

November 24, 2010

The Honorable Michael Donley  
Secretary  
Department of the Air Force  
Room 4E878  
The Pentagon, 20330-1670  
Dear Secretary Donley and General Schwartz:

General Norton Schwartz  
Chief of Staff  
United States Air Force  
Room 4E924  
The Pentagon, 20330-1670

Gentlemen,

We want to thank you for your recent notification that the Montana Air National Guard in Great Falls has been selected as the preferred site for the next round of C-27J basing. The Montana Air National Guard has proven time and again the men and women who serve have are dedicated to excellence and exceed expectations on a continuing basis. We would cite their recent acquisition of the F-15's and ramping up training to fully mission capable, far ahead of schedule, as just one example of their excellence and response to our nations needs. As a result, the Montana Air National Guard F-15s, pilots and personnel have been assigned to conduct an Air Sovereignty Alert mission at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. Needless to say, we, and all Montanans, are very proud of their accomplishments and we are confident they will perform any mission with the highest degree of professionalism and excellence.

We also believe the C-27J constitutes a strong flying mission that would serve as a valuable asset for the State of Montana for decades. As you know, this versatile cargo aircraft can transport emergency responders and their equipment into the most remote corners of the state along with providing a valuable asset to our national security. We, the Central Montana Defense Alliance, have concerns that we would like addressed before we can support the proposed change of mission. It is our understanding that the C-27J mission proposal could result in a reduction of approximately one-third of the current manpower assigned to the 120<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing. At a time when the current administration is trying to save jobs across our nation, this seems to be a contradiction in their stated objectives.

To capitalize upon the full potential of the Montana Air National Guard, we urge you to strongly consider the Montana Air National Guard as a future bed-down location for a Remotely Piloted Aircraft mission. As the Air Force itself has noted, the big skies of Montana are well suited for cutting-edge remote piloted aircraft technology and would be proud to see Montana Airmen engaged in this essential mission. The Central Montana Defense Alliance is concerned that the Air Force has not yet identified a secondary mission for the Montana Air National Guard that is compatible with the Air Force's stated observations about the applicability of remotely piloted aircraft to the Hays Military Operations Area.

Many Great Falls residents have expressed a deep concern regarding the cost of the proposed change of mission for the Montana Air National Guard. The Air Force currently proposes two mission conversions, one at Fresno (F-16 to F-15) and one at Great Falls (F-15 to C-27J). According to Air Force figures, the cost of these two conversions combined would exceed \$68 million. From the outside looking in, this does not appear to be a good business decision and surely it would be far more cost effective for the Department of Defense and the Air Force to do a single conversion and keep the F-15 mission in Great Falls given the relatively short life left on the aging F-15 frame. We feel it is even more critical to reflect on additional expenditures, particularly in this difficult budget climate. Would it be possible for you provide a detailed explanation of why this proposed mission change is the most cost effective way of protecting national security?

Finally, we are concerned that the 120<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing may be moved, reduced in assigned aircraft or deactivated as much as two years before the scheduled arrival of the C-27J mission. In our view, such a lengthy delay between missions jeopardizes the recruitment and retention of these extremely well qualified Airmen.

Thank you for your strong commitment to the Montana Air National Guard, the Air Force, and the United States of America. We look forward to working with you to resolve our concerns and ensure that the Airmen of the Montana Air National Guard, and the 120<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing in particular, remain a vital part of the Air Force for years to come.

Sincerely,

David Weissman  
Chair  
Central Montana Defense Alliance

Percy "Steve" Malicott  
President/CEO  
Great Falls Chamber of Commerce