

Posture of the Air Force in Review of the Defense Authorization Request for FY24 and the Future Years Program

May 2, 2023

U.S. Senate - Committee on Armed Services

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jack Reed (D-RI) [presiding]
Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)
Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)
Mazie Hirono (D-HI)
Angus King (I-ME)
Elizabeth Warren (D-MA)
Gary Peters (D-MI)
Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)
Jacky Rosen (D-NV)
Mark Kelly (D-AZ)
Roger Wicker (R-MS)

Deb Fischer (R-NE)
Tom Cotton (R-AR)
Mike Rounds (R-SD)
Joni Ernst (R-IOWA)
Dan Sullivan (R-AK)
Kevin Cramer (R-ND)
Rick Scott (R-FL)
Tommy Tuberville (R-AL)
Ted Budd (R-NC)
Eric Schmitt (R-MO)

WITNESSES:

Honorable Frank Kendall III - Secretary of the Air Force

General Charles Q. Brown, Jr. USAF - Chief of Staff of the Air Force

General B. Chance Saltzman, USSF - Chief of Space Operations

[Begin transcript - formatting by chinasentry.com]

CHAIRMAN REED: Good morning. The committee meets today to receive testimony on the president's budget request for the Department of the Air Force for Fiscal Year 2024. I would like to welcome Secretary of the Air Force, Frank Kendall, Chief of Staff for the Air Force, General Charles Brown, and Chief of Space Operations, General Chance Saltzman.

Thank you, gentlemen, for your leadership, and please share the committee's gratitude with the men and women under your command for their service and to their families for their continued support. The Air Force and Space Force play a fundamental role in our strategic competition with **China** and other adversaries. The United States air and space power remains the finest in the world, and the entire joint force relies on these capabilities each day.

This is a challenging mission, as the Air Force must strike a balance between supporting its continuous global operations, while providing adequate resources to modernize its aircraft and maintain our technological edge.

To that end, President Biden's defense budget request for Fiscal Year 2024 includes approximately \$260 billion in funding for the Air Force, an increase of \$12.4 billion over the 2023 enacted budget. This budget request includes considerable investments in platforms such as advanced battle management systems, Air Force joint all domain command and control, next generation air dominance, the B- 21, hypersonics, and air and ground moving target indication.

These are important initiatives that will contribute significantly to modernizing the service. Indeed, the Air Force's success in the coming decades will be its ability to manage and control data. The initiatives outlined in this budget would enable the Air Force to detect, analyze, and act on information across the battlespace quickly using automation, artificial intelligence, and predictive analytics.

In turn, these systems will help our forces acquire targets as early as possible and rapidly deliver information to the best shooter on air, land, or sea. The committee would appreciate an update on these and other programs that are receiving increased emphasis and resourcing.

The budget request also proposes to retire or realign various elements of the Air Force with a net reduction of roughly 214 aircraft in Fiscal Year 2024. This would include reducing or altering the force structure for F-22s, A-10s, F-16s, F-15s, C-130s, KC-135s, KC-10s, JSTARS aircraft, AWACS aircraft, HH-60 helicopters, and training aircraft. Any proposal of this sort deserves careful consideration.

Discussions must be had about whether any of these weapons system retirements are necessary or appropriate in the near term. We also need to evaluate our domestic industrial base to avoid making decisions that undercut our production and manufacturing capabilities. I would ask the witnesses to provide us with reasoning for the proposed retirements and assure us that any decisions are well thought out before any changes to the force structure begin.

General Saltzman, Congress established the Space Force in order to consolidate the numerous space activities in the Department of Defense. Given that the Space Force is only three years old, I understand it is still becoming institutionalized within the Department and there are many challenges in that process.

General, I would like to know how you are growing the service in terms of personnel and structures like the Space Development Agency, and how you are working to foster a service culture that can succeed in the dramatically evolving space environment.

Finally, now that the Space Force is up and running, it is important to present a trained force with substantive capabilities to the combatant commanders. One of the capabilities for the combatant commands now under discussion is tactical space intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, or ISR.

As our satellite constellations and sensors continue to improve, space based on ISR technologies will be able to provide global continuous information to units operating in every domain. Space is a rapidly evolving domain for the Defense Department. I want to ask the witnesses to discuss what resources are necessary to ensure its success.

Secretary Kendall, General Brown, and General Saltzman, thank you again for appearing today. I look forward to your testimony. And as a reminder for my colleagues, there will be a closed session immediately following this hearing in

room SVC-217. Let me now turn to the ranking member, Senator Wicker.

SENATOR WICKER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I join you in welcoming our distinguished witnesses, and I want to thank them for their years of service. This past year has highlighted several growing challenges confronting both the Air Force and the Space Force.

For example, Vladimir Putin's brutal and unprovoked war in Ukraine has demonstrated the significance of air and missile defense in denying the effective use of air power.

Russia maintains a high level of capability in space, but communist **China** is much further ahead in comparison.

Meanwhile, the state of competition to use or deny the use of space capabilities is rapidly evolving, and **Beijing** rapidly continues to develop and field capabilities that could test our own assets in the air and in space.

Although we face challenges, there are good signs of progress in this year's budget request. For example, I am encouraged to see that the Department of Air Force continue to modernize.

In particular, the Air Force is finally building out its fleet of fighter aircraft at a much – at a rate much closer to what we need. It does so while continuing to develop the next generation of advanced fighters and bombers.

I hope our witnesses will provide an update regarding plans for the next generation of tanker aircraft, considering that the KC-46 delivery is still in progress.

I am also glad to see adequate resourcing for programs such as the Sentinel B-21 and Long Range Standoff Missile.

However, there are alarming reports that indicate the ICBM replacement program could be delayed.

We simply cannot afford to fall behind on nuclear modernization. So perhaps we will talk about that. I commend the Space Force for the effort it has put into building a hybrid architecture for missile warning, secure communications, and resilient navigation. I hope our witnesses will identify steps Congress can take

to improve space capabilities more rapidly.

I am concerned that the Air Force is still assuming risk in the near term, particularly – in the air domain, particularly during the years of concern to operational commanders and the national defense strategy. Mr.

Secretary, there remains a large gap between warfighting needs and capability.

Many of the platforms Congress has supported continue to be delayed, including the F-35 Block 4 upgrades, and T-7 trainer aircraft. This is particularly troubling since those delays indicate we may not have these assets to deploy them when we would need them the most. I am also bothered by – excuse me, I don't want to have a ring tone here.

I am also bothered by potential failure to accelerate programs such as the E-7 command and control aircraft, despite the clear Congressional signal of support last year. Other challenges stand in the way of agile combat employment.

To make that a reality, we need to make progress in the electromagnetic spectrum, in munitions production, and in building out the posture of basing and logistics.

Further delays in these programs could have disastrous consequences.

The Air Force and Space Force have essential roles to play in deterring conflict in the **Western Pacific**. As I have said in other posture hearings, complacency is not an option. Complacency undermines deterrence. We need to proceed with urgency to get our forces the capabilities they need.

So, thank you for our witnesses, and I look forward to an important discussion. Thank you, sir.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you very much, Senator Wicker.

And now let me recognize the Secretary of the Air Force, Secretary Kendall.

SECRETARY KENDALL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Reed –

CHAIRMAN REED: Could you please pull that microphone as close as possible and ensure it is turned on?

SECRETARY KENDALL: How is that?

CHAIRMAN REED: Better.

SECRETARY KENDALL: Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Wicker, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the Department of the Air Force's Fiscal Year 2024 budget submission.

Approximately one year ago, I began my testimony before this committee with a quote from General Douglas MacArthur, reminding us that the history of failure in war can almost always be summed up in two words, too late.

That warning is even more valid today. Over the past year, under the rubric of seven Department of the Air Force operational imperatives, the Department of the Air Force has worked to define the capabilities and technologies we need, along with the programs and resources required, to deter, and if necessary, prevail over our pacing challenge, **China**, China, China.

In Fiscal Year 2024, we are requesting approximately \$5 billion as a direct result of this work, and over \$25 billion for operational imperative related investments.

War is not inevitable, but successfully deterring conflict is heavily dependent on our military capabilities.

In our Fiscal Year 2024 budget request, there are approximately 20 completely new or significantly reskilled program elements, some of which are classified, that we must develop, produce, and field if we desire to maintain the air and space superiority that America and our allies have counted on for decades.

In order to proceed with any of these programs, the Department of the Air Force needs timely authorizations and appropriations. The Department of the Air Force is ready to move forward with the next generation of capabilities we need, and there is no time to lose.

In addition to these new start or enhanced efforts, therefore, our training for budget includes request for additional resources to increase production and accelerate development of programs essential to the problem of the Air Force's missions, as defined in the National Defense Strategy.

For the Strategic Triad, we have fully funded the Sentinel ICBM, the B-21 radar

bomber, the long range standoff weapon, and our nuclear command and control programs. For the conventional force, we are increasing production of both the F-35 and the F-15EX. The next generation air dominance program is funded to move forward, and as indicated last year, an uncrewed collaborative combat aircraft program of record is fully funded in Fiscal Year 2024 request.

We are also continuing the acquisition of essential programs like the E-7 Wedgetail and the new resilient missile warning and tracking space system. As we indicated last year, hard choices have been required to move the Department into the future. We deeply appreciate the support of Congress for the divestitures we requested last year. This year, we must continue the divestment of our over 40 year old A-10 Warthog.

This program has served us well, but it is becoming increasingly obsolete and absorbing resources needed for higher priorities. We ask for Congress continued support for this and other identified changes we must make to field the forces we need to be successful against our pacing and other challenges.

But of course, it isn't all about the equipment we need to perform our missions. It is also about the men and women who serve in the total force, active, guard, reserve, and those who support them. We appreciate Congress's support for a 4.6 percent pay raise last year. This year we are asking for a 5.2 percent pay increase, the largest one year increase we have ever requested.

In line with Secretary Austin's taking care of people initiative, we are continuing to invest in child development centers and housing to meet the highest priority needs of our Airmen, Guardians, and their families. Like the other services, with the exception of the Space Force, the Air Force faces challenges in recruiting in a generation where the propensity to serve is the lowest that we have seen in decades.

