

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 7, 2008

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Levin and McCain:

We write jointly to request that the Armed Services Committee authorize sufficient funding to protect against a reduction in our nation's long-range bomber force. As you probably know, the Air Force has listed as its top unfunded priority fielding a B-52 force of at least 76 aircraft in a common configuration, including 44 combat coded aircraft and specified numbers of aircraft in each inventory category. This standard was set by last year's National Defense Authorization Act.

Our bomber fleet is a vital national asset. The B-52 offers global reach, operational responsiveness, and close air support for troops on the ground in ways that its designers could never have imagined. Due to outstanding maintenance, a robust design, and low flying hours, the B-52 fleet maintains the highest mission capable rate in the bomber force. These high mission capable rates translate directly into increased combat effectiveness.

We appreciate the Committee's decision to hold a hearing on the recent series of reviews conducted by the Defense Science Board and the Air Force related to the mishandling of nuclear weapons. One recommendation emerging from these reports is a restructuring of our bomber force to ensure that sufficient attention is paid to carrying out the nuclear deterrence mission without errors. One way of doing this may be to establish a separate, nuclear-focused B-52 task force, which would focus on training for the nuclear mission and appropriate stewardship of nuclear munitions. Adopting such a structure would mean that a portion of the B-52 fleet would not be available for carrying out conventional war plans, and hence could drive a larger B-52 force requirement.

We fully support Air Force plans to modernize the bomber force and field a new bomber, but the current Air Force program is not appropriately balanced between short-range tactical aviation and long-range bombers. If the bomber roadmap required by the FY 2007 Defense Authorization Act does not make a persuasive case for the adequacy of a reduced bomber force, we would encourage you to consider requiring the Air Force to retain the entire current force of 93 B-52s until a next-generation bomber enters the force.

We ask that the Committee fully fund the 76 aircraft fleet and approve any forthcoming Air Force reprogramming requests needed to address the transition to a new fleet organization concept. These requests are the top priority on the Air Force's unfunded requirements list, and are assessed as having high military value. Funding them would be consistent with your Committee's clear direction in the FY2008 National Defense Authorization Act, which was

signed into law too late for such a significant change to be incorporated into the FY2009 President's Budget submission.

Our specific requests to maintain a force of 76 B-52s are as follows:

B-52 NDAA Compliance

Request: \$12,500,000

Account: MILPERS, Air Force

Purpose/Project Description:

To fund additional military personnel associated with the 76-aircraft B-52 force required under the FY2008 National Defense Authorization Act.

Request: \$95,900,000

Account: O&M, Air Force

Purpose/Project Description:

To fund flying hours and other O&M expenses associated with the 76-aircraft B-52 force required under the FY2008 National Defense Authorization Act.

Request: \$65,200,000

Account: Aircraft Procurement, Air Force (Modifications of In-Service Aircraft)

Line: 26 (B-52 Modifications)

Purpose/Project Description:

To fund additional modification kits for B-52 modification programs: Combat Network Communications Technology (CONNECT); Selective Availability Anti-Spoofing Module (SAASM), Advanced Targeting Pod Integration; MLR-2020 Instrument Landing System and Advanced Weapons Integration (AWI). These modifications would allow the B-52 force to continue to employ GPS-guided weapons, carry out enhanced in-flight conventional weapons retargeting, improve tactical and global data link communications for real time command and control, upgrade air traffic management systems, upgrade training devices to support aircrew and maintenance training, improve smart weapons carriage with MIL-STD-1760 links, and fully integrate advanced targeting pods with the offensive avionics system. (Note: this request includes APAF items listed on the Air Force unfunded requirements list for B-52 modifications, CONNECT, and SAASM.)

Request: \$9,500,000
Account: RDT&E, Air Force
Line: 108
PE: 0101113F

Purpose/Project Description:

To fund additional development of the Combat Network Communications Technology (CONNECT) program, which incorporates in-flight conventional weapons retargeting (CIBRR) with an improved operator interface design and EHF communications (FAB-T).

We would additionally request that you consider including the following report language:

"B-52 Force Structure. – The Committee commends the Air Force for revising their plans to retire a large portion of the B-52 force. Recognizing that this reconsideration and the enactment of the National Defense Act for FY 2008 occurred late in the 2009 budget process, the Committee has added sufficient funds to provide for the legally required retention and upgrade of the B-52 force. However, the Committee expects that the Department of Defense will include the full funding needed to maintain the required force of B-52s, consistent with the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008, in its budget submission in FY 2010 and beyond. The Committee continues to believe it is premature to reduce the operational force of B-52 aircraft prior to a replacement long-range strike aircraft reaching initial operational capability. Nothing in this Act should be interpreted as precluding a decision to retain more than 76 B-52 aircraft."

Thank you for your consideration of our request. Our staff contacts on this issue are: Jamie Morin (Conrad), Brian Moran (Dorgan), Jason Matthews (Landrieu), and Zak Baig (Vitter).

We certify that neither we nor our immediate family have any pecuniary interest in the programs discussed in this letter, consistent with Senate Rule XLIV.

Sincerely,


KENT CONRAD


BYRON DORGAN


MARY LANDRIEU


DAVID VITTER