

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 13, 2018

Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Rodney P. Frelinghuysen  
Chairman  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Room H-305, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
Room H-305, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Leahy, and Ranking Member Lowey:

On December 7, 1941, Tyndall Field, received the first of 2,000 troops as an Army Air Forces Gunnery School. These World War II schoolhouses provided the necessary training of fighter and bomber pilots allowing the development of diverse skills for various aircraft and differing positions within bombers. Since then, the base transitioned into the Air Force where many different fighter aircraft have called the base home, from the F-86 Sabre and the F-104 Starfighter to most recently the F-22 Raptor. Basing advanced fighter aircraft is what Tyndall Air Force Base has carried out in the name of national security since before the United States formally entered World War II.

In October, Hurricane Michael caused catastrophic damage to the Florida panhandle including damage to 95 percent of the buildings at Tyndall AFB. Before the storm, Tyndall was home to two F-22 Raptor squadrons, one operational and one training. The base is also home to the First Air Force, the 53rd Weapons Evaluation Group, and the Air Force Civil Engineer Center. Following the storm, Vice President Mike Pence assessed the damage to the base and reassured Florida's panhandle community of the base's importance to the nation. "We will rebuild Tyndall Air Force Base," Vice President Pence said.

The challenge of rebuilding Tyndall Air Force Base provides us with the opportunity to move beyond the status-quo by creating an advanced fifth-generation fighter installation using modern planning and construction. The Air Force is recommending that Congress use supplemental funding to rebuild the base in preparation to receive the F-35 fighter at the Florida installation. The Air Force has done a preliminary evaluation to confirm Tyndall AFB can accommodate up to three F-35 squadrons. The move would provide benefits across the service's fifth generation fighter operations. Basing F-35s at Tyndall in the wake of hurricane damage allows the Air Force to use recovery funds to re-build the base in a tailored way to accommodate the unique needs of the F-35.

"We have recommended that the best path forward to increase readiness and use money wisely is to consolidate the operational F-22s formerly at Tyndall in Alaska, Hawaii and Virginia, and make the decision now to put the next three squadrons of F-35s beyond those for which we

have already made decisions at Tyndall,” said Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson. If this decision is approved and supplemental funds to rebuild the base are appropriated, F-35s could be based at Tyndall beginning in 2023.

Until Hurricane Michael, Tyndall AFB was home to the largest basing of F-22 Raptors in the world where 55 of these advanced platforms are assigned to the 325th Fighter Wing. As Hurricane Michael approached the Florida panhandle, 31 percent of F-22 aircraft at Tyndall Air Force Base were designated Non-Mission Capable (NMC) and were sheltered in place. The operational F-22s formerly at Tyndall can be accommodated at other operational bases, increasing squadron size from 21 to 24 assigned aircraft. This will provide the Air Force with the opportunity to focus on readiness across our fleet of fighter aircraft. The consolidation will drive efficiencies which will increase the F-22’s readiness rate and address key recommendations from a recent Government Accountability Office report that identified small unit size as one of the challenges with F-22 readiness.

Tyndall's direct access to the Joint Gulf Range Complex allows pilots to train and test in 180,000 square miles of DoD controlled airspace over the Gulf of Mexico. Florida’s training area also contains multiple live-fire bombing ranges, including Pinecastle Range, Avon Park Air Force Range, and the Eglin Bombing Range. As the world’s most advanced fighter aircraft, the F-35 requires an environment that allows for joint maritime, air, and land training exercises. Only Florida has an environment to maximize the potential of this platform. “The F-35 is a game-changer with its unprecedented combination of lethality, survivability, and adaptability,” Goldfein said. “Bringing this new mission to Tyndall ensures that the U.S. Air Force is ready to dominate in any conflict.”

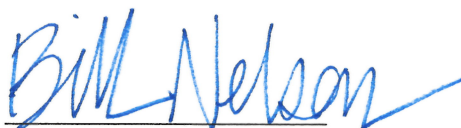
We urge you to support the amount requested by the Air Force to fulfill immediate requirements to the sum of \$2 billion. Half of this urgent need would allow Tyndall to salvage what buildings can be saved, make repairs, and begin the planning and design necessary to follow the military construction requirements to ensure Congress can adequately justify the funding. The other half of this amount would cover costs relating to personnel reassignments as the recovery progress continues, and the cost of sending the F-22 Raptors to other locations to ensure the Air Force mission is not impacted. This funding is needed now.

We should prove to those in uniform who lost everything after the storm hit, that you are not forgotten. I have seen you already start to rebuild your homes and businesses. Now we must begin to rebuild, not only for Florida, but for the good of our nation. We are confident close coordination between Congress and the Department of Defense will enable us to accomplish the priority of ensuring sustained American military dominance through the rebuilding of these vital Florida military installations. We look forward to working with you to accomplish this.

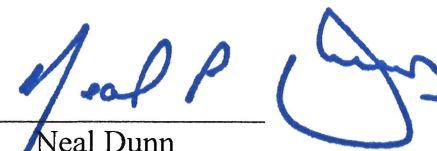
Sincerely,



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator



Bill Nelson  
U.S. Senator



Neal Dunn  
U.S. Representative