



THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

SEP 29 2009

The Honorable Carl Levin  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am writing as a follow up to our discussion last week regarding the retirement of strategic airlift aircraft.

The Department fully supports the language in Section 311 of the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2009 (Public Law 111-32) which requires a minimum of 292 strategic airlift aircraft as reflected in the Department's 2005 Mobility Capability Study.

Since the release of MCS-05, Congress has funded an additional 33 C-17s the Department did not request. The addition of these C-17 aircraft influenced our decision to upgrade only 52 of 111 C-5s with the Reliability Enhancement and Re-engining Program (RERP). Congress is now considering adding another 10 C-17s in the FY2010 budget.

The Department's current fleet of 324 aircraft (213 C-17/111 C-5) is in excess of strategic airlift needs, driving increased operating costs at the expense of other priorities. Each C-5A costs over \$13 million in annual operating expenses. Since we are over our current requirement by eight aircraft, as determined by the analysis conducted during the C-5 RERP Nunn-McCurdy recertification, it costs the Department over \$100 million a year in excess expenditures. These costs will only grow if we receive additional C-17s and/or delay the ability for the Department to retire excess aircraft.

Initial indications from Mobility Capability Requirements Study 2016 show the strategic balance will not fundamentally change. This leads me to believe: 1) the Department does not need additional C-17s to meet strategic needs; and 2) the Department needs to begin shedding excess strategic airlift inventory by retiring a portion of the C-5A fleet now. The Department requests your support and authority to allow the proper management of the strategic airlift fleet to meet the Nation's requirements.

Thank you for your strong interest and continued support of the Department.

Sincerely,

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