

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 18, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta  
Secretary  
United States Department of Defense  
1300 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

We write again to communicate our concern with the Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 Department of Defense budget request to Congress, as well as with the Air Force's proposed force structure changes. Understandably, the Fort Smith, Arkansas community has brought to our attention a number of concerns regarding the proposed mission changes at the 188th Fighter Wing, Arkansas Air National Guard (ANG), Fort Smith, Arkansas. This letter summarizes these concerns expressed in the enclosed approximately 2,000 individual letters from citizens. We share the concerns of the Fort Smith community.

The community and Arkansas Congressional Delegation strongly believe that removing fighter aircraft from Fort Smith, Arkansas, is not fiscally sound and will significantly affect joint training. While we understand that the proposed force structure changes are the result of a constrained budgetary environment, we are concerned the Air Force may not have developed a robust basing plan and cost analysis to help guide mission assignments.

Fort Smith, Arkansas, is the lowest-cost fighter unit in the Air Force. The A-10's at Fort Smith combine the lowest-cost fighter aircraft, in the lowest-cost command, with one of the lowest-cost bases. With the closest and one of the largest training airspaces in the force, 188th pilots train more while flying shorter missions. This equates to significantly lower required flight hours than other Air Force squadrons. While active duty fighter readiness has recently suffered due to reduced flight hour funding, Fort Smith has repeatedly returned flight hours, resulting in millions of dollars in taxpayer savings. In addition, Fort Smith has among the lowest base operating costs in the military. This includes the lowest energy costs per square foot and the lowest housing costs in the ANG. For these reasons, we question if the Air Force considered unit savings in developing their FY 2013 budget proposal.

Due to the adjacent Fort Chaffee Maneuver Training Center, Arkansas ANG pilots, together with Navy SEALs, Air Force Special Operators, and Army Green Berets routinely plan, execute and debrief robust combat scenarios in the nearby training areas. This degree of face-to-face interaction exponentially increases the skills used in future combat. For this reason, we question

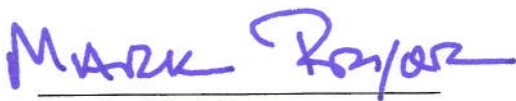
if the Air Force considered joint military training capabilities in developing their FY 2013 budget proposal.

The size, availability, and base proximity provide for one of the best training areas in the ANG. Additionally, strong community support and sparsely populated training areas minimize environmental and encroachment limitations. This airspace provides the ideal location for the A-10 mission and future fighter aircraft missions. The 188th Fighter Wing has some of the newest and most modern facilities in the ANG. This state-of-the-art airbase saves taxpayer dollars and has existing capacity for additional partnerships with little or no modification. For these reasons, we question if the Air Force considered existing military infrastructure in developing their FY 2013 budget proposal.

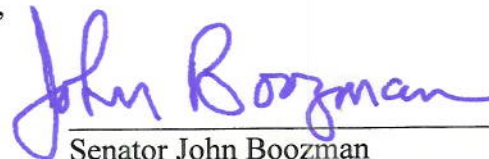
We have repeatedly asked to see the cost analysis used by the Air Force and the Department of Defense to develop the FY 2013 budget proposal. We have yet to receive this information. We ask for this information as lawmakers in order to make informed policy and budgetary decisions and to respond to the questions, concerns and needs of Arkansans. Again, we ask to see this analysis and remind the Department that a primary duty of Congress is to provide oversight of the Executive Branch of our government. To accomplish this core function, Congress must have access to the data and information used by the Department to formulate recommendations and proposals.

In closing, we request access to the cost analysis used by the Air Force and the Department of Defense in making FY 2013 budget recommendations. We ask for your commitment to develop and maintain an effective and transparent strategic basing process. In order to legislate effectively, it is critical that Congress is able to review the data and criteria used to make these recommendations in advance of drafting authorization and appropriation legislation. Further, we request that you and your staff review the enclosed letters from the Fort Smith community. We ask that you provide a final response by May 1, 2012. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide further information.

Sincerely,



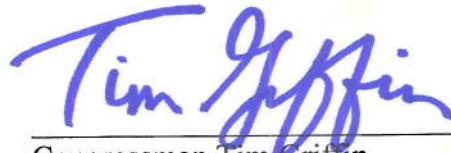
Senator Mark Pryor



Senator John Boozman



Congressman Rick Crawford



Congressman Tim Griffin



Congressman Steve Womack



Congressman Mike Ross