

December 7, 2021

The Honorable Frank Kendall  
Secretary  
United States Air Force  
1670 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20330

Dear Secretary Kendall:

I write to express concern with a proposal under consideration to allow civil aviation operations at the Homestead Air Reserve Base (HARB) in Homestead, Florida. Specifically, civil use of HARB poses the potential risk of obstructing ongoing Everglades restoration and threatens the core mission set of the base. It is my hope that you will discontinue any consideration of the proposed joint use agreement (JUA) which would allow civil operations at HARB, unless and until these concerns are adequately addressed.

Homestead opened in 1942, and its strategic importance to the United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) Area of Responsibility (AOR) became abundantly clear during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. Today, Homestead hosts the 482<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Wing that supports operations for USSOUTHCOM, as well as a number of tenants including the Headquarters of Special Operations Command South, U.S. Coast Guard Maritime Safety and Security Team, an air and maritime unit of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, as well as the most active NORAD alert site in the continental U.S., operated by the 125<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing of the Florida Air National Guard. Civil use of HARB threatens the operational security of the installation and could impinge upon the ability of carrying out missions essential to national security.

In addition to opening the door to additional proposals that could threaten the mission of HARB, civil use operations on the base would breathe life into misguided proposals to expand the urban development boundary (UDB) north of the base in order to build an Amazon logistics center. The expansion of the UDB and the construction of a logistics facility in this location would conflict with ongoing efforts to restore flows of fresh water from the Everglades to Biscayne Bay. Specifically, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the South Florida Water Management District are currently planning the Biscayne Bay and Southern Everglades Ecosystem Restoration (BBSEER) project, with preliminary proposals to convey water from western Miami Dade County through the C-102 canal to wetlands along Biscayne Bay. This project will improve South Florida's resilience to storm surge and sea level rise by recharging the Biscayne Aquifer and restoring natural infrastructure such as wetlands and mangrove forests along the bay's shores. The resilience benefits that will be delivered by BBSEER will also help protect HARB from hurricanes and storm surge.

The priority for the U.S. Air Force should be to protect and preserve its long term ability to conduct its core mission in support of the national defense, and not to pursue a path that would embolden Amazon, a multi-national corporation that does not have the national interest of the United States in mind. Doing so would only permit them to expand operations in a way that

would obstruct the mission of the Air Force, impede Everglades restoration efforts, and reduce the resilience of HARB and the surrounding area to storm surge and sea level rise.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Rubio". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each name being significantly larger than the others.

Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator