

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 28, 2014

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Howard "Buck" McKeon
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Inhofe, Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith:

We write to express our strong opposition to the Air Force's request to place three squadrons of the A-10 Thunderbolt II into Type 1000 storage in fiscal year 2015. This proposal is in direct conflict with the current prohibition passed with overwhelming support in both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees' authorization bills and in the defense appropriations bills.

Congress has made clear its support for the A-10. Both committees have written prohibitions against any planned divestment into their respective authorization bills (H.R. 4435 and S. 2410), and the House soundly rejected the idea of placing the A-10 into Type 1000 storage. The House Armed Services Committee and the full House have passed this legislation with strong bipartisan support. We now respectfully request that the committee follow the will of both chambers and include language in the final National Defense Authorization Act prohibiting divestment, significant changes to manning levels, any preparation to retire or the storage of any A-10 aircraft.

The Air Force's request to change the legislation overwhelmingly passed by both chambers would ultimately begin divestment of the A-10 fleet. This, in turn, would create a dangerous gap in close air support (CAS) that would negatively impact ground troops in Afghanistan and our defense posture worldwide. With the growing global instability and threats we and our allies face, we cannot afford to retire these squadrons.

The Warthog represents an aircraft of unmatched survivability, maneuverability and lethal armaments that is surpassed only by the deeply-ingrained close air support culture of its pilots. No other fixed-wing close air support assets are as proficient as the A-10 in conducting visual support operations below 1,000- foot ceilings while being able to effectively target the enemy or conduct search and rescue operations.

The F-15, F-16, B-1 and B-52 are incredibly effective aircraft and are important components of the Air Force inventory. Yet none of these platforms can fully replace the capabilities of the A-10 in many CAS situations.

The F-35 is the future of our national air defense and we should not delay delivery of the new airframe to our domestic air bases and allies. However, the F-35 has still not achieved initial operational capability (IOC), a significant milestone in a weapon system's development. Indeed, the Air Force does not expect to have the F-35 declared IOC, trained, manned and equipped until December 2016. This provides time for the Air Force to find experienced maintenance workers from other airframes, guard and reserve units or contractors.

Our Air Force has been pushed to the limit over the last few years of budgetary uncertainty and has responded superbly. Our latest fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has proven our airmen's resolve and ability to take the fight to the enemy. If the Air Force believes that operations in the Middle East against ISIL have introduced too much risk across the force and additional manning levels or a delayed delivery of our next generation of fighters is necessary, they should present these needs to the whole of the Armed Services Committees for consideration.

Allowing the Air Force to place 72 A-10s in storage in FY 2015 would cost the jobs of dozens of trained CAS pilots. Any modification to the prohibition legislation passed by 41 members of the House Armed Services Committee and a majority of the members of the Senate Armed Services Committee would undermine congressional intent. Additionally, if the maintenance manning levels across the force are so constrained, it would seem that the GAO study called for in the House passed NDAA language would be needed more than ever.

Members of Congress support the A-10 and the prohibition on divestment. We urge you to reject the Air Force's plan to divest of these three A-10 squadrons. The committees and both chambers have spoken on this issue and should have the opportunity to debate any needs of changes in manning levels, especially as we begin work on the FY 2016 authorization and appropriation bills. We respectfully request the prohibition on divestment, retirement or changes to manning levels for the A-10 Thunderbolt II be kept in the defense authorization bill ultimately presented to Congress and sent to the president.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



RON BARBER
Member of Congress



AUSTIN SCOTT
Member of Congress



CANDICE MILLER
Member of Congress