

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

May 21, 2008

The Honorable Michael W. Wynne  
Secretary of the Air Force  
1670 Air Force, Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330

Dear Secretary Wynne:

We are writing to express our concern that the B-1 fleet's mission-capable rate has seriously declined and that the B-1 fleet's accident rate has dangerously increased. We urge the Air Force to ensure that the B-1s are properly supported and maintained and that the necessary funding is provided in the FY 2010 Program Objective Memorandum (POM).

The B-1's performance in Iraq and Afghanistan has been outstanding. However, the heavy usage has placed extensive wear and tear on the aircraft. For the B-1 to continue in this important role, the Air Force must provide the necessary spare parts and maintenance. According to recent reports, we understand that the B-1s are not receiving sufficient spare parts and are suffering from a shortage of qualified maintenance technicians. As a result, the fleet's mission-capable rate has reportedly been dropping and it is at the lowest level in years. At the same time, the accident rate has increased significantly during the past several years, putting the crews and the aircraft at risk.

We note that last year the Pentagon lowered the B-1's rating under the Defense Priorities and Allocation System from "DX" to "DO." At that time, we expressed our concerns over spare parts for the B-1 in our August 28, 2007 letter to Mr. John Young, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics. Our concerns appear to have been justified.

In 2002, the B-1 fleet was facing funding shortfalls for modernization and maintenance. In response, the Air Force reduced the B-1 fleet from 92 aircraft to only 67 and reduced the number of B-1 bases from five to only two. At the time, it was expected that with this reduction in aircraft and bases, the Air Force would provide the necessary resources to support the remaining aircraft and increase the mission-capable rates. In fact, the Air Force stated:

In summary, the B-1 consolidation re-investment plan addresses the sustainment areas that directly influence mission capable rates and will result in the aircraft meeting or exceeding the command standards in the years to come.

Now, only a few years later, this smaller B-1 fleet is facing similar problems with a mission-capable rate reportedly at the lowest level since 2001, the year before the Air Force reduced the fleet and the number of bases.


With the B-1 mission-capable rates at such a low level, we are also concerned that the Air Force might now take the position that a further reduction in the fleet is once again needed to provide adequate maintenance support. Instead, the Air Force should provide the necessary maintenance support for the remaining 66 B-1s.


Given the seriousness of this situation, we request a briefing from Lt. Gen. Raymond E. Johns Jr., Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Plans and Programs, on the B-1 spare parts program, the B-1 fleet's mission-capable rate and the Air Force's plans to improve B-1 maintenance in the near-term and in the FY 2010 POM.

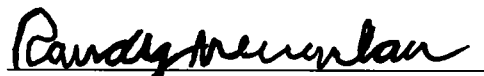
Sincerely,

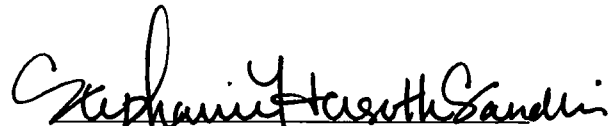
  
KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON  
United States Senator

  
JOHN CORNYN  
United States Senator

  
TIM JOHNSON  
United States Senator

  
JOHN THUNE  
United States Senator

  
RANDY NEUGEBAUER  
Member of Congress

  
STEPHANIE HERSETH SANDLIN  
Member of Congress