



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

April 20, 2020

The Honorable James Inhofe
Chairman, Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman, Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Ranking Member, Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Messrs. Chairmen and Ranking Members:

As the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps across the world and our nation, one steady and encouraging resource has been our nation's military.

The Air Force Association (AFA) is the leading voice for aerospace power, and we are honored to be the only non-profit, professional military association that advocates for all Airmen: Active, Reserve, Guard, Civilians, Retirees, Veterans, Industry Partners, and their families. AFA advocates for a dominant Department of the Air Force, and on behalf of our 97,000 members and the nearly 700,000 Airmen that support the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and U.S. Space Force (USF), we ask your support for them in the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and Appropriations bills.

The great power competition between the United States, Russia, and China has become the central challenge to U.S. security—both militarily and economically. America's dominance in the air, space, and cyber realms can no longer be taken for granted. The National Defense Strategy Commission highlighted the needs to recapitalize and modernize the force to meet the National Defense Strategy, and in particular the importance of the Air Force.

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The Honorable Pete Visclosky
Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Defense
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Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense
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The Honorable Dick Durbin
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Defining the readiness mission is difficult, however. When military parents can’t secure healthcare for a sick child, that affects readiness. When local providers reject military health insurance, forcing family members to travel out of the area for care, that too affects readiness. And when the military gives up health care capacity, the nation loses some of its ability to surge in response to health care emergencies such as today’s COVID-19 pandemic. Clearly, that affects readiness. Today’s pandemic crisis should be a wake-up call.



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

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Today’s Department of the Air Force is too old, too small and too poorly funded to meet its obligations under the National Defense Strategy. As Congress wisely directed in 2018, it needs robust spending increases to modernize quickly.

Thank you for what you do for our nation’s Airmen, their families, and veterans. We hope you address these issues, and the Air Force Association welcomes the opportunity to work with you on next year’s budget.

Sincerely,

Lt Gen. Bruce “Orville” Wright, USAF (Ret.)
President

CMSAF Gerald Murray, USAF, (Ret.)
Chairman



April 20, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer:

As the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps across the world and our nation, one steady and encouraging resource has been our nation's military.

The Air Force Association (AFA) is the leading voice for aerospace power, and we are honored to be the only non-profit, professional military association that advocates for all Airmen: Active, Reserve, Guard, Civilians, Retirees, Veterans, Industry Partners, and their families. AFA advocates for a dominant Department of the Air Force, and on behalf of our 97,000 members and the nearly 700,000 Airmen that support the U.S. Air Force (USAF) and U.S. Space Force (USF), we ask your support for them in the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and Appropriations bills.

The great power competition between the United States, Russia, and China has become the central challenge to U.S. security—both militarily and economically. America's dominance in the air, space, and cyber realms can no longer be taken for granted. The National Defense Strategy Commission highlighted the needs to recapitalize and modernize the force to meet the National Defense Strategy, and in particular the importance of the Air Force.

“Regardless of where the next conflict occurs or which adversary it features, the Air Force will be at the forefront.”

— National Defense Strategy Commission

Since its resounding impact on 1991's Operation Desert Storm, the Department of the Air Force has shrunk by a third and is now too small for the demands expected of it. The U.S. Air Force deployed to the Persian Gulf in 1990 and 30 years later is the only force that has never returned home. That's 30 years of continuous combat operations. Were war to come tomorrow, our Air Force could muster just over half of its fighter squadrons/equivalents to combat a peer competitor.



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

The Air Force provides the airlift, strike capability, combat air patrols, unmanned aircraft, and intelligence and surveillance for the joint force. It provides two-thirds of the nuclear triad, which our nation has long relied upon for deterrence. Without substantial investments in the force, it will not be ready for a possible conflict in the next decade with China or Russia.

The Space Force was created to ensure that space— where America holds a clear, asymmetric and strategic advantage — will not become another parity domain. Today’s Space Force provides the core timing and location data that enable secure cash withdrawals from ATMs, safe navigation the world over, critical communications, as well as command and control for our entire military. Having established this necessary force, the nation must invest the resources to ensure its success.

The Department of the Air Force needs stable and predictable funding—at adequate funding levels. The President’s Budget Request for FY2021 seeks only \$800 million more than 2020 to fund two independent military services. The Air Force has termed this a “calculated risk in near term capacity.” That is generous; in reality, the service is foregoing investments and deferring future capability to pay today’s bills. As just one example, despite a stated requirement to build capacity to 386 operational squadrons, the Air Force is planning to divest aging to pay for future capability at a time when it should be growing bigger.

We applaud the FY 2021 emphasis on Space Control; Missile Warning Capability; National Security Space Launch; and GPS Improvements. Yet, despite the administration’s and Congress’ emphasis on space, increasing the budget for the USSF by only \$800M is insufficient.

AFA strongly supports the following:

Personnel End Strength - The Air Force is too small for what our nation requires of it. Congress should grow the Total Force to 386 operational squadrons from the current 312 squadrons—an increase of 24 percent. Congress needs to increase the Active Duty strength to 350,000 personnel, the Air National Guard to 120,000, and the Reserve to 72,500.

F-35A Lightning II Stealth Fighter – The budget request funds only 48 new 5th Generation aircraft, despite a requirement for 72 new F-35As. Accelerating F-35A purchases is vital to ensure U.S. combat aircraft are survivable against our rivals’ increasingly sophisticated defenses.

KC-46A Pegasus Refueling Tanker – Most of USAF’s tankers are 50 years old or older. The new KC-46A is vital to USAF’s ability to project and maintain Global Reach and Global Power.

B-21 Raider Bomber – Congress is to be commended for its strong support of the new stealth bomber. Development funding must continue, as the current long-range strike force averages 40 years of age. Congress should procure 180 B-21 bombers at the fastest rate possible.

Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) – AFA supports full funding for the GBSD to replace the 40-plus year-old Minuteman III intercontinental ballistic missile system (ICBM).



Long Range Standoff Weapon (LRSO) – AFA thanks Congress for last year’s support for the LRSO. Unfortunately, this is a yearly struggle. These weapons are essential for deterrence.

Space Launch and On-Orbit Capabilities – Support from Congress is needed to grow robust space launch and on-orbit capabilities, taking advantage of cost-reducing measures in the commercial space industry and examining commercial operating models.

Hypersonics – China and Russia are ahead in this vital missile technology. The U.S. must advance and leverage hypersonic technologies more aggressively or risk losing advantages in air and naval power.

Air Force Pass-Through – For decades, funds have been stashed inside the Air Force budget to mask certain other spending. Known as the “pass-through,” these funds are neither controlled by nor used by the Air Force. Averaging approximately 20 percent of the department’s budget, the pass-through accounts for 6 percent of the entire defense budget—more than twice as much as the Space Force. Without it, the Air Force Department’s share falls to only 23 percent of defense spending — well below the other service departments.

The new Space Force is now entering an orbit that will demand funding increases to pay for new capabilities. It too must compete with Air Force modernization and pass-through funding to achieve its objectives. This is all light years away from real transparency and good governance in national security. Congress and the administration should eliminate the misleading pass-through. Transparency will make America stronger and safer—and ensure a successful future for our new U.S. Space Force.

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