

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 22, 2018

The Honorable Heather Wilson
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330

Dear Secretary Wilson:

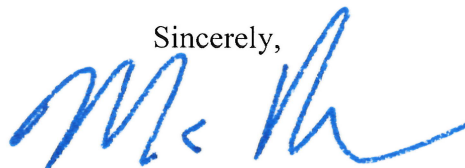
Florida's Tyndall Air Force Base is home to the largest basing of F-22 Raptors in the world where 55 of these advanced platforms are assigned to the 325th Fighter Wing. Earlier this month, as Hurricane Michael approached the Florida panhandle, 31 percent of F-22 aircraft at Tyndall Air Force Base were designated Non-Mission Capable (NMC) and were sheltered in place. While the damage assessment of these remaining aircraft is still underway, the facts are clear that any damage sustained could have been avoided if the NMC rate for the F-22 was lower. This concerning figure highlights the dismal state of readiness across our fifth-generation fleet.

As you know, the unique combination of advanced stealth and maneuvering capabilities make the F-22 Raptor the world's best air superiority fighter aircraft. As the threat from near-peer competitors continues to evolve and grow, this aircraft is vital to the U.S. military's ability to defeat high-end adversaries. In 2002, the Air Force identified a requirement for 381 F-22 fighter aircraft but this amount was cut in half by former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in an effort to stem further budget cuts to the Pentagon. Now with a force of 186 of these fifth-generation aircraft, this significantly smaller than planned inventory has resulted in maintenance and supply challenges that have affected aircraft availability rates.

In September, Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, requested all critical aviation platforms, which includes the F-22 to achieve a minimum of 80 percent mission capability for Fiscal Year (FY) 2019. As you finalize damage assessments of the aircraft that endured Hurricane Michael, I urge you to begin implementation of the framework laid out by Secretary Mattis starting with all Tyndall AFB fighter aircraft. Additionally, I ask you waste no time or effort in providing a supplemental funding request to Congress to repair and restore these aircraft to mission capable status as soon as possible.

I am confident close coordination between Congress and the Air Force will enable us to accomplish the priority of ensuring our air superiority aircraft meet this mission capable goal. I look forward to working with you to accomplish this.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator