

Written by Jeff Giertz

Thursday, 09 February 2012 14:11

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Washington, DC – Rep. Bruce Braley (IA-01) today urged Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to immediately reconsider an Air Force recommendation that would lead to the loss of all F-16 fighter aircraft operated by the Iowa Air National Guard in Des Moines.

21 jets at the 132nd Fighter Wing of the Iowa Air National Guard would be removed within two years under the plan, part of a larger effort to cut \$8.7 billion from the Air Force budget.

“The Air Force gets an incredible value from the experienced pilots and maintenance personnel of the 132nd Fighter Wing,” Braley said. “That’s why I’m disappointed that the Air Force has chosen to target one of the most cost-efficient units in their force to find savings.

“It doesn’t make sense that the Iowa Air National Guard is on the chopping block while less efficient units and less experienced pilots are preserved as part of this plan. How can you justify this decision when it’s not in the best interest of our national security and not in the best interest of American taxpayers?”

Braley Urges Defense Secretary to Reverse Recommendation to Cut F-16 Jets from Iowa Air National Guard

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Braley met earlier today with Iowa National Guard Adjutant General Timothy Orr and senior leaders of the Iowa Air National Guard to discuss the Air Force proposal. Tomorrow, Braley will join the rest of the Iowa Congressional delegation for a meeting with Secretary of the Air Force Michael Donley to discuss the removal of the jets.

Braley made the request in a letter to Secretary Panetta. Text of the letter follows; a copy of the signed letter is attached.

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February 8, 2012

Secretary Leon Panetta

Department of Defense

1000 Defense Pentagon

Washington, D.C. 20301

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Dear Secretary Panetta,

I write with serious concern regarding the Air Force's recently clarified decisions on force restructuring and its impact on the Air National Guard. The combat aircraft retirements and re-missioning discussed in the Air Force proposal unduly affect the Air National Guard over the Active Component, and do not reflect an effort to maintaining the Guard and Reserve or show a balanced approach to achieving budget efficiencies.

Mr. Secretary, you've stated yourself that the Guard and Reserve forces have proved their combat readiness and combat effectiveness over the past 10 years. As decisions are made to reorient our force and drawdown our current combat commitments, we must work to maintain that readiness and effectiveness while also capitalizing on the wealth of knowledge and experience within our Guard and Reserve units to maintain the total force. The Air Force proposal highlights the value of our Guard forces in associations with the active component while also removing a significant number of combat aircraft from them

Furthermore, I have serious concerns over the lack of budgetary consideration in the decision. While I applaud the Air Force's efforts to find budget efficiencies through the early retirement and delayed procurement of some aircraft, I have great concern that the bulk of retirements appear to come at the expense of Guard and Reserve units. The Guard and Reserve are highly efficient forces, maintaining experienced pilots and performing many of the same missions of active component forces when activated at a much lower costs to the Active Component over the long-term. The shifts of combat aircraft to Active Component and elimination of missions in the Guard Component achieves significantly less savings than if the situation were reversed. Furthermore, the decisions to replace combat air force missions in the guard with unmanned aircraft Remote Split Operations missions also make little budgetary sense as there is a continued need for unmanned aircraft in Afghanistan and elsewhere. These missions will require a significant investment of time beyond the standard drill periods of many of our Guard that will have a higher cost and a greater impact on our Guardsmen's civilian careers.

I recognize that the funding constraints we currently face require difficult decisions to be made in prioritizing the roles and resources of all aspects of the Air Force. I am disappointed that faced with these challenges, the Air Force chose to target one of the most efficient aspects of their force in finding reductions. This proposal is deeply flawed and deserves a full explanation of the budgetary analysis that went into making it. I urge you to reconsider this decision to

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better protect the National Guard and support its long-term viability as part of the force.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

Bruce Braley

Member of Congress

Cc: Mr. Michael Donley, Secretary of the Air Force

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