

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3302

March 10, 2014

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

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

Dear Secretary Hagel and Chairman Dempsey:

We write to express our deep concern regarding the President's proposed deactivation of the 440th Airlift Wing located at Pope Field. The 440th is a critical component in high-level training and timely deployment of both Airborne and Special Operations located at Ft. Bragg. Beyond the direct impact of over 1,200 service members and their families directly associated with the unit, our fear is that the deactivation of this unit will adversely affect the high quality training that some of our nation's best combat units rely on.

While we certainly understand that the Air Force and Department of Defense as a whole face significant budget pressure that requires difficult decisions to be made, we expect you will consider the cost of operating particular airframes and assess the monetary and operational value derived from co-locating units. Having the 440th Airlift Wing on post has proven to be a critical asset to the airborne and special operation missions it supports. We have serious concerns, should the 440th be deactivated, that units regularly conducting training and operations with local aircraft and crews will be forced to rely on out-of-state units to fly to Ft. Bragg in order to complete routine missions and training exercises. This could weaken the strong working relationship between the Air Force and the Army, which has been built over the last seven years at Ft. Bragg and Pope Field. We fear that not having planes ready onsite will lower the quality of training, while ultimately costing taxpayers more money and valuable resources.

Cutting Ft. Bragg's airborne operations by an estimated 23% could further erode our readiness at a time when the United States simply cannot afford it, particularly when the Department of Defense recognizes the continued need to enhance and utilize Special Operations Forces. Eliminating the ability to rapidly mobilize to train and deploy with local commanders, aircrews,

and aircraft that have an established relationship with our most in-demand forces increases risk at an unacceptable rate.

There is no question that we face difficult fiscal challenges, but as we make budget decisions regarding national security we simply cannot afford to cut the quality and frequency of training for those units we rely on most. As a result, we ask that you respond in writing to the series of questions below, regarding the decision to deactivate the 440th no later than ten days after receiving this letter.

Questions

- 1) Will deactivating the 440th Airlift Wing lower the frequency and quality of training currently provided to Ft. Bragg by the 440th Airlift Wing?
- 2) If the 440th Airlift Wing is deactivated, will the men and women who currently serve the wing have the ability to continue serving their nation at another military installation?
- 3) Will members of the 440th Airlift Wing be provided with financial assistance from DoD to relocate?
- 4) What will the operational impact be to Ft. Bragg's large contingency of Airborne and Special Operations missions and training?
- 5) Currently, the 440th Airlift Wing provides Airborne and Special Operations forces with the unique training capability of being extremely flexible, accessible, and able to change mission and training plans with very short notice. Will this flexibility be lost as a result of deactivating the 440th Airlift Wing?
- 6) What are the specific benefits seen by DoD for deactivating the 440th Airlift Wing?
- 7) How will the loss of air support provided by the 440th Airlift Wing be replaced?

Thank you for your distinguished service to our nation.

Respectfully,



Renee Ellmers
Member of Congress



Richard Hudson
Member of Congress



David Price
Member of Congress



Mike McIntyre
Member of Congress