We are removing barriers to service to ensure that anyone with the capability and desire can serve to their full potential. Under the National Defense Strategy, we are also strengthening teams, both in the joint force and with our allies and partners. Building these relationships and investing in our ability to work together is the essence of integrated deterrence.

The effectiveness and importance of these relationships are on display in Europe today, where NATO is stronger than ever. I recently returned from the

Pacific , where I met with a number of our teammates who participated in the groundbreaking event for the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement Air Bases in the Philippines.

Our budget request also supports strengthening our partnerships around the world, especially when we confront our pacing challenge and most acute threats. I started by talking about the value of time, and I will finish by highlighting a legislative proposal that can save up to two years of that valuable time.

Our proposal would expand rapid acquisition authority so that military Departments can more quickly respond to emerging threats and take advantage of evolving technology.

Within reasonable constraints, this legislative proposal would allow progress on compelling National Security needs that would otherwise be delayed until the next submission and approval of the President's budget.

I have been pushing this reform for many years and we look forward to working with the Congress on this proposal.

In closing, I believe the Department of the Air Force is well-postured to move into the future. Our work to define that future is not complete but has produced compelling results that are reflected in our Fiscal Year 2024 budget submission.

We look forward to your questions today. I would like to offer a more complete briefing on the classified details of our submission. And, Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to do that after we finish this session. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

General Brown, please.

GENERAL BROWN: Good morning, Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Wicker, and distinguished members of this committee. I am proud to represent the 689,000 total force Airmen serving our nation. I want to thank you for your steadfast support for our Airmen and their families. It is an honor to join Secretary Kendall and General Saltzman to testify on the Fiscal Year 2024 budget submission.

This budget builds on the progress made in Fiscal Year 2023 and marks the

next milestone towards the transformation of the Air Force to address the evolving security challenges outlined in the National Defense Strategy. As I emphasized last year, we must continue to accelerate change or risk losing our strategic advantage.

The Department of Air Force's operational imperatives describe key capabilities that must be attained to enable the Air Force's modernization in the face of a rapidly changing threat environment.

Remain dedicated to ensuring our investments and resources outlined in this budget submission are in line with the National Defense Strategy so the Airforce can continue to deter adversaries, prevail in conflict, and execute our mission to fight, fight, and win air power anytime, anywhere – not some time, in some places, but anytime, anywhere.

This budget ensures the Air Force continues to provide the nation the assurance of air superiority, the advantage of global strike, the agility of rapid global mobility, and you combine that with the adaptability of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, and authority in our command and control capabilities, providing the ability to sense, make sense, and act.

This is what we must be do today and we must be prepared to do tomorrow. In order to provide these core functions to the nation, we must accelerate development of programs essential to our mission with this budget submission.

To provide the assurance of air superiority, we are increasing production of the F-35 and F15EX while the next generation air dominance program and family assistance continues development.

To provide the advantage of global strike, we have fully funded ICBM and the B-21 bomber. To provide the agility of rapid mobility, we instituted recapitalization of KC-135 fleet, KC-46 — [Technical problems.]

– thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today. I look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIRMAN: Thank you, General Brown. General Saltzman, please.

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Chairman Reed, Ranking member Wicker, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for your continued support and for the

opportunity to testify on the Fiscal Year 2024 budget submission –

[Technical problems.]

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Sorry. I will be as loud as I can –

[Technical problems.]

CHAIRMAN REED: We had a coup.

GENERAL SALTZMAN: No, no –

[Laughter.]

GENERAL SALTZMAN: How is that?

CHAIRMAN REED: Much better.

GENERAL SALTZMAN: That is why he is the Secretary of the Air Force.

CHAIRMAN REED: No, no, that is right.

GENERAL SALTZMAN: As the Fiscal Year 2024 budget will allow us to further efforts to develop a resilient space order battle and prepare for rapid transition to a wartime posture against any potential adversary to fight and win a high intensity conflict.

In conjunction with ongoing modernization projects, the Space Force has several new starts for Fiscal Year 2024 to support those efforts. Investing in these modernization projects will allow us to execute our assigned missions as we move forward to better posture for the emerging complexities of the space domain.

Space is now undeniably a contested warfighting domain. **China** and Russia define space as such and are investing in technology meant to undermine U.S. advantage in the domain. **China**, our pacing challenge, is our most substantial threat into and from space. But Russia also remains an acute threat.

Both present serious challenges with space capabilities that can track and target U.S. military forces on land, at sea, and in the air. Both can hold U.S. space assets at risk with cyber and electronic warfare, lasers, ground to space missiles, and space to space orbital engagement systems.

These systems threaten the space architecture the nation relies on for prosperity and security. To meet this challenge, the Space Force will prioritize three lines of effort. First, we will field ready, resilient, and combat credible forces. Second, we will amplify what I am calling the Guardian spirit.

And third, we will partner to win. These are directly in line with Secretary Austin's mission, people and team priorities. In sum, this budget request is designed to deliver the forces, personnel, and partnerships the Space Force requires to preserve U.S. advantages in space.

To build resilient, ready, combat credible space forces, we are accelerating the pivot towards modern, more defensible satellite constellations and support infrastructure. We are conducting transformational force design analysis based on threats, operational needs, and costs so that we can maximize our budget while investing in effective missile warning, space domain awareness, communication and navigation systems.

Additionally, we are investing to ensure our networks are hardened to defeat cyber threats, and that we have the operational test and training infrastructure necessary to prepare Guardians for high intensity conflict.

With our second line of effort, we are amplifying the Guardian spirit by recruiting, developing, and retaining the best talent and empowering Guardians to succeed.

Investment in space centric curriculum for entry level schools will build Guardians laser focused on space operations in both competition and conflict.

Guardians will be empowered through mission command to innovate and execute in those scenarios. Notably, and with Congressional support, we plan to integrate the space mission elements of the Air Force reserve into the Space Force to offer Guardians flexible career paths, including both full time and part time duty to retain talent and bring private sector experience to the force.

The third line of effort acknowledges that the Space Force relies on partnerships to accomplish our mission. We are investing in training, education, data sharing, and integrated capabilities with our allies and partners. The Space Force will strengthen our presence in all combatant commands where Guardians are already making solid connections with allies and partners.

Because of its critical importance, the Space Force is collaborating with commercial space partners to build resilient capacity and leveraging emerging technologies.

To enhance this partnership, the Space Force is working to eliminate barriers to such collaboration so that we can build enduring advantages and field these capabilities more rapidly.

In conclusion, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Space Force's Fiscal Year 2024 budget request.

The Space Force continues to be the preeminent military space organization in the world.

Our adversaries seek to challenge our advantage in space, but with the support of this committee, our Guardians will be able to outwork, out-innovate, and outcompete our potential adversaries to ensure that we maintain that advantage.

The Fiscal Year 2024 budget request will make this possible, but only if the Congress passes timely appropriations. I look forward to your questions.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you very much, General. I have been informed we have something more than just a microphone issue. We have a system issue. So, they are working on it right now.

But in the interim, we will have to share microphones.

So, you can sit close together, or – let me begin my questioning by touching on a point that was raised by Senator Wicker. That is the E-7. All of my trips to the **Pacific** particularly have emphasized the importance of getting this system.

Last year, we were able to include \$200 million extra to accelerate the production, and it was hoped that we would get one aircraft in testing by 2027. But Secretary and General Brown, that is – what is the earliest point we think we can get the E-7 into testing?

SECRETARY KENDALL: We looked hard at trying to accelerate the program, Mr. Chairman, to move the initial stages faster. We didn't find a way to do that. So, I think we are basically on track with the same schedule that we showed

you last year.

The one thing that could be done would be to add funding that would accelerate the production of the follow-on units, not the first one, but the follow-on ones. But we were not able to afford that in our budget.

CHAIRMAN REED: Now, there was, I think, a presumption that we would buy the Australian version of the E-7. They are already flying the aircraft. Have we abandoned that approach?

SECRETARY KENDALL: No, we are still using – there are some modifications that have to be made for use in U.S.

airspace, to comply with some of our communications requirements and so on, but they are relatively modest. We are also working with the Australians on follow on upgrades to the E-7 that would enhance its capabilities.

CHAIRMAN REED: And we are – you are asking for \$633 million this year, which will be, as you indicated, to acquire long lead time items and accelerate the production of succeeding aircraft. I mean, again, I think this is absolutely essential program, given what I have heard out in the **Pacific**. And General, Brown, I think, would you concur?

GENERAL BROWN: I would. And one of the things I would highlight is that in our relationship with the Australians, we are going to be able to send here in June, close to 50 to 60 of our airmen to actually start training on the E-7s. When we do get the aircraft, we will have trained operatives and maintainers to help accelerate bringing the E-7 to the – into our inventory.

CHAIRMAN REED: Very good. Another issue is the collaborative combat aircraft, which I think makes a great deal of sense. That essentially a manned aircraft would be operating unmanned aircraft.

One of the constraints I think we have is the number of missiles available for our aircraft right now. And creating this autonomous capability with multitudes of other aircraft would compound our missile problem. Can you just comment, Secretary and General Brown, on the missile issue?

SECRETARY KENDALL: We are trying to do a balanced set of investments, and that includes the weapons as well as the platforms. The budget request

includes three multi- year requests for weapons systems, for missiles, for AMRAAM, JASSM, and LRASM.

We are also trying to increase the production capacity that you have when we get it in production. So, we added, I think, about \$1.5 billion for munitions procurement in this budget over last year's just for the reasons that you stated.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you. And General Brown, any further comments?

GENERAL BROWN: That extra funding will help the facilitate, so we actually – as we, you know, funding, we can actually increase the production rate not only for AMRAAM, but JATM, which is the follow on to AMRAAM, is also going to be important aspect to support the collaborative combat aircraft.

CHAIRMAN REED: And this has sent a positive signal to the industrial base that you are here for the long run?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Absolutely.

