

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

June 29, 2018

Dr. Heather Wilson
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Wilson:

We write you regarding recent news reports highlighting possible issues related to the maintenance record and mission availability of the C-135 aircraft of the 55th Wing based at Offutt Air Force Base.

In a series of articles in the Omaha World-Herald published beginning on June 24th, 2018, several allegations were made regarding the safety and maintenance of the C-135 based airframes of the 55th Wing. Overall, the series raised several questions of concern, and as such we respectfully request further clarification on the Air Force's efforts to maintain the fleet.

As members of Congress, we appreciate the Air Force's request for additional funds to make several important investments in the C-135 airframes of the 55th Wing. This includes the \$222.17 million for new planes to replace the OC-135B for Open Skies flights, as well as the \$394.53 million to support the 17 RC-135V/W Rivet Joint, three RC-135S Cobra Ball, and two RC-135U Combat Sent mission aircraft performing Air Combat Command (ACC) operational missions. Additionally, the request includes the planned conversion of three modernized KC-135Rs into WC-135R Constant Phoenix aircraft. Overall, this represents a substantial investment in the 55th Wing, and we were proud to support the authorization of this funding in the FY 2019 National Defense Authorization Act, the Senate version of which fully authorized funding for all of these planned recapitalizations and modernizations. We look forward to continuing to support this request throughout the remainder of the budget process.

That said, the safety, security, and continued mission effectiveness of the 55th Wing remains an issue of critical focus. As such, we ask that you provide written responses to address the following issues within the 55th Wing's C-135 fleet, to include the RC-135V/W Rivet Joint, RC-135S Cobra Ball, RC-135U Combat Sent, WC-135 Constant Phoenix, OC-135B Open Skies, and TC-135 Rivet Joint Trainers:

- What is your assessment of the health, readiness, and overall safety of the 55th Wing?
- Has the Air Force observed any changes to the average monthly "health of the fleet" aggregation for the 55th Wing?
- Is there any trend toward an increase in maintenance issues or safety problems?
- Do you assess that there is any increase in risk to the safety of pilots and aircrews due to current maintenance issues within the C-135 airframes of the 55th Wing?
- What is the Air Force's long term plan to sustain and recapitalize this critical capability?

We thank you for your diligent and swift attention to this request. The men and women of the 55th Wing provide an immeasurable service to the nation, and we are committed to continue doing everything possible on their behalf to ensure the success and safety of these missions.

Sincerely,



Deb Fischer
United States Senator



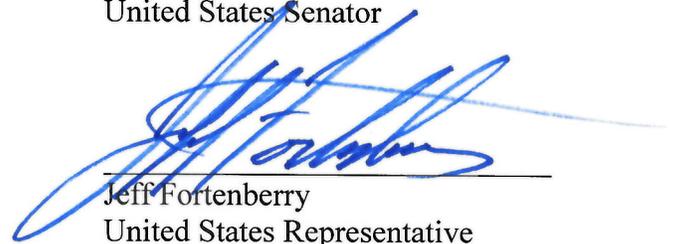
Don Bacon
United States Representative



Adrian Smith
United States Representative



Ben Sasse
United States Senator



Jeff Fortenberry
United States Representative