

From: senator@casey.senate.gov
To: rl_gray@hotmail.com
Date: Wed, 30 Jan 2013 18:19:49 -0500

Dear Mr. GRAY:

Thank you for taking the time to contact me regarding the proposed cuts to the Air Force Reserves and Air National Guard in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2013 (FY2013). I appreciate hearing from all Pennsylvanians about the issues that matter most to them.

Pennsylvania is home to the nation's fourth-largest Air National Guard (ANG). We are eternally grateful for the ANG's commitment and sacrifice and must continue to ensure that they are fully supported both during and after their service. In order to represent the interests of Pennsylvania's National Guard community, I am a proud member of the U.S. Senate National Guard Caucus.

The Air National Guard is critical for national security and for Pennsylvania. As such, I strongly supported a freeze to any FY2013 Air Force infrastructure changes and I also supported the establishment of the National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force. The conference committee in December 2012 between the House and the Senate on the NDAA resulted in the removal of the provision which would have frozen any infrastructure changes within the Air Force in FY2013. However, the bill requires the Air Force to maintain a combination of 32 C-130s and C-27Js. The final NDAA, passed in December 2012 and signed into law by President Obama on January 3, 2013, also establishes a National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force to assess future Air Force requirements.

As your United States Senator, I have strongly supported the full operation and funding of the 911th Airlift Wing and the 171st Air Refueling Wing (ARW) at Pittsburgh International Airport, and the 258th Air Traffic Control Squadron (ATCS) in Johnstown.

Since 1943, the 911th Airlift Wing at Pittsburgh International Airport has supported United States Air Force assets and personnel deployed around the world. The unit's primary mission is to organize, recruit and train Air Force Reserve personnel to carry out critical airlift missions in both peace and conflict situations. The 911th currently supports the C-130 Hercules aircraft group, which performs a wide variety of operational missions, including airlift support, aeromedical missions, weather reconnaissance and emergency relief operations. The 911th has also provided critical care for our wounded airmen through an Aeromedical Staging Squadron.

In January 2012, the Department of Defense proposed a variety of structural changes to our Nation's military, including closing the 911th Airlift Wing in Pittsburgh. As your United States Senator, I strongly opposed this proposal and have urged the Department of Defense to reverse course immediately. The 911th has worked hard to become more efficient and integrated into the wider military community. Its efforts, as well as its highly skilled workforce, deserve to be supported.

In addition to supporting critical airlift missions in the United States and overseas, the talented workforce at the 911th Airlift Wing also provides technical and logistical support, civil engineering expertise and emergency medical services. Maintaining and enhancing this highly-skilled workforce is crucial to preserving the United States' superior military edge. Closing the 911th would require this workforce to disband, and it would be extremely difficult and costly to reconstitute it in the future.

In light of our fiscal challenges, the 911th has worked hard to maximize efficiencies. Last year, the Navy confirmed plans to build a Naval Operations Support Center (NOSC) in Pittsburgh.

The Navy presence supports the important concept of joint operations and shows the ability of the 911th to maximize its resources. A groundbreaking ceremony for the new NOSC facility was held on October 6, and the new facility is expected to open in February 2014.

The dedication of the 911th workforce is a testament to the commitment and patriotism of the people of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh citizens have served our country honorably throughout our history and continue to do so throughout our armed forces. The 911th Airlift Reserve Wing in particular should be recognized for distinction — it has consistently met its recruitment goals, while other Air Force Reserve components around the country have fallen short. The people of Pittsburgh want to continue to serve, and we should be looking for ways to expand, not contract, those opportunities.

I am committed to supporting the 911th and have worked hard to contest the Air Force's proposal to close the installation. On February 4, 2012, I sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta expressing my strong opposition to the proposed closure of the installation and urging the Air Force to reverse its decision. In a meeting with Air Force leaders on February 9, I emphasized the cost-efficient practices of the 911th and its importance to the Pittsburgh region.

Rather than closing this important installation, I argued that the Air Force should look to close installations that are not using taxpayer money wisely or are located overseas. The Air Force has not provided detailed information on how the 911th was chosen for closure. On February 17, I sent a letter to Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley requesting the documentation used to justify the proposed closure. I repeated this request in a letter to Secretary Donley on March 2, and in another letter to Secretary Panetta on March 5.

On March 14, I sent a letter to Chairman Daniel Inouye of the Senate Committee on Appropriations and Chairman Carl Levin of the Senate Committee on Armed Services requesting their support in opposing the proposed closure of the 911th in Pittsburgh. The letter expressed my concerns that the Department of Defense had not provided the justification for the proposal or documentation of the proposed closure's impact on the Pittsburgh area, both of which are required by law. Chairman Levin and Ranking Member John McCain of the Senate Committee on Armed Services sent a letter to Secretary Panetta requesting that the Department of Defense refrain from implementing the proposals included in the budget request until Congress has had time to fully review and act on the request. I highlighted this specific issue in a letter to Secretary Donley on March 23.