GENERAL BROWN: That is correct.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. General Saltzman, you referred to this in your testimony, but can you give us a quick update on the status – and please try a microphone. I think –

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Did it work?

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you. It was the Air Force and the Space Force that combined in a few seconds and fixed it, so, here we go. Question, tests and training ranges.

You are at a point now where you have to develop them.

They will be quite different than hundreds of acres of land someplace in the Midwest or the far West. Can you give us an idea of where you are on your range and your infrastructure for range testing?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Yes, sir. Thank you, Senator. We, of course, have simulators and we have some very nascent early models of what I will call virtual ranges to accomplish our training. I just don't think they are sufficient yet. And primarily because they don't replicate the threat effectively.

And so, the budget proposal adds several hundred million, about \$340 million across the FYDP in order to increase the fidelity of our simulators and allow us to inject threats into the environment so that our crews can validate their tactics and validate their training against a thinking adversary.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you very much. Senator Wicker, please.

SENATOR WICKER: Okay. Thank you very much.

Secretary Kendall, thank you for starting off with the MacArthur quote about too late. It does segway right into a number of things I mentioned in my opening statement, sir.

The ICBM replacement program could be delayed. That would cause us to fall further behind on nuclear modernization. Delays in the F-35 Block 4 upgrades. The T-17 train or aircraft.

And then the chairman has also – has already gone into the E-7 command and control aircraft, which would replace the 1975 era AWACS. What happened to the \$200 million that we provided last year to accelerate this program, which ended up not getting accelerated?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Sir, are you referring to the E-7?

SENATOR WICKER: Yes, the E-7, command and control aircraft. I am sorry, did not make that clear.

SECRETARY KENDALL: That program has been moving as fast as we are able to move it. The – I did a personal review of the steps that are necessary to get it into the first phase of testing, and we couldn't find a way to do that. I am not sure about the \$200 million that you are referring to and what was done with that –

SENATOR WICKER: All right, well, the chairman mentioned in his question that at the Air Force's request we provided – we appropriated another \$200 million above the president's budget request to accelerate this program.

It did not get accelerated, and we wonder why – where the \$200 million went.

And then there is a larger question that the chairman alluded to, there is the E-7 Wedgetail that is being used by our allies in Australia. That is being used

very effectively by them. And so, General Brown, where did the \$200 – do you know where the \$200 million went?

GENERAL BROWN: Some of that aspect, the money went into the initial development and getting things on contract. So, you start – also the long lead items to develop the aircraft.

SENATOR WICKER: Okay. Well, now, Secretary Kendall was asked when this E-7 will now be ready, and I don't think we got an answer to that, Secretary Kendall. You said it would just still be on the original schedule. When would that be ready?

SECRETARY KENDALL: 2027, is the year we will be fielding, because it takes two years to build the new airplane. Then we have to take another two years, roughly, to modify it and put it into testing –

SENATOR WICKER: Okay. And why –

SECRETARY KENDALL: – so the first aircraft – 2027.

SENATOR WICKER: Why is it necessary for an aircraft that is already functioning well for one of our allies?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Because we are getting new production aircraft. So, their commercial aircraft but then modified to put the radar system and the command and control systems inside them.

So, in order to preserve airworthiness, you have to actually acquire the commercial aircraft and then open it up to insert the other things that you need to put in it.

SENATOR WICKER: Okay.

SECRETARY KENDALL: – and that whole process takes a period of time.

SENATOR WICKER: Okay. Well, it is a fact, though, that Congress at the request of the service provided an extra \$200 million for acceleration, and we didn't get any acceleration. That is correct, is it not?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I think what General Brown indicated, what you got with that was some long lead items being purchased to reduce risk in the

program.

SENATOR WICKER: We didn't get any acceleration, did we?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I would have to check that for the record. I am not aware that you got acceleration.

SENATOR WICKER: Okay. You get back to us on the record. But, Secretary Brown, how important is this T-7 air training aircraft and to what sort of a disadvantage are we at that this has been delayed once again.

GENERAL BROWN: The importance of the T-7 is to replace an aircraft for a 60s era T-38 aircraft. And so, as we bring it on, one of our challenges is continue the maintainability of the T-38 or the delays that right now we have with the T-7.

So, it is a better aircraft, the T-7 is a better aircraft. I had a chance to personally fly it in a simulator to see how it operates, but that is going to help us reduce our pilots at a – because of a glass cockpit as well, at a better rate and to be able to transition to the current capabilities we have today.

SENATOR WICKER: Another delay. Thank you, Mr.

Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Wicker. Senator Shaheen, please.

SECRETARY KENDALL: Could I clarify a point for Senator Wicker? When we have talked about acceleration of E-7, generally we have talked about getting more inventory sooner, not getting the first airplane sooner.

So, I think there may have been some confusion because of the way we have used the word accelerate. We get more inventory in the hands of people faster than we would have with the profile we initially proposed, but you don't get the first airplane faster.

SENATOR WICKER: Inventory. What do you mean by that?

SECRETARY KENDALL: We, instead of going a profile of one, two, three, for example, we go one, three, three. So, you get additional aircraft sooner than you would have otherwise. So, the total deliveries are accelerated, but not the first aircraft.

SENATOR WICKER: Thank you, sir.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Secretary. Senator Shaheen.

SENATOR SHAHEEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Kendall and General Brown – Secretary Kendall, you talked about timely authorizations and appropriations in your opening statement.

And General Brown, you also referred to on time appropriations as being critical. What will happen to your role, the role of the Air Force and the Space Force, for that matter, if the United States defaults on its debt?

SECRETARY KENDALL: That is a very big question, Senator. I am not an economist. I am trained in business.

For any creditors to default on their debt causes a number of reactions, right. It is more expensive for you to get money.

Your creditors aren't as willing to lend money. You are people are not as willing to lend money to you. All the economists that I have seen suggest that it would be an absolutely devastating impact.

When you have – the closest thing I have seen to this is the 2008 crisis, when the Congress was asked to pass several billion of funds to shore up the financial system.

And I remember watching the screen as the stock market completely collapsed as that bill was being voted down in the Congress.

That is the sort of thing that we are talking about.

And I think most people would predict a severe recession, at least. And then going forward, one of the biggest parts of our Federal budget is the interest on the debt.

If those interest rates go up, which is what happens to you when you default, if you can borrow money at all, then that expense becomes much greater and the interest on the debt is already roughly at the level of defense budget.

So, the short answer to your question is, it would be devastating.

SENATOR SHAHEEN: And you talked about the threat from **China**, which I think we would all agree is our major competitor. What would **China's** reaction be to that kind of catastrophic financial outcome in the United States?

SECRETARY KENDALL: That is probably beyond my expertise to comment on intelligently. But obviously, anything that damages us would be a benefit to **China**.

SENATOR SHAHEEN: Thank you. So, it is probably not good for us to default on our debt.

SECRETARY KENDALL: That is a significant understatement, I think.

SENATOR SHAHEEN: Thank you. General Brown, during the recent appearance before the Appropriations Defense subcommittee, we had a conversation about the deficiency with the KC-46's slow guidance system, and you said you had not heard anything about that. Have you had a chance to look into that? And do you have an answer for what the impact of that will be?

GENERAL BROWN: I regret that I haven't been able to dig into the details on that. But just in my conversations with our operators and also with AMC, the aircraft is going fairly well right now despite some of the deficiencies that we are finding. And as I think, I highlighted before, is operating and supporting all of our aircraft with the exception of the A-10.

SENATOR SHAHEEN: Well, I will continue to ask you, so hopefully you will be able to get an answer for how that is affecting the operations of the KC-46. General Salzman, in Ukraine, we have seen the role of commercial satellite companies and how important those are, and obviously that is going to continue to be critical in terms of the Space Force.

You talked a little bit about the training and how to incorporate addressing – dealing with those commercial satellites. Can you talk about how important it is to adapt our training and to really make use of the commercial innovation that is going on?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: One of the areas that I think is ripe for exploitation is the idea of virtual augmentation or virtual reality as we have seen it.

And there is a lot of very promising technologies associated with how you could

do virtually augmented reality training so that the operators can experience something that day to day they don't get to experience in space.

Sometimes the orbital mechanics are hard to visualize, but you can use these tools to help you understand proximity between spacecraft, proximity of how solar arrays are turned. So, there is a lot of exploitation that we can do with those kinds of technologies, and we are looking into those with commercial industry.

SENATOR SHAHEEN: Good. I have actually had one of those demonstrations. They are very impressive. You also, General Salzman talked about the opportunities for full and part time availability in Space Force to bring private sector talent to the force.

As the co-chair of the National Guard Caucus, I know that the National Guard has a lot of interest in participating in Space Force in some capacity, and there is still a fair amount of confusion about how that is going to work. Can you talk about the progress that we have been – we have made on how we are going to incorporate the National Guard into Space Force?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Well, it is two different things at this juncture. First is the legislative proposal that we have put forward that helps establish the Air Force reserve space elements into the Space Force proper, a single component that would have both full time and part time.

We think that is a very innovative way to establish this career path flexibility that will have retention impacts for us. The second situation is the Space National Guard or the Air National Guard capabilities that are performing space, separate and distinct from the legislative proposal.

The most important thing to me is that we retain the capabilities that are currently in the Air National Guard.

It is about a 1,000 people. It is seven different states with tremendous space capabilities that we rely on every day.

And so, it is important that we maintain that expertise and those capabilities. What we have said is there is probably multiple ways where we can retain those, but we have to move away from the status quo because we have got this disconnect between my responsibilities for the mission, but General Brown's

responsibilities to currently OT&E those space capabilities in the Air National Guard.

So, where status quo causes problems, there are other ways to evaluate those, and we are going through all the costing and analysis to make sure that we can provide decision makers with the right balance between the two.

SENATOR SHAHEEN: Well, thank you. I look forward to hearing the outcome of those discussions. Thank you, Mr.

Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Senator Fischer, please.

SENATOR FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr.

