

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 13, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Recent media reports indicate that the Office of Management and Budget (“OMB”) has recommended a five-year delay in the initial acquisition of the Air Force aerial tanker replacement and the cancellation of the Next Generation Long Range Strike System, commonly referred to as the Next Generation Bomber. We believe that any delay or cancellation of either program constitutes an unacceptable and unnecessary risk to our nation’s unique ability to project airpower worldwide.

As you know, none of our recent military operations would have been possible without the utilization of our tanker fleet. Specifically, our strike aircraft would not have been able to reach and dwell over Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, and Kosovo without a robust aerial refueling capability. However, the mainstay of our aerial tanker fleet, the Eisenhower-era KC-135, is nearly 50 years old. Undoubtedly, these were some of the factors your Administration considered when it articulated, on the White House’s website, the importance of aerial tanker recapitalization. Specifically:

Preserve Global Reach in the Air: We must preserve our unparalleled airpower capabilities to deter and defeat any conventional competitors, swiftly respond to crises across the globe, and support our ground forces. We need greater investment in advanced technology ranging from the revolutionary, like Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and electronic warfare capabilities, to essential systems like the C-17 cargo and *KC-X air refueling aircraft, which provide the backbone of our ability to extend global power.* [italics added] ¹

Equally disconcerting is OMB’s reported recommendation to cancel the Next Generation Bomber, which will incorporate state-of-the-art stealth technology. The utilization of state-of-the-art stealth technology will be essential to defeat the emerging threat posed by advanced integrated air defense systems. For example, a rogue nation, for a relatively modest sum, could acquire such advanced systems as the Russian-made S-300 and S-400 surface-to-air missiles. It has been widely speculated by the media that penetrating airspace defended by such surface-to-air missiles will be extremely difficult,

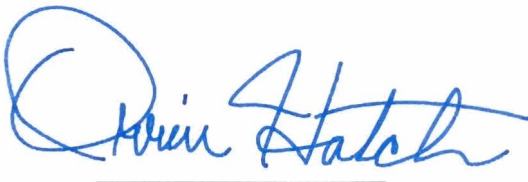
¹ The Agenda · Defense (visited Mar. 10, 2009) <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/defense/>>.

if not deadly, for those aircraft that lack state-of-the-art stealth technology. Currently, our bomber fleet is only comprised of 16 combat-ready stealth aircraft out of a total force of 129 bombers. Half of the Air Force's combat-ready bombers consist of B-52s, which also have 50 years of service. As the Congressional Research Service has noted, "the Air Force's operational assessment is that the B-52 will not be survivable under the 2015-2020 threat picture, and therefore its effectiveness and utility could be limited except in benign threat environments."² Therefore, we believe it is a vital national security interest for a Next Generation Bomber to achieve an initial operational capability by 2018.

As our nation reconstructs its economic foundation, so too must we reconstitute the basis to project global air power. Our tanker and bomber fleets have been the bedrock of this unique national capability. Therefore, as our aircraft become increasingly obsolete and unsupportable, we respectfully request that the Administration commit to the expedited procurement of a new aerial refueling tanker and the development of a Next Generation Bomber that achieves an initial operating capability by 2018.

Thank you for your attention to these matters.

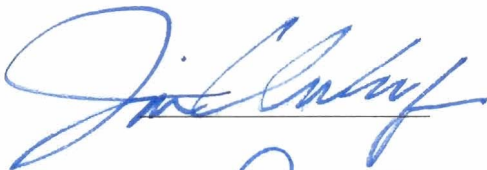
Sincerely,


Devin Hatch


Richard Shelby



Jeff Bond


Mark E. Amodeo


Jim Cooper


Sam Frankel


Pat Roberts


Jim Johnson

² "Long-Range Strike White Paper," HQ USAF/A5RC, 2007, p.13. *quoted in* Anthony Murch, The Next Generation Bomber: Background, Oversight Issues, and Options for Congress, Congressional Research Service p. 5 (March 7, 2008).







