

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

September 12, 2018

Senator Richard Shelby  
Chairman, Senate Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Defense  
The Capitol, Room S-128  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Kay Granger  
Chairwoman, House Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Defense  
The Capitol, Room H-305  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senator Dick Durbin  
Vice Chairman, Senate Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Defense  
The Capitol, Room S-128  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Peter J. Visclosky  
Ranking Member, House Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Defense  
The Capitol, Room H-305  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Granger, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Visclosky:

We write to request that the Defense Appropriations Conference Committee adopt the House position for A-10C Thunderbolt II wing replacement funding in the Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) Defense Appropriations bill. The A-10 is currently one of the most utilized aircraft across multiple theaters. For this reason, the FY19 House and Senate National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA), the FY19 NDAA conference report, and the FY19 House-passed defense appropriations bill each included \$65 million above the Air Force request to accelerate re-winging of the A-10 fleet, for a total of \$144 million. We ask that you fund this line item to the fully authorized \$144 million amount to mitigate aircraft groundings and prevent a critical capability gap in the operational fleet.

The A-10 “Warthog” has continued to be instrumental in U.S. contingency operations around the globe, including: providing critical anti-armor capabilities in defense of the Korean peninsula; deterring Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and the Baltics; checking illegal Chinese military expansion in the South China Sea; targeting the Taliban’s sources of illicit revenue in Afghanistan; and permanently driving the Islamic State (ISIS) out of Iraq and Syria. In fact, as of September 6, 2018, the A-10 has dropped roughly 20 percent of all munitions—more than any other aircraft—in the fight against ISIS and had flown 12 percent of all sorties deployed since counter-ISIS operations began in 2014.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to its ground attack capabilities, the A-10 is uniquely designed for life-saving missions like Close Air Support (CAS) and Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR). The former protects troops in harm’s way while the latter involves rescuing downed pilots or other isolated personnel from enemy territory before they become prisoners of war. A-10 pilots specifically

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<sup>1</sup> AFCENT via USAF HLD, 6 Sept. 2018.

train for these missions because the A-10 has the best lethality, loiter time, and survivability to succeed in each of these mission sets.

Congress has taken clear and concrete steps to preserve the remaining 281 A-10C aircraft in the fleet over the last several years. In FY16, Congress: fully funded the fleet, prohibited the use of any funds to retire any additional A-10s; required the Air Force to maintain a minimum of 171 combat-coded A-10s; and directed the Air Force to commission an independent assessment of the required capabilities and mission platform to replace the A-10.

The FY17 NDAA and defense appropriations bill continued this trend by: preserving the current fleet of 281 A-10s; again requiring a minimum of 171 combat-coded A-10s; mandating adequate maintainers and a regular depot schedule; protecting A-10s in the boneyard from premature destruction; and asking for a plan in conjunction with the FY18 budget request to prevent any A-10s from becoming unflyable due to wing deterioration. Congress also required the Air Force to conduct a comparison or “fly-off” between the F-35A and the A-10C in CAS, CSAR, and Forward Air Control-Airborne (FAC-A) missions. This provision prevented any retirements until the full operational test and evaluation (OT&E) process for the F-35A is complete and an analysis is done by the Air Force on mission gaps.

The FY18 NDAA also established a requirement for the Air Force to maintain no less than 1,970 fighter aircraft. The A-10 fleet is a vital part of maintaining this force inventory.

Although the Air Force set their initial FY19 request for A-10 wing replacement funding at \$80 million, which would provide for between 8-12 wing sets,<sup>2</sup> the FY19 NDAA specifically authorized \$144 million for the A-10 wing replacement program--\$65 million above the Air Force’s request. Air Force officials worked closely with both the House and Senate Armed Services committee staff to calculate a maximum amount of funding which could be executed for the A-10 depot program in FY19. An additional \$65 million would provide for another 6-9 sets, which would enable work for 14-21 A-10s in the first year of contract production. This collaboration between the executive and legislative branches underscores the importance of ensuring full funding is available immediately so that the re-wing project can be completed as quickly and efficiently as possible.