Secretary, I want to ask you about an underappreciated but absolutely integral part of our nuclear enterprise, and that is NC3 modernizations. Senator King often refers to that as the fourth leg of our triad, and I agree with him on the absolute importance of that. Can you please describe how this budget request supports NC3 modernization and why it is so important that we get this effort right?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Thank you, Senator. The NC3 is an essential part of the triad. It actually has to be secure and resilient so they can function in an emergency. What we are doing is we are replacing and getting the next generation of AEHF satellites for secure communications.

We are investing in that.

We are also investing in the radios that are carried by some of our aircraft that are nuclear capable. And we are investing in some of our software systems that are used to manage nuclear functions.

So, we have fully funded investment accounts in each of those areas to make sure we stay current and provide the secure nuclear communications that are necessary.

SENATOR FISCHER: Would you say we are on schedule in that modernization? Do you feel pretty confident that we are where we need to be?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I am never 100 percent confident in schedules. Every new program, every development program in particular, entails risk. I am not aware of anything that – there is nothing that is keeping me up at night in that area right now.

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay. Good to hear. General Brown, I would like to ask you about the Sentinel program. The Sentinel in placement is one of the largest and most complex projects that the Department has undertaken in decades. What efforts are currently being undertaken to ensure that this program remains on schedule?

GENERAL BROWN: There are several things that we are doing to keep Sentinel on schedule. And part of that is the dialog between the Department of the Air Force with our industry partners. I meet with the CEO on a quarterly basis where we walk through where they are.

One of the key aspects we are looking at is trying to be more proactive than reactive on this and really thinking ahead to ensure we are doing things to drive down risk as far as supply chains, workforce. To stay ahead of, and then on top of that, as we are working through right now for the land acquisition, our working that process as well.

So right now, I think the dialog is important and that is what is really helping us keep things on track. So, there are no surprises or minimizes surprises, and being able to engage and mitigate well in advance of any type of event that might impact the critical path.

SENATOR FISCHER: As you look ahead, and you are talking about mitigation on disruptions that can occur, what keeps you up at night?

GENERAL BROWN: Well, just the size of – you know, the size of this particular program and the aspect of how important is to our strategic deterrence. And because of the size of the program and the time it is going to take, you know, those are the things that concern me, because there is a lot of things going to happen between now and when we fully field. But our goal here is to stay ahead of those and ensure that we mitigate any type of challenge.

SENATOR FISCHER: Are we on track for that goal?

GENERAL BROWN: We are now, and that is part of the yard work between

ourselves and industry partners.

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay, thank you. Secretary Kendall, I was with you on the rollout for the B-21 Raider. Can you provide us with any updates or new developments on that program?

SECRETARY KENDALL: There haven't been any fundamental changes since we were there, Senator. We are still, as far as I know, on track to have our first flight later this year.

SENATOR FISCHER: And can you tell me how the budget request this year is going to help to expand munitions production capacity?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Yes. We are asking for multiyear production for three systems, JASSM, LRASM, and AMRAAM. We are also entering production, hopefully for JDAM, the new air to air missile. And we are going to be asking for funds to increase the size of that production line, the capacity of that production line from what we had originally planned.

SENATOR FISCHER: Okay, good. Also, Secretary Kendall and General Brown, I was pleased to see that there is full funding for the RC-135 program in the budget request for this year.

The RC-135 is highly capable IRS platform that provides critical intelligence to decision makers and enables the United States to maintain a strategic advantage over potential adversaries.

We see those efforts and how important they are in Ukraine and also with our NATO adversary – or NATO's allies. Thank you for getting that in there. And I expect to see continued full support for the RC-135 fleet in future years as well. So, thank you both very much. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator King, please.

SENATOR KING: Thank you. Secretary Kendall, what do you – which do you consider a more serious immediate threat to National Security, **China**, or the failure of this Congress to pass a budget and go with a one-year continuing resolution?

SECRETARY KENDALL: They are not the same category, Senator, but I take

your point. We – I mentioned time in my opening statement. It is the thing that I am most obsessed about. We can't get it back. That is irreplaceable.

SENATOR KING: And how serious would it be if we had a yearlong continuing resolution instead of the passage of the budget?

SECRETARY KENDALL: It would be very serious. All the new starts that I talked about earlier, all the increased efforts that I talked about, all the work – we spent a year roughly working on what we called operational imperatives, which were the seven operational problems that we needed to solve given what the threat is doing, particularly **China**.

SENATOR KING: Would it compromise National Security?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Absolutely.

SENATOR KING: You mentioned earlier, and this is sort of in the same lane, in your testimony, in your opening statement about an advanced procurement or an advanced approval for some of the work that you are undertaking.

Could you expand on that a bit?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Senator King, you are of an age similar to mine, I think, and when I make a reference to the movie Casablanca, you will know what I am talking about. But the movie starts –

SENATOR KING: I am shocked, shocked that there is –

SECRETARY KENDALL: There you go.

SENATOR KING: – going on.

SECRETARY KENDALL: The movie starts with a comment about refugees who come to Casablanca and wait and wait and wait. I am waiting right now. We spent the first year I was in office defining what we needed to do to stay ahead of the pacing challenge, ahead of **China**.

And I had to wait a year to get that into the budget, get the budget submitted. Now I am waiting another roughly a year for, under normal circumstances, that budget to be passed. If there is a year continuing resolution, I will wait yet another year.

And that is all time that we are giving away to someone who is racing to be ahead of us technologically and field the capability. We cannot afford that time.

SENATOR KING: And you are proposing a technique –

SECRETARY KENDALL: What I am proposing is we wouldn't have to wait even the normal one, one year and a half. We will be able to do the low-cost initial stages of a program, do the system engineering, do the planar design work, do maybe a little risk reduction, maintain competition, make no long-term commitments, only go up to the point of preliminary design review, one of the earliest milestones.

All that is relatively inexpensive, but it takes time.

And then Congress would have full authority to decide whether we could proceed beyond that point or not. We would probably use reprogramming for this and Congress would have authority over that.

So, there wouldn't be any real loss of the authorities that the Congress has over what we do, but we will gain a year and a half at least of time, lead time to getting things fielded.

SENATOR KING: We are headed for a markup of the National Defense Authorization Act in about a month. I hope that you will submit your suggestion so that we can consider it as part of that process.

SECRETARY KENDALL: It has been submitted, Senator.

We came over from OMB. It was approved by OMB.

SENATOR KING: So, you have it in our process. Thank you. General Brown, Senator Cramer and I submitted a letter some time ago to the uniformed leadership about the transition program in the military from active duty to veteran status. We got a response from the Secretary, but I view this as a uniformed issue.

I want the senior leadership to take this issue very seriously. Transition for veterans is an incredibly important situation because we have learned that suicide, for example, is most likely in the first two or three years after separation.

So, I hope I can have your commitment to pay particular attention to this

process. We should be attending to be sure that our soon to be veterans have all the information and contacts that they need to reintegrate into the larger society.

GENERAL BROWN: You have my commitment. And, you know, I do take it very seriously because as you might imagine, I have a number of friends that have served, and at some point, I will also transition into – as a veteran.

So, you know, the aspect of how we do a very smooth handoff in collaboration with the Veterans Affairs. But it is not only how we transition into new careers, it is also how they emotionally transition into a new life out of uniform, and I think that is a key aspect that helps. If we focus on that, I think it will also help us prevent the suicides of our veterans.

SENATOR KING: Thank you. I will be submitting a question for the record in the classified session with regard to GPS denied environment. I think that is something we really need to pay close attention to.

The first step in any conflict is going to be an attempt to blind us, so I hope that – I have the same recommendation to the Navy that they will relearn how to use sextants. Space Guard, General Salzman. Where does that stand? We have been discussing that on the committee.

What is your recommendation with regard to a reserve force or space guard to augment the capabilities of your organization?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: My recommendation at this point is to make sure we have good, validated numbers that can help us assess each of the various courses of action that would allow me to retain the kinds of capabilities that currently live inside the Air National Guard. Again, that is my most important point.

The expertise and the capabilities that are currently in the Air National Guard need to be harvested so we can don't create an operational gap in any kind of transition.

So, my recommendation is, make sure that the costing, the number of billets, all of that data is assessed and evaluated as we look at the course of actions.

SENATOR KING: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator King. Senator Cotton, please.

SENATOR COTTON: Gentlemen, thank you for your appearance here and your decades of service to our nation.

Secretary Kendall, you have spoken some about accepting near term risk to fund the future force. I have gone back and looked historically at Air Force budgets for about 20 years. Are you aware that the Air Force has received \$1.3 trillion less than the Army since 2002?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I was not aware of that.

SENATOR COTTON: And almost \$1 trillion less than the Navy since 2002.

SECRETARY KENDALL: No, I was not aware of that either, Senator.

SENATOR COTTON: That is after accounting for the so- called pass through budget, which I believe causes many people to include members of Congress to misperceive the Air Force's total budget. Could you share with us your thoughts about how that works?

SECRETARY KENDALL: The passage of budget is budget that is included in the submission under the Department of the Air Force, but it is money that doesn't actually go to the Air Force. It is about \$40 billion.

For people who are familiar with the budget and used to working with it understand that they realize what that is. So, for people who are not as familiar, it can be a little confusing in terms of what our total budget is.

SENATOR COTTON: And to be clear, this is passed through budget is not for Air Force classified programs, are not only for Air Force classified programs. It is simply your budget is used as the vehicle to fund these other programs.

SECRETARY KENDALL: That is correct. It goes to different Departments.

SENATOR COTTON: That is why I say, I think some people misperceive the top line Air Force budget, and I worry that that might be contributing in part to why your service has had to accept this near-term risk now to fund the future force. And I think we as a Congress should try to address this situation to make sure this misperception doesn't continue.

SECRETARY KENDALL: General, what I look at is the adequacy of our budget to allow us to meet our missions.

And I am comfortable with the money that we are asking for this year to be able to do those functions. There is risk always, and we have tried to balance that risk, taking into account the pacing challenge in particular and trying to respond to that.

