

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 13, 2007

The Honorable Dr. Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
Pentagon
Washington, DC

Dear Secretary Gates:

For each of the last two years, the Pentagon has failed to fund C-17 aircraft in the annual budget submission, which would have resulted in the termination of the production line were it not for congressional action. Last year, and again this year, the Air Force asked for Congress's help to add C-17s after submitting the budget. While this approach may have had utility in the short term, the strategy is no longer viable.

We understand that Pentagon programs are under stress due to the scarcity of funds, but this program is critical to the rapid movement of U.S. personnel and critical supplies. As you know, the C-17 line is the only currently operating production line for a strategic airlifter in the nation today. Once the C-17 production line is closed, the nation will lose a valuable asset should military planners determine that there is insufficient strategic airlift to sustain military operations. Additionally, the loss of as many as 30,000 jobs and the dismantling of the associated industrial infrastructure will make regenerating the capability extraordinarily difficult and prohibitively expensive.

The number of C-17 aircraft built to date supports a 'minimum requirement' as noted by numerous studies and military officials. This minimalist approach to meeting our military airlift needs has resulted in, among other things, the need to charter Russian built airlifters to deliver MRAPs to our men and women serving in Iraq. With a planned increase in personnel endstrength coupled with an increasing reliance upon rapid mobility there is no justification to believe that airlift requirements will decrease and many reasons to believe that currently available capacity is insufficient.

The Department of Defense cannot wait to fund continued C-17 production until the impact of the increases in personnel force structure and equipment stocks are fully realized. Such a lack of action puts future military operations at risk. While Congress has sustained C-17 production in recent years, it is unrealistic to presume that it will be able to continuously support needed production through congressional adds. The C-17 must be rightly funded in the President's Fiscal Year 2009 Budget.

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Respectfully,



CLAIRE McCASKILL
United States Senate



CHRISTOPHER S. BOND
United States Senate



KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON
United States Senate



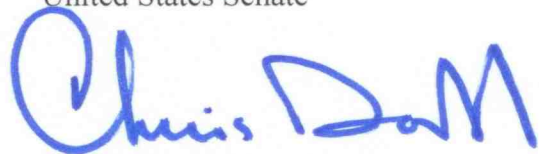
JOHN CORNYN
United States Senate




SUSAN M. COLLINS
United States Senate



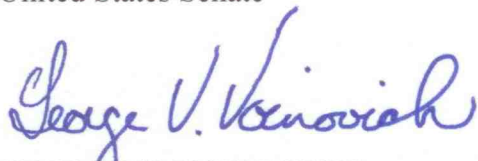
DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senate



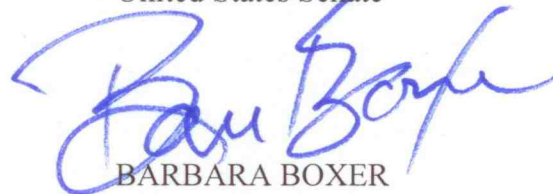
CHRISTOPHER J. DODD
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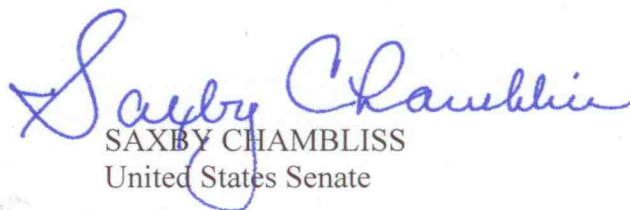
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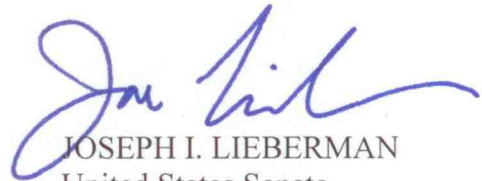
OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senate



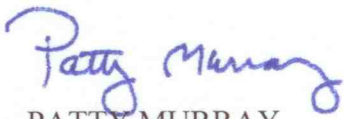
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