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**United States Senate**  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

CHRISTIAN D. BROSE, STAFF DIRECTOR  
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August 28, 2015

The Honorable Ashton Carter  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

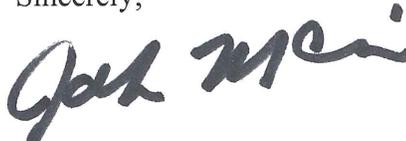
While the recently announced cost overrun on the Air Force's KC-46A tanker is deeply unfortunate, it is encouraging that the contractor, and not the taxpayer, will bear this expense. That said, the resulting delays to the program's internal deadlines for completing key qualification and planned ground and flight testing activities are indicative of a program at risk of not meeting its planned delivery milestones. As a result, I am concerned that the recent problems with the tanker modernization program could prevent the Department of Defense from delivering this critical capability to our warfighters as promised and on schedule.

This program is one of the Air Force's top acquisition priorities. That makes it all the more necessary for you to ensure that tradeoffs are not made that would limit the ability of both the Department and the Congress to know the full scope of any issues discovered during testing before committing to aircraft production. The KC-46A production decision has been delayed several times, and is no longer expected to occur by the second quarter of 2016, as originally planned. The contractor has chosen to begin early production activities at its own initiative and cost in order to fulfill its contractual obligation. While we appreciate that decision, a concurrent test and production strategy increases the risk of redesign and retrofit to address potential issues found in testing, and has potential implications for schedule and cost to both the KC-46A program and beyond. I fully expect that, should such issues arise, the government and taxpayer would not be responsible for these additional costs and would seek appropriate consideration.

All too often under our current defense acquisition system, the Department has started programs that were poorly conceived or inherently unexecutable, with the aim of getting programs into development and production where they can become notoriously difficult to change meaningfully or, if necessary, terminate. The KC-46A program must not become another such failure. Our committee will continue to exercise close oversight to ensure that those defense officials who are responsible for this program enforce the schedule and deliver combat capability to our warfighters on time and at maximum possible value, with reasonable cost to the taxpayer.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter and for your continued service to our nation.

Sincerely,



John McCain  
Chairman