SENATOR COTTON: I want to return to both your opening statement and a question from Senator Reed about collaborative combat aircraft or CCAs. You called them an operational imperative. Can you discuss in a little more detail about how significant these CCAs are for both deterrence and your combat capability?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Our analysis shows that they are very cost effective. That they basically, by augmenting crewed aircraft with relatively inexpensive CCAs, you get a net combat capability, which is much more significant than if you tried to do it with all fully crewed aircraft.

And we – our current anticipation is that the cost with CCA will be a fraction of the cost of, say, an F-35.

The other advantages for overall affordability, it can make the force much more affordable. You get a lot more combat power for the same total dollars that you might be committing. So, it has big benefits in both ways.

SENATOR COTTON: And you said again today in your opening statement that the history of failure in warfare can almost always be summed up in two words, too late, a famous Douglas MacArthur quote, but I think you have said it enough that maybe one legacy of your tenure is that people think it is a Frank Kendall quote, and I think that is apt today as it was in MacArthur's time.

What would be the significance if **China** were to field such unmanned aircraft along with its manned fleet before the United States? How could delays in CCA funding impact that possibility?

SECRETARY KENDALL: **China** is aggressively trying to field the capability to defeat our ability to project power. They have been working on it for at least 20 years.

Their long range weapon systems targeting our airfields, our carriers, our satellites, etcetera, are a threat that we really have to cope with.

But they are also modernizing their air capability.

And I think, Senator Cotton, you have seen the classified briefing that we have been providing. I can't go to great details here, but they have analyzed carefully how we fight and what we fight with, and they have been thoughtful about what they need to invest in to try to circumvent that or defeat it.

And that is the reason that I am so obsessed with getting on with the next generation capabilities. Holding onto things that are becoming obsolete over time just doesn't make any sense. We have got to get to the next generation.

SENATOR COTTON: It is my understanding that this fleet of unmanned aircraft would be a mix of aircraft with both weapons, kinetic weapons, let's say missiles, bombs, that sort of thing, but also other sensors or electronic warfare systems. Is that correct, Mr. Secretary?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Yes, that is correct. One way to think about it is that the pod or the weapon that might have been under the wing of a crewed aircraft is now flying in a separate aircraft and managed by that that commander of that aircraft.

The analysis that we have done shows that the adversary has to honor each of those aircraft as it is a full threat. And that gives you a great advantage relative to the cost of having those things in the air.

SENATOR COTTON: So, it creates a targeting problem for our adversary to have so many aircraft up in the air.

SECRETARY KENDALL: It both increases the targeting problem, but also gives them tactical dilemmas that he doesn't have to face right now. We can sacrifice one of these aircraft, put it well out in front, use it to draw fire and force the other side to expose itself and then be subject to engagement. So, they are – we call them attritable.

They are not expendable, but we can afford to lose some of them operationally. There is nobody in them that we are going to lose. So, it changes our tactical options substantially.

SENATOR COTTON: While therefore enhancing survivability of our manned aircraft.

SECRETARY KENDALL: Exactly right.

SENATOR COTTON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator Hirono, please.

SENATOR HIRONO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam faces significant infrastructure challenges due to consistently deferred maintenance.

For the Air Force specifically, Hickam airfield is in urgent need of almost \$1 billion over the next several years to repair the taxiways our planes take off and land on. Secretary Kendall, is this budget request adequately prioritizing maintaining Air Force facilities in the **Pacific** ?

SECRETARY KENDALL: We are prioritizing our facilities in the **Pacific** , largely because of the threat that we face out there. And one of the operational imperatives was resilient forward basing.

So, the thing that we are prioritizing is improving the hardening and the equiptage, if you will, of our bases so that we can make agile combat employment a reality. I believe that Hickam specifically falls under our Joint Base construct, which is operated by the Navy. And we are working with the Navy to try to have our priorities funded.

SENATOR HIRONO: That is why I have a question for General Brown. Repairing the Hickam airfield will require support from the Navy and the Joint Base. Are there issues of prioritizing Air Force needs of the Joint Base?

GENERAL BROWN: You know, having served as the Commander of **Pacific Air Forces** and being stationary at the Joint Base, there has to be collaboration between the Air Force and the Navy.

We have been able to highlight more recently our real concerns with the airfield pavement. And so, it has gotten the attention of the Navy and other parts of the Department, so I think we are on a good path to actually ensure that aspect because it is going to help us project combat power.

SENATOR HIRONO: Thank you. The Agile Combat Employment Strategy requires the appropriate posture and supporting infrastructure at locations throughout the **Pacific**, like the islands of the Compact of Freely Associated States.

That will be Palau, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Guam, and Northern Australia. Secretary Kendall, does the Air Force have the appropriate forward air basing it needs to execute agile combat employment?

SECRETARY KENDALL: We are working to increase that air basing in places that you mentioned, in Japan, wherever we are based in the **Pacific**. Our operational success out there depends on making the concept of agile combat employment a reality.

And that includes, and it is a priority for us in the budget because it is something we can do fairly quickly relative to other things that we might want to do that would take a development program, for example.

So, we do have quite a bit of money in the budget focused on adding capability to support agile combat employment, including in the locations that you just mentioned, Senator.

SENATOR HIRONO: General Brown, what would be the impact to deterrence capabilities in the **Pacific** if dispersed infrastructure in the places that I am mentioning are not prioritized?

GENERAL BROWN: It decreases their options. And by having more and more options to be able to operate, that complicates the calculus for our adversaries. And by having and being able to show different locations we can operate from, project combat power from, a credible combat force that adds to deterrence. And having that ability is important.

SENATOR HIRONO: I am sure both of you acknowledge the importance of the compacts of free association that we are currently concluding.

And I just want the two of you to be aware that not only should we be funding the appropriate amounts to the compact nations themselves, but when their citizens come to our country and they are living in states throughout the U.S., that they are able to access the social service programs that they should be entitled to, and I would like those kinds of provisions to be included in the

compact.

And I mentioning this to you because the compacts involve not just the DOD, but Interior, as well as State.

General Saltzman, the Department of Defense is increasingly turning to space-based systems for its ballistic cruise and hypersonic missile defense sensing needs. This is of particular interest to Hawaii.

So, what are you doing to ensure that these programs remain on time and on budget? And also, these space systems come with their own unique risks. How is the Space Force ensuring these capabilities are resilient in the face of disruption, whether through a cyber or kinetic attack?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Yes, Senator, I think you will see that this particular budget submission addresses those concerns. First, the missile warning, missile tracking layer that we are pivoting to is a proliferated constellation, which means it is more resilient by design as there are more satellites performing the mission.

Because they are in lower Earth orbit, they are actually more high fidelity, so it is better tracking for some of the threats that we are seeing come out of our pacing challenge. Also, we are investing heavily in the cyber defense capabilities of the networks that are required to maintain and operate those systems as well.

So, this budget definitely addresses your concerns.

SENATOR HIRONO: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator Rounds, please.

SENATOR ROUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen, first of all, thank you all to you and to your families for your service to our country. I would also like to thank General Brown and Secretary Kendall for your most recent visit to Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Ellsworth is very excited to be the first bed down for the B-21 training squadron and the first operational squadron in the entire community. In fact, the entire State of South Dakota is very excited to see that coming their way.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the Tigers of the 37th

Bomb Squadron in their recent win of the STRATCOM's coveted Omaha Trophy. Shows that they are the best of the best and we are proud of them.

General Brown and General Salzman, there have been efforts most recently regarding an attempt to utilize a part of the electromagnetic spectrum for purposes other than DOD purposes, and specifically the 3.1 to 3.45 gigahertz band or the S-band of the spectrum.

I would like for the record, if you could confirm for us that your forces do utilize that portion of the spectrum and that, at this unclassified level, could you share with us just how significant that part of the spectrum is to your forces regarding radar communications and so forth?

General Brown.

GENERAL BROWN: Senator Rounds, we do use that part of the spectrum for our operational capabilities, and there is a number of weapon systems that operate within that band.

And I will just give you one example, our C-130 station keeping.

If we – that band was actually moved and we had to redesign, it would cost roughly about \$2 billion just for that one platform. And we have a number of platforms that operate within that – within the S-band, so it is critical that we understand the impact on our security, not only for us to be able to operate, but also having to – if we had to redesign systems, if we lost access to that part of the electromagnetic spectrum.

SENATOR ROUNDS: Thank you, General. General Saltzman.

GENERAL SALTZMAN: We have a – that particular band is a radar band that allows us to look into deep space.

And we currently have a developmental radar that is going to significantly enhance our ability to do space domain awareness.

If we were not able to use that piece of spectrum, not only would we lose the time that we have already invested in, as much as several hundred million dollars that we have already put into development, but it would also mean that we have to use a different portion of the electromagnetic spectrum, which isn't

as capable in determining and discriminating capabilities in deep space.

SENATOR ROUNDS: Physics still count, don't they?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: They do, sir.

SENATOR ROUNDS: Thank you. General Brown, multiple independent studies, as well as at least one by the Air Force, indicate the numbers of bombers needed to meet requirements greatly exceed the minimum number currently being planned for.

In your professional military judgment, what is the approximate number of bombers needed to maintain a credible deterrent against two near-peer competitors?

GENERAL BROWN: Senator, the couple of things I think about is not only the number but also the capability of the bombers. And the two bombers that we are – right now, the three bomber fleet, going to two bomber fleet, the B-21, as you highlighted that will start out at Ellsworth, but also as we upgrade the B-52, and so there will be 100 B-21s and 75 B-52s.

We will continue to do analysis. I mean, that is what we – the analysis we have right now, based on the threat.

We will continue to pay attention to the threat, and that will also influence if we have to go beyond those numbers from a bomber capacity standpoint.

SENATOR ROUNDS: It sounds like a lot of bombers until you realize that not all of them are capable at all times.

They are all undergoing maintenance at one point or another. What percentage of the bombers would you normally expect to be operational at that point?

GENERAL BROWN: You know, ideally, you know, when we look at our day-to-day operations, not only for our bombers, but really all of our fleet, you know, an 80 percent aircraft availability because you are going to have some aircraft down for maintenance, down for depot type operations. That is the goal of what we want to get to or above, not only for our bombers, but really across all of our platforms.

