

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 10, 2008

The Honorable Michael W. Wynne
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force, Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330

General T. Michael Moseley
Chief of Staff
United States Air Force
Washington, D.C. 20330

Dear Secretary Wynne and General Moseley:

Please be advised of our concern about the Air Force's significant funding shortfalls of the Title 10 Air Sovereignty Alert (ASA) mission. The men and women of First Air Force and AFNORTH charged with this vital homeland defense responsibility deserve our full support. The President assured the American public that defense of the homeland is the number one priority of the Department of Defense. Most Americans believe there must be a strong commitment of resources to the defense of American airspace. However, current Air Force policies are not in line with Presidential direction, Department of Defense intent, Joint Chiefs of Staff guidance or USNORTHCOM requirements.

Despite sustained and new threats both asymmetric and strategic, dedication of Air Force funding for this critical mission has not kept pace with evolving requirements since fiscal year 2004. This year, as in years past, there is a built-in multi-million dollar shortfall in personnel, operations and maintenance funding for Air National Guard ASA wings in the Air Force baseline budget. Lack of a consistent Air Force commitment to the ASA mission has forced First Air Force wings to reduce pilot training and sorties, subjecting crews to incremental pay and forcing away-from-home-station duty.

Reductions and changes resulting from the 2005 BRAC round are also degrading ASA capabilities during its implementation. Further, there has been little explanation forthcoming on determining the effects of Air National Guard transformation on current coverage of U.S. airspace or response and intercept times.

Cost-cutting transformation policies of the Air Force, that include constant attempts at manpower cuts and centralizing maintenance and inspection, will also negatively affect the readiness rates of units performing this mission. These policies do not recognize the unique nature of the Air National Guard dual mission wing, and are undermining the high level of expertise and experience resident in their manpower.

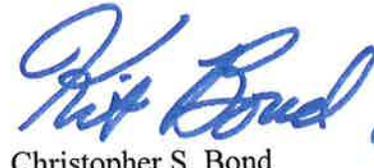
Large reductions in manpower in the command and control management of AFNORTH have already diminished mission capabilities. The entire Air National Guard only receives 7.2% of the Air Force total budget, yet these men and women already perform their missions with cost saving efficiency.

Moreover, the wings of First Air Force are equipped with F-15's and F-16's that are rapidly nearing the end of their operational life. In 2013, the first wave of the F-16 fighters, which make up 10 of the 15 ASA units, will be retired. In eight years, approximately 80% of the ASA force structure will be gone. Stated Air Force 5th generation fighter procurement strategies seem unrealistic given extraordinary costs and the current political environment. Given the Administration's procurement cap of 181 F-22's and continued scheduling delays and cost overruns according to GAO exceeding \$23 billion alone last year, the ASA mission is in jeopardy unless other options are pursued.

What immediate plans does the Air Force have to improve and sustain the ASA mission and the security it brings? What consideration has the Air Force given to developing a "Plan B" to backfill legacy aircraft at ASA wings with upgraded 4th generation fighters? And what consideration will be given to including all ANG ASA personnel, operations and maintenance in the annual Air Force budget? What contingency plans for the protection of US airspace are in place should more F-15s or F-16s be grounded before replacement aircraft are procured?

The nation's Air Sovereignty Alert wings cannot sustain long term operations given the current state of affairs. And we will loose some of the best trained pilots and maintainers in the Air Force, performing one of our nation's most important security missions. We deeply concerned about the risks associated with a less than robust First Air Force, and respectfully request that you rethink your priorities regarding homeland defense and the sovereignty of American airspace.

Sincerely,

			
Patrick Leahy United States Senator	Christopher S. Bond United States Senator	Tom Davis United States Representative	Frank LoBiondo United States Representative