In testimony in front of the House Armed Services Committee in March of this year, Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson confirmed the service’s plan to fly the A-10 “at least until 2030.”<sup>3</sup> 173 A-10s have already received new wings. But, as the Air Force was considering whether to decommission the A-10 fleet, the contract for wing production was allowed expire before the remaining 108 wing sets could be completed. These remaining 108 A-10 aircraft—which make up one-third of the fleet—are still in desperate need of wing set replacements to safely continue mission assignments into the coming years.

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<sup>2</sup> Testimony of Air Force Secretary Heather Wilson in front of the House Armed Services Committee regarding the FY19 USAF Budget Request, March 2018.

<sup>3</sup> <https://mcsally.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/mcsally-gets-air-force-secretary-public-record-first-time-keeping-10>

We are encouraged to see that the Air Force has issued its request for purchase to industry for procurement of as many as 112 sets of new wings for the service's remaining "thin wing" A-10 Warthog ground attack aircraft. However, the remaining A-10s need the new wing sets *now*. Increased operational tempo and high utilization of the Warthog's capability to perform a wide range of missions have meant that the wings on these aircraft are rapidly approaching the end of their service life. Further, re-winging the planes has already been unduly delayed since the Air Force ended the first such upgrade program early, which left dozens of the ground attackers without the new "thick wings" that would keep them safe to fly into the 2040s. The Air Force has already had to resort to a "collaborative approach" of harvesting old wing sets from retired A-10s in order to prevent wing-related groundings in the 2018 fiscal year.<sup>4</sup> In April, Air Force Lieutenant General Jerry Harris, the service's Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans, Programs, and Requirements, told legislators that, without accelerated wing replacement funding, the Air Force may be forced to ground as many as 55 A-10s through 2025.<sup>5</sup>

Now that the Air Force has confirmed its plans to maintain the A-10 fleet into the 2030's, the remaining 108 wing sets must be delivered as soon as possible. The A-10 remains the only aircraft in the U.S. military specifically designed for CAS and CSAR. If one-third of the A-10 fleet were to be grounded, it would create a significant capability gap at a time when our servicemembers are facing increasing threat environments and ground combat scenarios. The funding amount authorized in the House, Senate, and conference NDAs and requested in the House defense appropriations bill would enable the revival of a wing production line and begin the process of supplying these remaining aircraft with the new wings they need to keep flying safely in the future until we have a proven, tested replacement for its capabilities.

Congress has clearly willed over recent fiscal years that the A-10 fleet be sustained in its entirety. Further, this increased funding level was specifically added into both the FY19 House and Senate defense authorization bills, the FY19 NDAA conference report (which has been signed into law by President Trump), and the FY19 House defense appropriations bill, which passed the House in June. As such, we urge you to fund A-10 wing replacement to the fully authorized level of \$144 million to keep these battle-tested aircraft in the air and in the fight.

Sincerely,



Martha McSally  
Member of Congress



Johnny Isakson  
United States Senator

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/21158/usaf-wont-get-any-new-a-10-wings-for-a-decade-and-thats-bad-news-for-the-warthog>

<sup>5</sup> USAF A5/8, as of April, 2018; see also <http://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/21158/usaf-wont-get-any-new-a-10-wings-for-a-decade-and-thats-bad-news-for-the-warthog>.



David A. Perdue  
United States Senator



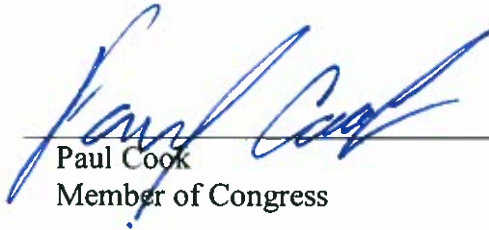
James E. Risch  
United States Senator



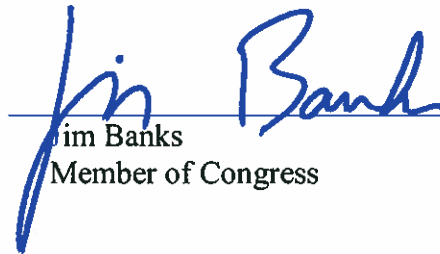
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Cc:

Senator Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman, Senate Committee on Appropriations

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Chairman, House Appropriations Committee

Representative Nita Lowey  
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