SENATOR ROUNDS: Thank you, sir. General Saltzman, as you know, I have

concerns about the DOD's approach to providing space based, ground moving target indication capabilities to tactical DOD users following the divestment of the JSTARS platform.

Can you share with me how you are making sure that the JROC validated requirements are captured in the acquisitions process of a platform whose acquisition is executed by the intelligence community? And will the DOD maintain milestone authority?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Currently milestone decision authority, obviously that is acquisitions, and it will be a collaborative effort with the IC. But Mr. LaPlante in USD A&S does have that milestone decision authority, or portions of it.

From my vantage point, in terms of requirements and meeting those requirements, the Space Force is responsible for writing the capabilities development document, which documents those high-level requirements to make sure that the JROC validated requirements are satisfied in the program.

And then perhaps most importantly is the concept of employment. U.S. Space Force has responsibility to right that concept of employment to make sure that operationally it is a DOD mission that meets the warfighter requirements regardless of who develops the sensor.

SENATOR ROUNDS: Thank you. And Secretary Kendall, just one very quick comment. I hope that in the future, with the help of this committee, when asked what keeps you up at night, I hope there will be a point here shortly where you can respond the same way that Secretary Mattis did, Secretary of Defense Mattis did, and said, it is not things that keep me up at night. I keep other people up at night. And I think that is our goal. Thank you.

SECRETARY KENDALL: I share that with you, Senator.

SENATOR ROUNDS: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Mr.

Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Stand Rounds. Senator Ernst, please.

SENATOR ERNST: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, gentlemen, for your testimony and your service to our great nation. I want to continue the

discussion about our bomber force and the future of it.

And in a conflict with **China**, Air Force bombers will need to go after hundreds of targets over the vast distances of the **Pacific**. And yet today's Air Force is very much centered on fighters, with about 15 fighters for every one of our bombers.

If you look back to the 1960s, the Air Force had to deliver long range strikes against the Soviets, and the make-up of the Air Force at that time was about three fighters to every bomber. So, we just need to make sure that the mix is appropriate for today's fight. And again, if we are looking at a fight with **China**, we want to make sure that we are appropriately balanced.

So General Brown, we will start with you. Tell us a little bit more about the critical role of the bomber in projecting power, especially as we are looking towards the east and a potential fight with **China**.

GENERAL BROWN: Excuse me – one of the key areas when you think about our bomber fleet, is that to be able to do – come from long distances away from where the airfields that you would take off from, would be under attack by and large.

The overall capacity of our bombers to do a number of missions, to be able to carry how long they will be able to stay airborne. And so, it provides that capability to carry a number of long range standoff weapons in support of operations.

That is the viability of the bomber, and it is the capability that provides to be able to help us generate combat power.

SENATOR ERNST: Yes, very important. Thank you, sir.

And to the extent you can speak to it, how would the B-21 modular design allow the bomber to take on a wider range of missions, whether it is a strike, mission, ISR, or even electronic warfare?

GENERAL BROWN: I think one of the areas as we start going down the path of digital engineering and looking at how we do mission systems, many things are more software based today than they were back in history.

And so that ability to be able to rapidly reprogram these to be the threat, to

bring in additional capability from a weapon standpoint as well, that is a part of the modular aspect and how we are able to work, you know, the aspects of the engineering to bring in capability much faster than we have in the past.

SENATOR ERNST: Yes, exactly. I am intrigued by modular designs in this platform and many others as well.

Secretary Kendall, with our major increases in the Air Force budget, then would increasing the B-21 buy require divesting legacy aircraft?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Senator, I share your concern about the future size and structure of the Air Force. I am not sure that the future Air Force will look all that much like the one we have today.

And one of the things that may change, this shift in the balance that you talked about between shorter range tactical air capabilities and longer range strike capabilities the bombers provide. Within whatever constraint we have, we will probably end up, I think, at some point talking about adjustments to what the current ratio is.

We don't have many options to make those changes right now. We are preserving the bomber fleet pretty much as much as we can. We are fortunate that the B-52 was so robustly designed that we can keep it pretty much forever.

So, we are using it as a bus, essentially, and we keep upgrading it, putting new engines on it, new radar.

The B-1 continues to service. It has got a lot of capacity. B-2s have been harder to maintain. B-21 is our option in the near-term to bring in new capability, and we are just starting to get it into production. Current numbers 100. I don't know what it will end up being. It may be larger than that. I would not be surprised by that.

SENATOR ERNST: And Secretary, thank you for that. Is there a way that the Air Force could control unit costs if it ramps up production of the B-21?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Cost and quantities are always connected, and you do reduce cost by increasing the production rate, definitely.

SENATOR ERNST: Okay.

SECRETARY KENDALL: The B-21 is being built on a line that was built for the development program and just be continued to use for production at a relatively modest rate. I think if we were going to significantly increase our production, we have to go relook at how we retool for manufacturing B-21. But that is not a near-term decision.

SENATOR ERNST: Wow. Well, I appreciate it, gentlemen. My grandfather built bombers in Middle America during World War II. And it is amazing that here we are all those years later, and yet we are still heavily reliant upon its capabilities. But thank you all very much for being here today. Thank you for your service.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Ernst. Senator Cramer, please.

SENATOR CRAMER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to all of you for your service and for being with us today. Since bombers are the topic of the moment, General Brown, I want to talk a little bit about not so much bombers, but disbursement of bombers and taking advantage of some opportunities, particularly as it relates to BASE, or bomber agile combat employment, and the distribution of the nuclear capabilities.

As you know, of course, there used to be six big bases in the northern tier between Michigan and Montana. Today, there are two and one of them being Minot, the other one being Grand Forks in North Dakota.

The Grand Forks course was a bomber base. It had a 300-foot-wide runway. It has been reduced to 150-foot runway, based on the movement of the lights. It is due for improvement in 2025, and I am just wondering if you would be open to looking carefully at perhaps widening that runway for, you know, base type of use in the future.

Again, keeping in mind that in 2025, it is due for some improvements anyway. Because it really sets – we are down to the last two in that tier.

GENERAL BROWN: Senator, we can definitely look at that. Particularly as you said that they are already going to be doing some modifications. It is probably – and any time you are doing, it is probably a good time to take a look at and make sure we do not miss any options to provide us opportunities and capabilities in the future.

SENATOR CRAMER: Well, I always like it when my state's interests match up

with common sense and the military. So, all I can ask is you take a good look at it.

Thank you. General, I also want to talk to you about, you and I a couple of years ago talked about the deliveries of the MH-139A helicopter.

Secretary Kendall happened to be in Minot around Christmas time, and so he saw those drafty old, you know, Vietnam era helicopters that our Airmen, and particularly the security forces, have to use in Minot. And we couldn't go for a ride that day because of weather. Not uncommon in Minot.

The delay at that time, couple of years ago, the delay in delivery was due to FAA certification, as you no doubt recall and know. That is now done, but we see that there may be a delay again, and I am just wondering if you have some sort of an update on the MH-139As and when we might expect to see them?

GENERAL BROWN: Yes, we just finished up the production development phase and then in Fiscal Year 2024, we expected four of the MH-139s. They start their initial operational testing as well, so we will be beyond that FAA certification and then that will help us start to the path of a follow-on procurement to start fielding the aircraft.

SENATOR CRAMER: Well, is four enough? I mean, is there a way to escalate? Is there any chance we can accelerate that? I mean, I would even question whether the Hueys, the old ones, are mission capable at this point.

GENERAL BROWN: We will always take a look to see if there are ways to accelerate, you know, bringing on a capability and at the same time balance the rest as we bring that capability on to the force.

SENATOR CRAMER: I understand. Maybe one of the things that could help and inspire you would be a ride in February. But anyway, we will work on that another time.

Thank you very much. Thank you, all three of you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you very much, Senator Cramer.

Senator Tuberville, please.

SENATOR TUBERVILLE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for being here today, gentlemen, and your service. General Saltzman, U.S. policy is to have at least two space launch vehicles to launch DOD and NRO satellites. Space has changed a lot in 20 years. That law was written in 2004.

Meanwhile, the demand for launch vehicles, commercial, civil, and defense, has skyrocketed. Given the dramatic changes that have occurred in space, the increase in demand and the need for greater resiliency, redundancy, and responsiveness, what would be your best military advice for policymakers when it comes to space launch vehicles? Would you like to see at least three?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Well, assured access to space is a critical capability that we have. The way I would characterize it is for me to say that we have assured access to space, I need at least two providers capable of putting satellites on orbit.

But it is to the advantage of the U.S. Government, it is to the advantage of the U.S. Space Force to have as many viable launch providers as possible. It creates a level of agility. It creates a level of resiliency that is important, which is why our NNSL, National Security space launch phase three contract that we have out for comments, is looking at two lanes.

One that maximizes the number of emerging launch providers to participate, while preserving that assured access that are our most highly risk averse mission sets.

And so, I think we have struck that balance appropriately.

SENATOR TUBERVILLE: Thank you. Secretary Kendall, the U.S. Air Force wants its next generation air refueler tanker KC-Z to reach additional operational capabilities by 2040. Clearly, that creates a gap in critical wartime capability. Where are we on the KC-46 Pegasus procurement to ensure we have full capabilities?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Senator, we have fundamentally changed our tanker acquisition strategy, where we need to move to a next generation taking capability which is resilient enough to survive against a pacing challenge.

So basically, the current plan is to go from the KC-46 into what we call the next generation aerial refueling system, or NGAS, which will be a new design,

designed to be resilient enough to survive in the environment that we anticipate. We want to get to that design as quickly as we can.

So, there will be some gap between the currently contractual options that we have for KC-46, to when we can get the NGAS system into production. We would like to make that gap as small as possible. So, what we are requesting in this budget is the funding to start down the road towards this program and do the analysis of alternatives to define that design and its requirements.

But we need to get on with this as quickly as we can.

