



1501 Lee Highway, Arlington, Virginia 22209-1198 (703) 247-5800  
An Independent Nonprofit Aerospace Organization

February 9, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As our new Commander in Chief, you have inherited the best Air Force in the world. The active duty, guard, reserve, and USAF civilians are *Airmen* in the finest American tradition. Despite the strain of more than 18 years of continuous combat, they bring unparalleled Global Reach, Power and Vigilance to the joint battlefield in support of the current fight. Our Air Force flies more than 300 sorties every day in support of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and quietly and securely provided “top cover” for your inauguration. We must continue to support them and all our troops and their families for their selfless service.

On the White House web site, you are quoted as saying you will “....ensure that our troops have the resources, support, and equipment they need to protect themselves and fulfill their mission.” We could not agree more! It’s no accident the Combatant Commanders currently possess the most decisive suite of air and space capabilities ever. Period! The relevant question is: “For how long?”

We are at a crossroads with our Air Force. Your administration and Congress face important decisions that will shape U.S. airpower for decades to come. Depending on the choices, the Air Force may be unable to accomplish its assigned missions in the future. The Air Force Association, an independent, civilian education organization dedicated to promoting public understanding of aerospace power and the pivotal role it plays in the security of the nation, believes that to remain the best Air Force in the world into the future, we must, as a minimum:


- **Recapitalize the Aging Fleet: The USAF is operating the oldest fleet of manned and unmanned aircraft and space systems in its history, and we must replace these aging systems.** In 2009, the USAF will purchase only 117 aircraft, and more than half of that number will be unmanned aerial vehicles. At this replacement rate, the aircraft fleet will continue to get older – beyond its current 25-year average age. Many of our space systems have been on orbit for almost two decades, and all of our forces depend daily on the situational awareness, navigation, weather, and

communications provided by USAF space assets. The Air Force must also have a more capable next-generation Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR-X) aircraft to better support US and coalition personnel isolated from friendly forces by distance, threat, weather and enemy action.

- Preserve Global Reach: **We must move quickly to field a new refueling aircraft to replace the Eisenhower-era KC-135s.** As you have also indicated, we must preserve Global Reach in the Air – and we cannot do that relying on refuelers more than fifty years old. **And continued production of the C-17 airlifter** will help assure we can respond anywhere in the world – with humanitarian aid, or military forces. Expansion of ground forces will place further burdens on an already strapped airlift fleet.
- Retain Air Dominance: **We strongly urge you and DoD to continue the F-22 production capability and allow adequate time to decide on further procurement.** We have ruled the skies in every conflict since Korea, and US military operations anywhere in the world are planned assuming that will continue. As other nations field and export next generation fighters (in numbers well beyond any contemplated F-22 production), now is not the time to shut down the production line, which is at its most affordable point. AFA believes the nation needs more F-22s than the current total if we are to continue to provide air dominance that allows freedom of operations, the ability to impose our will on the enemy in any theater, and protection for our ground troops from attacks from above. And we should move as quickly as possible with the F-35, a fighter that *complements*, but does not replace, the unparalleled capability of the F-22.
- Maintain a Strong Industrial Base: **As decisions are made that are in the “best interests of the country,” we must retain our industrial strength – it is fundamental for the U.S. to remain a world leader in cutting edge technology or assume the risk of falling behind with potentially dire consequences.** Only a few prime contractors still exist to take on major aerospace projects. If we close down the F-22 and C-17 lines, we will lose thousands of high-paying jobs that our nation needs to keep. Further, the aerospace industry is an engine for growth – exporting \$14B per year of American-made products to overseas customers.
- Continue Efforts to Reinvigorate the Nuclear Enterprise: AFA strongly endorses the USAF’s efforts to implement the recommendations of the Schlesinger Task Force and other commissions. The nuclear deterrent mission is the top priority for the Air Force. But we cannot rely forever on nuclear weapons designed and tested decades ago. **The nation must move forward with a replacement warhead for our nuclear deterrent.** A replacement warhead would provide advance safety and security features, be certifiable without nuclear testing, and is a fundamental part of DOD’s efforts to reinvigorate the nuclear enterprise.

The 125,000 members of AFA represent every state in the union and believe US airpower must remain second to none to ensure our security. The USAF is doing a remarkable job of balancing its full support for Combatant Commanders around the world today, while trying to field systems and capabilities that will remain relevant to conflicts 30-40 years into the future. The critical decisions in the near term will determine whether our nation's joint warfighting team will have the requisite full suite of essential capabilities to deter its enemies – and defeat them if deterrence fails – across all operating domains.

Very respectfully,



Joseph E. Sutter  
Chairman of the Board, AFA



Michael M. Dunn  
President/CEO, AFA

CC:

The Honorable Ike Skelton, Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services

The Honorable John M. McHugh  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services

The Honorable Carl Levin, Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services

The Honorable John McCain  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services

The Honorable John P. Murtha,  
Chairman  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Defense

The Honorable C.W. Bill Young  
Ranking Minority Member  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Defense

The Honorable Daniel K. Inouye,  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Defense

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Vice Chairman, Subcommittee on  
Defense Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Robert Gates  
Secretary of Defense



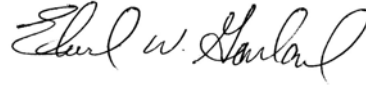
Jim Lauducci  
AFA Vice Chairman for  
Field Operations, VA



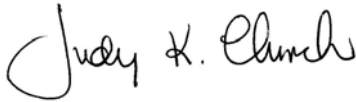
Emil M. "Max" Friedauer  
AFA National Director, FL




Sanford Schlitt  
AFA Vice Chairman for  
Aerospace Education, FL



Ed Garland  
AFA National Director, TX



Judy K Church  
AFA National Secretary, KS



James Hannam  
AFA National Director, VA



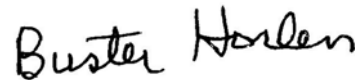
Steven R. Lundgren  
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Peter J. Hennessey  
AFA National Director, OH



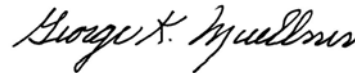
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AFA National Director, CA



Buster Horlen  
AFA National Director, TX



Justin Faiferlick  
AFA National Director, IA



George K. Muellner  
AFA National Director, CA



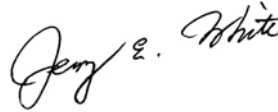
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AFA National Director, GA



Len Vernamoni  
AFA National Director, MS



Charles A Nelson  
AFA National Director, SD



Jerry E. White  
AFA National Director, CO



Paul W. Schowalter  
AFA National Director, NC



Charles P. Zimkas Jr.  
AFA National Director, CO



Scott Van Cleaf  
AFA National Director, VA