

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 13, 2014

The Honorable Deborah Lee James
Secretary
United States Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary James:

As the next selection process for Joint Strike Fighter (F-35A) beddown approaches, we are writing to express our hope that the criteria used by the Air Force in determining future base selection will more accurately reflect airspace ownership and the weather associated with training airspace.

The most important aspect of a base's associated airspace is the training accomplished once within the boundaries, not the distance from the airspace to the base. That said, it is concerning the quality of joint air-to-ground training was far outweighed by the distance of the training airspace. Additionally, Air Traffic Control Assigned Airspace (ATCAA) was not accurately scored in the 2009 report. Units that routinely utilize an ATCAA for military training received no credit for this airspace unless it was situated directly above a training range. Many units have ATCAA's extending beyond the boundaries of the training range which are extremely valuable to fifth-generation fighter training. Ironically, this scoring anomaly penalizes over-land airspace users where the most effective air-to-ground training for the F-35A will take place.

Airspace ownership, which provides incredible flexibility to maximize mission success, was also left out of the previous criteria. Scoring on this should be weighted differently for bases that share and have to schedule their airspace with multiple other units. The number of bases and units utilizing training airspace directly impacts the real world training that is available. Single-unit ownership allows for maximum flexibility in the event of maintenance delays or inclement weather, and should be scored accordingly.

Another critical factor in determining a mission's success is the weather in the airspace where the majority of tactical training occurs. We would contend the weather score for future basing decisions should be redefined into two separate categories: a "Base Weather Score" and an "Airspace Weather Multiplication Factor." This model would capture the two key weather components for fighter aviation: the ability to launch and recover jets, and the ability to get quality training in clear airspace.

Lastly, it is our understanding once Air Combat Command (ACC) develops the criteria for the next round of F-35A basing selection, the criteria is then validated by the Basing Request Review Panel (BRRP), the Strategic Basing Executive Steering Group (SB-ESG) and the Air Force Corporate Structure (AFCS). Then the criteria goes to your office for approval. Only after your office has approved the criteria is a Congressional "Criteria Brief" scheduled. Receiving a brief only after a final determination has been made by your office is of little value to those we are entrusted to represent. In order to have a better understanding of the process leading up to the selection of certain bases for F-35A beddown, we respectfully request we receive a brief prior to final approval of the criteria by your office.

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It is our belief that if a new criteria which emphasizes training potential, including key factors of airspace ownership and weather associated with the airspace, is adopted, we will realize the most effective and efficient use of this multi-billion dollar weapon system. We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



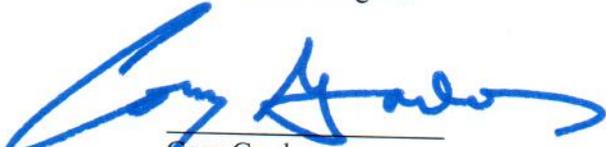
Mike Coffman
Member of Congress



Mark Udall
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



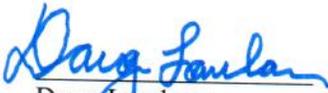
Cory Gardner
Member of Congress



Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress



Scott R. Tipton
Member of Congress



Doug Lamborn
Member of Congress