It is one of the areas in which time is very important to us. It won't be 2040. It is going to be much sooner than that. But we don't know – until we define the design and move it forward, we don't know exactly what that date will be. I am shooting for the early 2030s.

SENATOR TUBERVILLE: General Brown, your thoughts on that?

GENERAL BROWN: As the Secretary described it, you know, our tankers are very important to be able to generate that combat power. And the aspect of – by changing the strategy to move things further left and get to next generation air refueling system is a way to move a bit faster to – that capability is going to be a bit more survival and to be able to create greater combat power.

SENATOR TUBERVILLE: Yes, especially for the **Indo-Pacific**. I mean, it is going to be a, you know, we are going – a greater need, obviously. Secretary Kendall, it wouldn't be a hearing if I hadn't asked you about Space Command.

You and I have talked about this quite a bit. Are we getting closer? You know, I would hate that this, you know, we are getting – you know, we are on the verge in our lifetime of a dangerous world.

And, you know, we might be fighting this thing from space if we don't watch it, and we want to make sure that we are doing the right things. I hope this thing doesn't get political. It looks like it is. You know, we have been waiting for two years for a decision.

Give me your thoughts on what is going on with the Space Command. General Dickson said in his last hearing here that he needed a decision. So, what are your thoughts?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I don't have anything new to report today, Senator. I am really hopeful that we will be able to get a decision out as soon as possible, but I don't have any new information to provide.

SENATOR TUBERVILLE: None whatsoever? Are we even thinking about it or was this – we just – it just goes in and out? I mean, it is –

SECRETARY KENDALL: I just don't have anything more to provide.

SENATOR TUBERVILLE: But do you do you think it is important for us to have a permanent base?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Yes.

SENATOR TUBERVILLE: Yes. And, you know, I think we all do. And Nebraska, who is on the list, number two, and then San Antonio, number three, I think we all are kind of sitting around waiting to see what is going to happen.

But we sure would like to get this decision made and moved on down the road and have the opportunity to build on it instead of having guesswork. So, thank you. Thank you very much.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.

Senator Warren, please.

SENATOR WARREN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to our witnesses for your service. We often talk about the role of bombers and fighter jets in National Security, but our greatest strength as a nation is our people.

The Senate approves thousands of military promotions every year, and typically this vote is a formality. But the Senator from Alabama has weaponized a policy disagreement about abortion to politicize the military and place holds on all, all military nominations.

This brings the careers of nearly 200 officers, people who have served their country for decades, to a screeching halt. General Brown, can you explain what steps does a colonel or a brigadier General have to go through before the president sends a promotion over to the Senate for approval?

GENERAL BROWN: Well, each one of those offers goes through a thorough

review that actually starts initially in the Department of the Air Force. We ensure there is no adverse information.

That same process gets repeated through the Joint Staff, through the Office of Secretary of Defense, over at the White House, before that member's record comes and is delivered to the Senate for promotion. So, it takes several months before it actually gets to here to the Senate.

SENATOR WARREN: Okay. So, you are not just sending these promotions over on a whim – it looked like a good idea. I take it that these individuals are being recommended for higher rank because they are our military's best, and they have proven themselves to the highest degree. Is that fair?

GENERAL BROWN: It does. It also it shows that they have future potential.

SENATOR WARREN: Future potential as well. Now, recruitment has been a challenge for most of the military services, but retention levels have stayed quite high. The Air Force currently retains about 90 percent of its people at critical decision points.

That means that they complete a commitment, and the vast majority are choosing to re-enlist and stay with the Air Force. That is really good news. Secretary Kendall, does it worry you that if our men and women in uniform see that their promotions can get held up indefinitely because one Senator has an issue with one DOD policy, that that might hurt your ability to retain the best and the most qualified people in the Air Force?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Senator Warren, it does have an impact, definitely. I also want to mention it has an impact on families, too. We generally rotate people through the summer months and people need to plan for that.

They have to plan to get their children to schools, where they are going to be established and in their new homes. So, there is a very personal toll this takes as well. One of the things that motivates our people in terms of retention or not is how they feel that their families are being treated.

Things like childcare and education and health care are all very important factors. And we ask our military families to move multiple times during their career. It is something that they accept. But when they are planning for that, and it is disrupted, it has very negative impact and it definitely impacts on

retention as well.

SENATOR WARREN: And do you think these families want to be made a political football?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I know that they do not.

SENATOR WARREN: So, Secretary Kendall, what is the National Security impact of these holds for the Air Force?

SECRETARY KENDALL: The biggest impact is that people who should be coming into leadership roles don't arrive on time. So, someone who is already there has to step up, either someone – Generally people, if they are going to retire, they are still going to retire. So, a junior person will step up and be acting for a period of time.

Those people are limited in what they can do. They generally are not going to make any major initiatives or make any major changes because they know they are not going to be there very long. They expect that they will be replaced very shortly.

So, they will keep the trains running, but they are not going to move the organization forward as much as they might be otherwise.

SENATOR WARREN: Well, the Senator from Alabama is holding up promotions across all of the services. But I took a look at the Air Force nominees in particular, and one thing that was really striking to me is that the vast majority of them studied at the Air War College in Alabama.

The State of Alabama has invested a lot in these leaders and the Senator from Alabama doesn't seem to care about that. So, Secretary Kendall, unlike many of the other services, the Space Force is meeting its recruiting goals.

The Space Force is obviously still very young. These are defining years for your service. What are the readiness impacts of these holds on Space Force?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I am not aware of any General officers that are being held for the Space Force at this time. But the same generic impact would happen there as would happen on the Air Force. The Space Force is meeting its recruiting goals because it is an exciting new opportunity for people, and it is

relatively small, and it is relatively modest numbers that it is seeking.

SENATOR WARREN: Well, thank you very much. You know, holding the promotions of every single senior military nominee is not democracy, it is extortion, and this kind of extortion has serious consequences for our national defense.

This actively hurts our ability to respond quickly to threats around the world. And as you point out, Secretary Kendall, this is really painful for military families who have already been called on to give so much. We need to lift these holds. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Warren. Senator Budd, please.

SENATOR BUDD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And again, thank you all for being here, for those behind you and those you represent as well. And considering the Senator from Massachusetts's remarks, Secretary Austin can solve this with a single stroke of the pen.

So, I was able to make that several weeks ago very clear. So, change the policy, solve the problem.

Secretary Kendall, based on the president's budget, the Air Force is requesting \$2.9 billion, or about \$317 million more than last year to purchase 24 F-15EXs, and that is to replace the remaining C and D model F-15s. Does that sound about right? Thank you –

SECRETARY KENDALL: Yes, sir. It is replacing another incremental of F-15Cs.

SENATOR BUDD: Yes, sir. Thanks. I think the Air Force budget makes it very clear, so, again, I appreciate you clarifying that. What is not clear to me is the Air Force's plan for the F-15E, Echo, fleet, including the squadrons at Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in North Carolina.

I know Ranking Member Wicker was able to spend time there during his service, though it is a special place for many of us. The Air Force just completed major upgrades to the F-15E fleet, including replacing the outdated radars.

This investment by Congress and the Air Force drastically improves the aircraft's air to air, and air to ground targeting capabilities. Does that sound about right?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Yes, sir.

SENATOR BUDD: Thank you. The Air Force is now in the process of adding the Eagle passive active warning and survivability system, or E-PAWSS, to these aircraft, which will offer improved defensive situational awareness and electronic attack capability. Correct?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Yes, Senator.

SENATOR BUDD: So now, reading from page 261, this is volume two of the aircraft – excuse me, the Air Force’s Aircraft Procurement Justification book, which states that F-15 E-PAWSS procurement plans have been applied to the Air Force F-15E divestment plan and will result in 99 E-PAWSS modified aircraft.

Now, one can read this to mean, and it has been reported that the Air Force plans to shrink the size of the F-15E fleet from 218 aircraft to just 99 aircraft by Fiscal Year 2028. Is that a correct interpretation of the Air Force divestment plan for the F-15E?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I would have to check to confirm that, Senator, but I have no reason to believe it is not correct.

SENATOR BUDD: Thank you. I would ask you to check.

And Mr. Secretary, will you commit, after you check, to providing my staff a detailed briefing on the Air Force long term plan for the F-15E within the next two weeks?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I can promise to give you that. I can’t assure you that it will be within two weeks. But I will do my best to do that.

SENATOR BUDD: As soon as able, thank you. So, in addition to the F-15E divestment, you want to divest 32 F- 22s Block 20 aircraft, all of the U-2s, all MQ-9 Reapers, all RQ-4 Global Hawks of the Block 40 aircraft, and F-16 modernization would be cut. The F-15EX procurement objective was 144 aircraft, but now it is just 104 aircraft. Sound right?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Some of that is correct. I am not sure about some other parts. We are not divesting all the MQ-9s, for example.

SENATOR BUDD: Okay.

SECRETARY KENDALL: And I believe your numbers on the EX were correct.

SENATOR BUDD: If you would check on those numbers, if you would, please. What is going to replace – what is going to replace all these fighter aircraft in the ISR platforms? And the question really is on what schedule?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Over the FYDP, we do come down about 14 percent in total number of fighters. The problem we have is that the oldest fourth generation fighters are just not capable against the threat. And when they go up against fifth generation aircraft, they do not do well at all. We have got a lot of exercises that demonstrate that to us.

The F-15E, which you are concerned about, we are going to be keeping that for some time. And as you mentioned, there is some upgrades still underway. We are not as with the numbers I think that you indicated.

As far as you mentioned, Seymour Johnson, I am not aware of any near-term plans to change anything at Seymour Johnson, but we can give you more details on that when I give you the details that you asked for.

SENATOR BUDD: The question, please. Fiscal Year 2028, if you would. Thank you.

SECRETARY KENDALL: I will let you know. Overall, we are trying to move towards a next generation set of capabilities. So F-35, NGAD to replace the F-22s, and F-15EX, and F-16s, more modern F-16s are basically going to be the fighter fleet of the future. We are going to add to that the CCAs that we talked about earlier in the testimony.

