

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 31, 2013

The Honorable Dick Durbin  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Defense  
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Durbin:

As you start to consider possible conference scenarios for the Fiscal Year 2014 defense appropriations bill, we write to request your support for the Air Force's Combat Rescue Helicopter (CRH) program at the funding level of \$333.5 million appropriated by the House of Representatives, as it is closest to the Air Force's request for this program.

As you know, the CRH program is intended to replace aging HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters with the latest technology in order to better meet the highly specialized mission of combat search and rescue. The Air Force's combat search and rescue team—one of the highest utilized assets in the military—has performed thousands of saves over the last decade, repeatedly proving how critical this mission is. We know you share our commitment in ensuring that the Air Force continues to have the necessary assets to accomplish its mission successfully.

Unfortunately, the Air Force's efforts to date to recapitalize the aging helicopter fleet have not been encouraging. But after two failed competitions for new aircraft, we believe the Air Force has finally put together an acquisition strategy that can succeed. In setting up a technically acceptable, best value selection, the Air Force should have a strong chance of avoiding the protests that brought the previous competitions down.

We understand that you remain supportive of the CRH program but have continued concerns regarding affordability. Through fixed price incentive contracts, the Air Force is convinced its current strategy will be cost-effective. However, the bigger issue for the Air Force is whether it can afford the entire program while facing decreasing defense spending coupled with sequestration. While we appreciate the intent of your mark, we fear it could jeopardize not only the execution of the program in FY14, but support for the entire program within the Air Force given the competing budgetary demands. Now is the time to replace these aircraft, and the CRH program is the Air Force's best opportunity.

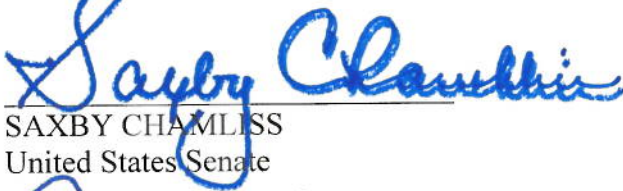
We appreciate your willingness to continue to work with us on a more affordable way forward for the CRH program, and reiterate our hope that you will support an appropriations level closer to the House mark. Because the contract award is delayed, we understand that a reduction similar to the House mark is close to being correct in order to keep the program on track for a December award. In addition, we believe that including language directing the Air Force to continue its support for the program would be helpful in ensuring its success.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL  
United States Senate



SAXBY CHAMLISS  
United States Senate



CHARLES E. SCHUMER  
United States Senate



CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY  
United States Senate



PATRICK LEAHY  
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