Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
U.S. Department of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Panetta,

We write in regard to the Department of Defense's Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 budget proposal to eliminate the A-10 Thunderbolt II "Warthog" unit operating out of Fort Smith, Arkansas. According to the Air Force, this proposal is based on new strategic guidance as well as compliance with the recently enacted Budget Control Act. We have concerns about this proposal and hope that you can provide additional information.

The 188th Fighter Wing (FW) is home to the Flying Razorbacks and employs nearly 1,000 members in both a full- and part-time capacity. The 188th FW has consistently responded when called to defend our nation. Their readiness and capability have been demonstrated at home and overseas through multiple deployments and when tasked with monitoring the skies over America on September 11, 2001. The 188th FW is a textbook model in terms of operational readiness and efficiency, while performing their mission through the most cost-effective means possible.

We have serious concerns regarding the criteria utilized by the Air Force to reach the FY 2013 proposal as well as the overall impact this proposal may have on the Department's stated force structure priorities. Furthermore, it is our opinion that these proposals may undermine the important emphasis on joint operations which the Commander-in-Chief recently referred to in his January 3, 2012, letter entitled *Sustaining Global Leadership: Priorities for a 21st Century Defense*. Decisions of this magnitude are best served with deliberative input and transparency of Congress that goes beyond that of the budget process.

We request written answers to the following questions relating to the criteria, analysis, and data used in formulating the FY 2013 Air Force budget proposal.

1) What is the justification for eliminating multiple flying missions and units on a discretionary basis while at the same time requesting additional Base Realignment and Closure processes?

2) Did the Air Force take into consideration the recommendations outlined in the April 2011 report *Comprehensive Review of the Future Role of the Reserve Components* released by

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the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs? If so, which recommendations are reflected in the Air Force's FY 2013 budget proposal?

3) Did the Air Force conduct a life-cycle cost analysis (which includes personnel costs) for all active duty and reserve A-10 units? If so, please provide this information.

4) In the shift to reduce the size of the A-10 force, what is the justification for targeting units primarily operated by the guard versus those operated by the active duty? Please explain the criteria that differentiated these units including cost and force structure.

5) How much weight was given to the goal of maintaining an air guard unit in each state versus the level of operational readiness and cost efficiency of each unit? Please explain how much weight was given to each criterion.

6) Can you provide information on how the Air Force's proposed implementation of the new strategic guidance aligns with the other service branches' strategic guidance?

Our country has relied on servicemembers from the 188th FW on countless occasions as they continue to demonstrate their commitment to our nation. For this reason, we want to ensure that any proposal put forth by the Air Force is justified through supportive documentation and is consistent with existing force structure strategies.

We appreciate your attention to our concerns and request a response no later than March 12, 2012. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide additional information. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Senator Mark Pryor

Senator John Boozman

Congressman Rick Crawford

Congressman Tim Griffin

Congressman Steve Womack

Congressman Mike Ross