

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 29, 2016

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

We write to express our continued concern regarding the replacement of the UH-1N helicopters. Over the past several months, the Commander of U.S. Strategic Command repeatedly urged the Department of Defense to replace the current fleet of UH-1N helicopters that are responsible for protecting our nation's intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) fleet. After assessing the security situation facing our nation's missile sites, the Combatant Commander concluded that he cannot rely on the current fleet of helicopters, deeming them insufficient for addressing the current threats to our national security. As the current UH-1N helicopters are operating on national security waivers – incapable of meeting speed, range, payload, armament, and survivability requirements – we must replace these aircraft as expeditiously as possible.

Reacting to the Combatant Commander's urgent calls to replace this ailing fleet of helicopters, the Air Force determined the best acquisition strategy was to use the Economy Act to enable rapid fielding of replacement helicopters. The Air Force emphasized that procuring H-60 Black Hawk helicopters off of the currently operating Army line would be the "fastest path" and the "most efficient and convenient sources to satisfy Air Force requirements."

In response, the Senate supported the Air Force's proposal. The Senate passed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (NDAA) this month, including language that would increase the budget request by \$302.3 million to accelerate the Air Force's plan by using these additional funds to procure eight HH-60 Black Hawk helicopters using the Army's current contract. Likewise, the Senate Appropriations Committee reported the Department of Defense Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2017 that included \$75.0 million above the President's budget request and directed the Air Force to expedite procurement of replacement aircraft in accordance with current law.

Nevertheless, the Air Force announced in late May that the Department had changed direction and would instead pursue an acquisition plan that, by the Air Force's own admission, will add years to the time it will take to replace the UH-1N missile field support helicopters. As such, we request that the Department provide a full justification for implementing an acquisition strategy that will delay the replacement program by several years when the Air Force can field helicopters that will meet requirements sooner. At a time when our nation faces unprecedented threats, we cannot afford to prolong the security vulnerabilities of our ICBM missile fields for several more years. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate



JON TESTER
United States Senate



JOHN HOEVEN
United States Senate




JOHN BARRASSO
United States Senate



JACK REED
United States Senate



STEVE DAINES
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