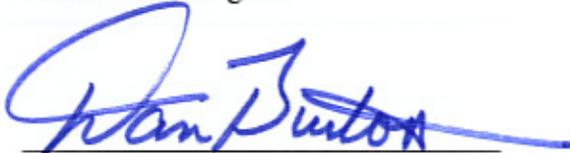
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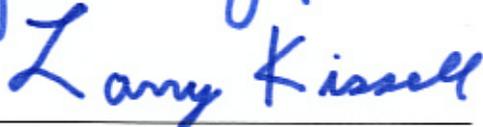
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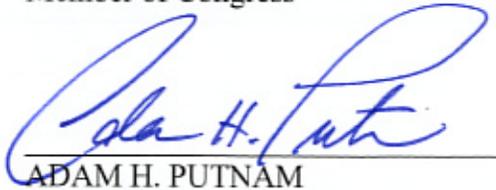
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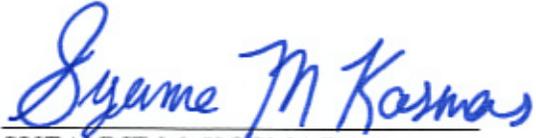
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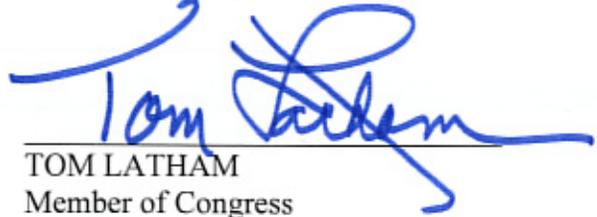
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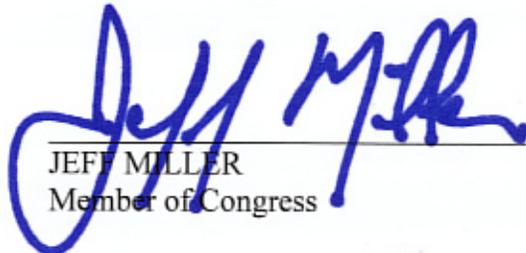
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DON YOUNG  
Member of Congress