

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0403

February 29, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

Respectfully, I request the Department of Defense delay implementation of FY13 budgetary guidance by the United States Air Force pending a review of criteria used in determining reductions in force structure, flying missions, and other related decisions. I join the Adjutants General and Governors of the United States in this request.

In the interest of disclosure, I represent the district that is home to the 188th Fighter Wing, Arkansas Air National Guard, which I understand is slated to transition from its close air support mission (A-10s) to a remotely piloted aircraft platform. My understanding is that this wing is one of five scheduled to lose its A-10s, and these reductions will shrink the A-10 platform from 300 aircraft to approximately 200.

I have serious concerns about the Air Force plan as currently written. As an example, any decision purposed in closing the 188th Fighter Wing is suspect. When reviewed in the context of objective criteria – airspace availability, distance to bombing range, cost per training hour, cost per flight hour, and cost of living – it does not appear that the decision was made on these cost efficiencies and performance. The 188th outperforms in all major objective categories, and it is one of the most cost-effective flying units in the Air Force.

I have specific questions regarding the current plan:

- Is there an A-10 basing study? If not, what criteria were used in determining basing?
- Did the Air Force follow their established procedures for A-10 basing decisions? Was the process deliberate, repeatable and transparent, with defined roles and responsibilities?
- When making basing decisions, did the Air Force consider energy costs and sustainability? If so, what weight was given to the significant energy savings of the 188th Fighter Wing?
- Was the Senate Armed Services Committee's guidance to consider distance to operational training areas followed in the A-10 basing decision? If so, what weight was

given to the significant taxpayer savings achieved due to the transit time from the 188th Fighter Wing to its training ranges?

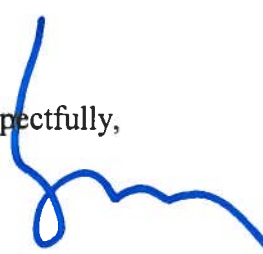
- Were the Special Operations Forces (SOF) training needs and their operational tempo considered in the A-10 basing plan? If so, what weight was given to the joint force multiplier capabilities of the 188th Fighter Wing?
- Does the re-missioning of the 188th Fighter Wing, and losing its unique training relationship with SOF, support the SOF in accordance with the Senate Armed Services Committee's direction?
- Did the Air Force consider JTAC training requirements? If so, what weight was given to the significant JTAC training production and partnership of the 188th Fighter Wing?
- Did the Air Force mandate a "one flying mission per state" standard for its FY13 plan?
- Why did the Air National Guard bear the brunt of the cuts to A-10 flying units?

It is my understanding that the Air National Guard represents 21% of the total Air Force. The Air Guard, however, represents 59% of the aircraft cuts in the FY13 plan. There is little argument that the reserve components provide the best value to the Department of Defense. The excessive nature of these cuts to the Air National Guard – not just the 188th Fighter Wing – doesn't make sense.

It is my hope that the Air Force will walk back its current plans for changing the force structure until a thorough evaluation – including congressional consultation – is conducted and the criteria used in the planned reductions is shared with the parties involved.

I look forward to participating in these discussions and receiving your responses to my questions.

Respectfully,



Steve Womack
Member of Congress
Third District, Arkansas