

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 3, 2009

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Long range strike, as you know, is a critical capability afforded to the nation by the United States Air Force. The ability to hold any target at risk, at any time, serves as a powerful deterrent to potential aggressors and can create invaluable wartime strategic effects. While our current long range bomber fleet is combat ready and capable, its long term viability is less certain. The Air Force's next generation bomber, currently scheduled to be fielded by 2018, is being designed to help recapitalize this portion of our fleet. Recent press accounts and statements by senior officials in your administration suggest that this initiative is being considered for cancellation. As strong supporters of the merits of this program, we respectfully urge you to reconsider your position based on a number of important points:

Credible deterrence and effective power projection demands that the United States always have the option of employing strategic force, no matter what obstacles may arise. Long range strike represents the foundation of this capability. Whether considering access to regional bases, over-flight rights, or the challenges involved with sustaining forces deployed to a combat theater, there are numerous points of vulnerability that can impede a mission dependant on forward-based tactical assets. The unexpected eviction of U.S. forces from Manas Air Base in Kyrgyzstan is but one recent example of the challenges that can arise in these operations. Long range strike assets overcome many of these problems because of their unique capability to reach across the globe on missions, attack dozens of targets on a single sortie, respond rapidly to fleeting targets, and most significantly – remain autonomous from forward-based logistical support.

Today's long range strike force is facing inherent challenges, with bomber platforms in the U.S. Air Force inventory averaging over forty years in age. While elements of the fleet are still highly adept in certain threat environments, the proliferation of anti-access weaponry, including advanced integrated air defense systems, is curtailing when and where many of our legacy assets can successfully operate. Twenty B-2s – 12% of the nation's long range strike fleet – are the only long range bomber assets in the Air Force inventory that can penetrate high threat environments and survive. These stealth aircraft have not been produced since 1997, and thus there are no viable replacements to backfill losses. Our B-52s and B-1s have been upgraded over the years to take advantage of new technologies such as precision strike, GPS, and targeting pods, but remain vulnerable to attacks by surface-to-air missiles and fighters due to their lack of stealth. The venerable B-52H, a Vietnam era platform, comprises almost half (47%) of our current long range strike inventory. Given the growing age of our bomber fleet, we simply cannot afford to let lapse or completely lose the strategic advantage these unique platforms confer. The next generation bomber is a viable initiative, based on proven technologies, that promises to preserve and enhance our nation's critical long range strike capability for years to come.

Looking to a future of uncertainty, long range strike platforms will only grow in their importance as an essential pillar of conventional deterrence and power projection. Modern stealth bombers can penetrate air defense systems, respond rapidly to strike fleeting targets, and operate over long distances without excessive logistical and basing support. We earnestly hope that you will join us and the Air Force in recognizing the need to recapitalize this important element of our fleet by 2018.

Thank you for your continued service and dedication to our nation. We look forward to partnering with you to ensure the U.S. Air Force remains *the* dominant air power well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Sincerely,

  
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JOHN C. FLEMING, M.D.  
Member of Congress

  
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TODD W. AKIN  
Member of Congress



RODNEY ALEXANDER  
Member of Congress



CHARLES W. BOUSTANY, JR., M.D.  
Member of Congress



ANH "JOSEPH" CAO  
Member of Congress



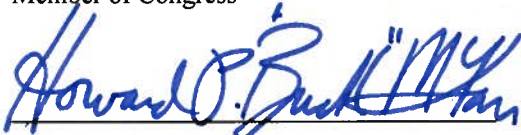
BILL CASSIDY, M.D.  
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WALLY HERGER  
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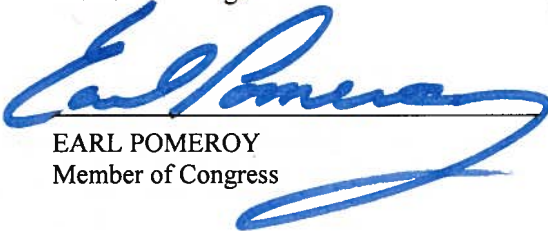
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