I have also made the case for keeping the 911th open during a phone call with President Obama on March 14. On March 17, I met with Vice President Biden in Pittsburgh to emphasize the low

cost to the Department of Defense of supporting the 911th and the prospect of higher costs to reconstitute the 911th's outstanding workforce and capabilities in the future. I will continue to engage with the White House to highlight the importance of the 911th to our national security and to southwestern Pennsylvania.

On May 9, I met with Secretary Donley to discuss the Air Force's restructuring proposal. I repeated my concern that the Air Force would be wasting a valuable resource by closing the 911th and that the Air Force did not conduct the proper analysis prior to making this proposal. I also gave a letter to Secretary Donley requesting specific data on the cost and cost-effectiveness of the 911th compared with other installations around the country and the impact of the proposed closure on the local community.

On May 30, I sent a letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid urging him to support the provision that would prevent the closure of the 911th for at least one additional year as the Senate debated the NDAA. On July 12, I sent a second letter to Chairman Inouye requesting that the Committee on Appropriations include funding for the 911th in its FY2013 Defense Appropriations bill as authorized by the NDAA.

On June 7, upon my request, Secretary Donley, took the opportunity to visit the Pittsburgh Air Reserve Station to see first-hand the efficiencies of the base. In addition, the local community and military advocates spoke directly to the Secretary regarding their concerns for the closure of the base.

On December 21, 2012, Senator Toomey and I sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta regarding the National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force in the FY2013 NDAA. The letter urged that the Air Force, pending completion of the Commission's work, to continue stationing C-130 aircraft at the Pittsburgh Air Reserve Station. This action would enable the Air Force to avail itself of the unit's deep bench of experience and outstanding support from the Pittsburgh International Airport.

Most recently, on January 4, 2013, Senator Toomey and I met with Lieutenant General Michael Moeller, Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Plans and Programs. Lieutenant General Moeller plays a key role in Air Force basing decisions and leads a working group which will determine the placement of 32 C-130s and C-27Js. During the meeting, I argued that the 911th should receive some of these C-130s and warned the Air Force against moving any of the 911th's assets without presenting a detailed analysis. I made clear that the Pittsburgh Air Reserve Station is an ideal location for C-130s because of its efficiency and skilled workforce.

The 911th Airlift Wing is a model of efficiency and innovation, and its high recruitment numbers demonstrate the desire of the people of Pittsburgh to continue to serve. Closing the 911th would deprive our military of an important asset and would have a significant impact on the Pittsburgh area. I will continue to demand answers from the Air Force and to push the Department of Defense to abandon its plans to close the installation.

The strength of Pennsylvania's Air National Guard is also demonstrated by the 171st Air Refueling Wing (ARW) at Pittsburgh International Airport. The 171st ARW has supported

United States Air Force assets and personnel for more than sixty years. In the past two decades, members of the 171st have deployed in support of Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield in the Middle East, Operation Allied Force in former Yugoslavia, Operation Joint Forge in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 171st also played a key role in responding to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and to Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Most recently, members of the 171st ARW deployed in support of Operation Odyssey Dawn to enforce the no-fly zone over Libya in 2011. The 171st ARW is currently assigned 16 KC-135 Stratotanker aircraft, which provide air refueling capabilities to Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps aircraft. The KC-135 has also been used in aeromedical evacuations.

In July 2012, I sent a letter with Senator Toomey, supporting the strengths of the 171st and requested the Air Force consider the 171st for the new KC-46A aircraft. In January 2013, the Air Force announced the 171st ARW will be one of the first guard units to be considered for the new KC-46A mission. The Air Force will make a final decision on the placement of the KC-46A tankers in 2014.

The 171st AWR and the 258th Air Traffic Control Squadron (ATCS) in Johnstown have been targeted for reductions. As your United States Senator, I oppose this plan and have urged the Air Force to reverse its decision.

For nearly thirty years, the 258th ATCS has supported U.S. Air Force operations around the world. Located at the John P. Murtha Cambria County Airport, the 258th ATCS trains and equips air traffic control and maintenance personnel for rapid deployment in the United States and around the world. Members of the 258th have deployed in support of U.S. military missions in a variety of critical locations in Europe, South America, the Middle East and Asia. The 258th also provides air traffic control tower services for the airport and operates a Low Altitude Surveillance Radar for the region.

The 258th ATCS and the 171st ARW play an important role in supporting U.S. military assets and missions around the world, and employ a dedicated and talented workforce. The citizens of western Pennsylvania have served our country honorably throughout our history and continue to do so throughout our armed forces. Removing assets and personnel from these bases would have a negative impact on our military's readiness and on the region. I will continue to urge the Department of Defense to reconsider its proposal to make cuts to these important bases in Pennsylvania.

Again, thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. Please do not hesitate to contact me in the future about this or any other matter of importance to you.

For more information on this or other issues, I encourage you to visit my web site, <http://casey.senate.gov>. I hope you will find this online office as a comprehensive resource to stay up-to-date on my work in Washington, request assistance from my office or share with me your thoughts on the issues that matter most to you and to Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

Bob Casey
United States Senator

P.S. If you would like to respond to this message, please use the contact form on my website: <http://casey.senate.gov/contact/>