

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 13, 2014

The Honorable Carl M. Levin  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Armed Services  
Russell Senate Office Building, Room 228  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James M. Inhofe  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Armed Services  
Russell Senate Office Building, Room 228  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Howard “Buck” McKeon  
Chairman  
House Committee on Armed Services  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Armed Services  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

As the Committees on Armed Services in the Senate and House attempt to reconcile the two versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for 2015, any final provision that would permit the Department of Defense to transfer maintenance personnel away from A-10 squadrons or reduce flying hours in fiscal year 2015 would represent a back-door divestment of our best close-air-support asset and directly contradict the bipartisan majority will of both the House and Senate Committees on Armed Services.

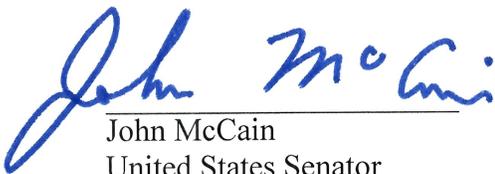
In fact, our A-10 amendment to the NDAA, that was passed by the Senate Committee on Armed Services with an overwhelming, bipartisan voice vote explicitly prohibited “significant changes to manning levels with respect to any A-10 aircraft squadrons.”

Faced with the imminent prospect that its misguided proposal to prematurely divest the A-10 would be defeated in Congress, over the last few weeks, the Air Force has conveyed to Members and staff wholly specious and belated concerns that it must immediately transfer experienced A-10 maintenance personnel from the Air Force's most cost-efficient and combat-proven close air support aircraft in order to fulfill decades-long anticipated maintenance requirements for the F-35A. This is, in our view, a false choice that should be soundly rejected based on the overwhelming consensus of our ground troops and commanders and the clear intent of Congress.

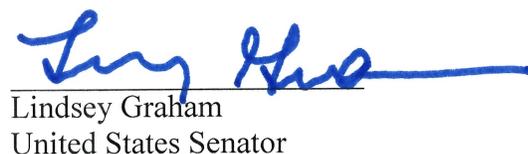
There are a variety of ways to address any potential shortfall in F-35A maintenance personnel and help keep the F-35A on track to achieve initial operational capability in late 2016, including, among other things, using contract personnel and mobilized service members from the National Guard and Reserve. Despite repeated inquiries regarding an analysis of all such alternatives, the Air Force has failed to explain why they are not practicable.

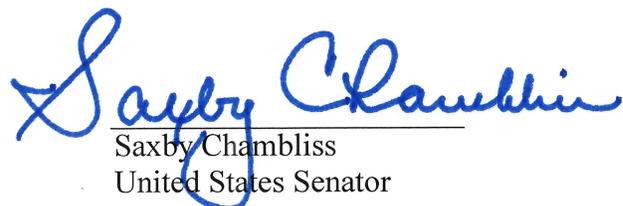
We strongly believe that the annual National Defense Authorization Act, which has been passed every year over the last half-century, is strongest when it thoroughly considers and questions proposals from the Department of Defense and reflects the majority will of members of Congress. We are convinced that, particularly in the face of specious, eleventh-hour arguments offered by the Air Force, any outcome that permits the Air Force to gut the readiness of A-10 units by depriving them of maintenance personnel and flying hours would contradict this principle. We strongly believe the Air Force has a variety of means available to meet F-35A maintenance requirements without targeting our nation's most combat-effective close air support aircraft.

Sincerely,

  
John McCain  
United States Senator

  
Kelly Ayotte  
United States Senator

  
Lindsey Graham  
United States Senator

  
Saxby Chambliss  
United States Senator