

United States Senate

May 16, 2017

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND
FORESTRY
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL
RESOURCES
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

The Honorable Heather Wilson
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Wilson:

Congratulations on your confirmation as the 24th Secretary of the Air Force. I look forward to working with you to ensure that our Air Force remains the preeminent force in air, space, and cyberspace.

As you know, Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, Montana, is home to one third of our nation's Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) force. Most of our current Minuteman III missiles have been in service for almost 50 years. While our airmen have diligently maintained this aging system, we must field a modern Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) in order to meet 21st Century security requirements. Secretary Mattis recently testified before the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee on the deterrent value of maintaining a nuclear triad and noted that the ICBM sends a "very sobering reminder to any enemy that would choose to test us." I encourage you to ensure that the Minuteman replacement remains on time and on budget.

An effective nuclear deterrent also requires effective security. With 165 ICBM launch facilities spanning some 14,000 square miles in some of the most unforgiving terrain in the United States, I have strong concerns that our airmen must rely on the Vietnam era UH-1N to provide adequate security. I've recently discussed this matter with Secretary Mattis and Deputy Secretary Work, and am encouraged by their commitment to resolve this lingering readiness gap. I urge you to field a suitable replacement as soon as possible.

Montana is also proud to host more than one-half of the recently expanded Powder River Training Complex. While I value the rich training opportunities that 'Big Sky Country' affords, I continue to hear from residents who live inside of the training area who are negatively affected by the associated jet noise and airspace restrictions above their properties. I appreciate the continued diligence of Air Force leadership to minimize adverse impacts to local residents and to be a good neighbor within the training space.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to meeting with you soon to discuss these matters further. I invite you to join me on an upcoming visit to Malmstrom AFB in Great Falls, to observe first-hand the hard work our airmen are doing to keep the Minuteman III at the ready.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator