

LETTER TO MEMBERS OF THE AIR FORCE CAUCUS

Thank you for your continuing service on the Congressional Air Force Caucus. As we all know, providing adequate and agreeable funding for the defense of our nation is a complicated process.

While the focus of much of our effort has been on continued funding for the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, we must not forget that our Air Force is currently facing a number of long-term challenges, especially with respect to modernizing and recapitalizing the force. These issues do not just impact the Air Force, but instead affect all service branches, for the Air Force is a joint enabler, providing services such as airlift, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, and tactical air support to the entire Department of Defense community. We must always be prepared to meet current and future obligations, which is something that can be difficult when one considers the tremendous tasks that continually face our armed forces. Accordingly, we must always ensure that our military forces have the materiel resources and support needed to successfully accomplish their mission, now and in the future.

The Air Force went to war more than sixteen years ago, and it has yet to return. For the last six years, the Air Force and its sister services have been heavily engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq. Because of the sustained increase in demand for worldwide operations tempo, Air Force equipment is wearing out much earlier than original projections will support. Funding shortages have compounded this problem by causing delays and cancellations of force modernization programs. Given the intense competition for scarce resources, we have three concerns that are specific to the Air Force:

1. The average age of Air Force aircraft is now more than 23.5 years (in some cases, aircraft are over 50 years old) and the current Air Force fleet is the oldest it has flown in its 60+ year history. *We must ensure the adequate recapitalization of new weapon systems and retire older, more costly systems to meet operations requirements and fulfill our national security commitments.*
2. In order to execute operations and maintain materiel needs with today's funding levels, the Air Force will reduce its ranks by 40,000 personnel over the next four years. This comes at a time when the service is detailing over 5,000 Airmen to battlefield tasks normally performed by Army and Marine Corps personnel. Reductions to date are already placing a strain on operations tempo. *We must consider the resources that will be necessary to sustain the Air Force as it supports the additional 92,000 individuals that are being added to the ranks of the Army and the Marine Corps.*
3. Today the Air Force unfunded priority list of 25 programs totals \$5.75B. *We must address critical shortfalls to ensure the Air Force can sustain its current combat capabilities while building future air, space, and cyberspace components.*

It is the Air Force's duty to provide for our defense, and so it is for us to adequately provide for their ability to do so. We look forward to your thoughts and comments on these critical issues and to beginning serious discussion on meeting the challenges facing our Air Force.

Sincerely,

//Signed//
Cliff Stearns
Co-Chair

//Signed//
John Spratt
Co-Chair

//Signed//
Sam Johnson
Co-Chair

//Signed//
Jim Marshall
Co-Chair