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January 24, 2014

The Honorable Deborah Lee James
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary James:

As you know, section 143 of the fiscal year 2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), states that you “may not retire, prepare to retire, or place in storage” any additional A-10 aircraft before December 31, 2014. It has come to my attention that the Air Force may be taking steps to prepare to retire the A-10 in violation of current law.

The A-10 is our nation’s best close air support platform, and hundreds of brave Americans are alive today because of the unique capabilities of this aircraft. As you know, General Odierno testified that “The A-10 is the best close air support platform we have today.” General Welsh has said the A-10 “...is the best airplane in the world at what it does.”

Despite this, I have received reports that Air Combat Command (ACC) has issued orders to cease all future Suite 8 development of the operational flight program (OFP) for the A-10. If true, this would appear to be a significant step to “prepare to retire” the A-10.

Among other things, Suite 8, as I understand it, is required to ensure that A-10 aircraft have an effective identification friend or foe (IFF) Mode 5—which the Air Force is apparently requiring be fielded on all airframes beginning in 2015. This IFF Mode 5 capability is central to the A-10’s continued operational effectiveness. Without IFF Mode 5, combatant commanders will be unlikely to allow the A-10 to operate in contested areas. Equally troubling, I understand that a failure to complete the Suite 8 development will prevent any new subsystems from being installed and integrated into the airframe’s avionics architecture.

If the reports I have received are accurate, this ACC action represents an Air Force decision to end future A-10 software upgrades and prevent the A-10 from operating in contested environments in FY 2015 and beyond. In short, the Air Force appears to be taking steps to retire the A-10 in violation of the law before Congress has had a chance to receive and scrutinize the Department of Defense’s FY 2015 budget request as it relates to the A-10.

I ask you to confirm without delay whether ACC has made this decision regarding Suite 8. If so, I ask you to reverse this action which I believe is in violation of the law.

Thank you for your service to our country. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kelly A. Ayotte". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Kelly A. Ayotte
United States Senate

cc:

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

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
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