SENATOR BUDD: Thank you. So, I understand the divesting to invest concept, but I am alarmed at the risk and the timing. Roughly you have about 5,100 aircraft and it is going to shrink to about 40 – a little over 4,400 by 2028.

And most of those reductions are fighters. So, my concern is that this represents an invitation to **China** to be even more aggressive. Any comments on that or concerns?

SECRETARY KENDALL: We look at total combat capability of the fleet and we are increasing that as we buy fifth generation aircraft.

SENATOR BUDD: Thank you. I yield –

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you very much, Senator Budd.

Senator Rosen, please.

SENATOR ROSEN: Well, thank you, Chairman Reed. And thank you for all of you for being here, for your service to the nation, and for everyone that works with you. And I want to build on what Senator Warren was talking about a little bit, about our military families, about how much they sacrifice, how much they do to really keep us safe and protect us, and it is important that we take care of them, too.

So, Nellis Air Force Base in Southern Nevada, there is a housing shortage. So, General Brown, I have raised this before in committee several time. Our wonderful junior enlisted Airmen and Airwomen station in Nevada's Nellis Air Force Base, their average only 12 months in the dormitories, being forced to move off base into very expensive private housing in the community due to these on- base housing shortage.

And in Nellis, the dormitory master plan reflects a shortage of about 500 rooms. And the base has identified a need for two more dormitories. So, I am really disappointed that neither a new dormitory is in the Air Force's Fiscal Year 2024 budget, or in the Future Years Defense Program, or even on your unfunded priorities list.

So, General Brown, how are you going to help our youngest service men and women here at Nellis, and of course at other places around the country, provide more support for them to do their jobs and serve our country?

GENERAL BROWN: Senator, as you highlighted, it is very important. We need to take care of our – most importantly, our junior Airmen, because that actually impacts our retention. We do have two dorm projects that were going through the initial stages for Nellis, in addition to money we are putting into renovating the many of the dorms that already exist.

Having been in Nellis several times, most recently in January, and the conversation on not only the dorm capacity but how we work as well with the community to find affordable housing. One of the areas that I would also highlight as we focused on not only affordable housing, but the difference in

how we raised the basic allowance for housing for a junior Airmen.

It was raised by about 21 percent. I mean, this is something we are paying close attention to, not only at Nellis, but I would say around the Air Force as we are seeing areas from housing standpoint, housing prices have gone up. But really working closely with the communities to try to find opportunities, particularly when we have a bit of a deficit in our dorms at specific locations.

But we are going to continue to work to put more energy into the dorms at Nellis to do those renovations, but also the couple of dorm projects that I mentioned.

SENATOR ROSEN: And I would be remiss if I didn't say thank you in responding to our letters, for improving the speed and access for the base housing allowance when servicemen, Airmen do transition to off base housing.

Getting that money quickly, faster. They are paid the least among everyone and they are often the youngest, so it is very challenging. So, I appreciate the cooperation and attention you have been paying to that. And then I want to move on to some of our military families that actually have children.

They need childcare. It is really important.

Missions go 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, right. In the military, doesn't rest. And so, Secretary Kendall, our Airmen stationed at Creech Air Force Base just outside Las Vegas, now they do the MQ-9 Reaper program, amongst other things. They struggle to find adequate childcare because their shifts are often outside the normal business hours due to the drone programs and other things they do.

It is 24-hour support. And the DOD's new in-home childcare fee assistance pilot program, it was launched to help provide in-home childcare solutions for our service members, especially in regions with high demand. I am happy to see that you extended this pilot program to Las Vegas. However, I am understanding now that the program has a lot of red tape, that it is really difficult requirements, and essentially is rendering in-home childcare reimbursement unavailable to Nevada's military families.

So, Secretary, can you commit to me to work to make this program better for Nevada families? They have to show up 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to complete the mission.

We have to be there for their families. What can we do?

GENERAL BROWN: Senator, I couldn't agree with you more. I have made that commitment. I have driven from Nellis off to Creech, so I know what those people have to do, and I can really appreciate the childcare difficulties associated with having to provide childcare near your home and then make that commitment to go back and forth.

We have the pilot program, as you mentioned. I was not aware of the red tape issues until you highlighted them. But we will take a look at that and see if we can do something to make it much more accessible to people.

Childcare is the problem that I hear most about from our families. There is a shortage of childcare staff around the country. We are trying to address that with a number of initiatives to improve our paying compensation, provide, in the case of the Air Force, free childcare for staff members, first child, and then deductions for the rest.

We are working hard to have more in-home childcare providers to increase the availability of childcare. So, we are doing a number of things in that area. But I will take a specific look at the problem you mentioned about the pilot program and see if we can reduce the red tape.

SENATOR ROSEN: Perfect, thank you. We will look forward to following up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Rosen. Senator Schmitt, please.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to, from the outset here, ask unanimous consent to submit for the record this Washington Post investigative story entitled, Pentagon Buries Evidence of \$125 Billion in Bureaucratic Waste from 2016.

CHAIRMAN REED: Without objection.

[The information referred to follows:] [COMMITTEE INSERT]

SENATOR SCHMITT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Kendall, I would want to ask you about this, because you play a starring role in this article, as it turns out.

There was a report that the Pentagon actually commissioned in the business – or the Defense Business Board, as you are aware, as you are nodding here, identified over \$125 billion worth of bureaucratic waste.

And you were instrumental in burying that report. And I want to ask you about this, but before I do, and you deserve an opportunity to sort of explain yourself here, but fundamentally, in this report or the reporting on the report that was buried, DOD employed – employs more than 1 million people in back-office positions, and we have 1.3 million troops on active duty.

That is almost a 1 to 1 ratio. The report also laid out that there was a clear path to saving over \$125 billion in the next five years by trimming that bureaucracy. The greatest contributors to the savings are early retirements and reducing services from contractors.

But that \$125 billion, whether it is \$125 billion or some factor below that is a startling number. And just to put that in context, that amounts to 50 Army brigades, ten naval carrier strike group deployments, or 83 F-35 fighter wings for a full five years.

I want to ask you, what was your role in this? And is there anything to be learned from this report that never saw the light of day?

SECRETARY KENDALL: The report definitely saw the light of day. It was published, and nobody tried to suppress it, Senator. So, that is completely incorrect.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Well, there is some emails from you, actually, that you were very aggressive in making sure that this wasn't given any credibility.

SECRETARY KENDALL: It has no credibility.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Okay.

SECRETARY KENDALL: I am very familiar with that report. It was a very amateurish effort. It essentially made analogies between the Government and the Department of Defense, and companies that were selected in the commercial role, which had no real valid comparison.

And then it said that because these companies could save x percent of their

cost, therefore, the Department of Defense must be able to save the same percentage. It was nonsense.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Okay. So, you were in that procurement role – when you were in that procurement role – you are now Secretary of the Air Force. I want to ask you, let's just say you are right. Let's say that it has no validity, which I don't believe.

Whether it is 100 percent or 20, whatever that number is, what are you doing right now as the Secretary to cut out waste? Are you doing anything? If you identified anything, have you done anything?

SECRETARY KENDALL: We have set a number of management initiatives in place to try to introduce well-defined metrics for each part of the Air Force, each part of the enterprise – all the different functional pieces.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Have you realized any savings from this? Have you realized any savings from this?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Yes, we have.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Okay. I would like to follow up then to find out exactly what that is.

SECRETARY KENDALL: Certainly.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Okay. And the reason why I am asking is we are clearly, whether you want to call it a pacing challenge or a chief adversary with **China**, they are not messing around.

And I just don't think there is – we have to have a sense of urgency, I think, in making sure that every dollar the taxpayers are putting forward, and I am somebody that is going to be advocating for, you know, an aggressive posture here, that we are not letting any of that go to waste.

And sort of following up on that, in March, I sent a letter to Secretary Austin asking him some fairly simple questions about civilian workforce. There are recruitment issues. There is ready – you know, readiness challenges.

And I was asking him specifically how many DEI related positions exist in the Department of Defense. And I want to ask you, how many DEI positions exist

under your purview?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I would have to get you that for the record.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Okay. Will you be responsive?

Secretary Austin has not been responsive, so I want to just find out what we are dealing with here, the number of jobs.

And I also want to ask you, how many mandatory DEI training sessions were conducted last year?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I would have to get that for the record also. Our DEI training sessions are prescribed by law. I think they are in the NDAA from 2019, if I remember. They are prescribed certain numbers of hours in different aspects of our training.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Okay. We would like to get those materials actually too. We have had a hard time actually getting those materials.

SECRETARY KENDALL: We can get that for you.

SENATOR SCHMITT: Okay. Thank you. And then Secretary Kendall and General Brown, lastly, I do want to ask, I saw today actually it was reported that the Air Force announced that the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base will be fielding a new special operation wing that will offset the impact of the loss of the A-10 mission there.

I know you mentioned the A-10 in your introductory comments, Mr. Secretary. You are aware that the 442nd fighter wing out of Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri houses some of the best and most experienced fighter pilots and maintainers in the world, yet we and they have yet to learn what their follow-on mission will be once the A-10 is divested.

Given the ongoing pilot shortage and recruitment challenges we have, it is important to ensure that the 442nd get a follow-on mission. Secretary Kendall, do you agree it makes sense to leverage those existing talents, the fighter aircraft experience, the fighter pilots, the maintainers at the unit, the 442nd, as you divest in the A-10 – divest from the A-10?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Senator, our approach to divesting the A-10 is to try to

replace fighter mission – another fighter mission, if possible. And if not, then a flying mission. And if we can't do that, there are a number of other missions that are very important to the Department.

We have talked about electronic warfare here. Cyber is another one. ISR, intelligence. All of those things matter. So, in every case where we are taking aircraft out, we are trying to make sure that a viable long term mission replaces that mission.

SENATOR SCHMITT: When do you expect to announce that follow on mission for the 442nd?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I would have to get that for you.

I don't know when –

SENATOR SCHMITT: Okay. We are very interested in that. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Schmitt. Senator Kelly, please.

SENATOR KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Kendall and General Brown, General Salzman, good morning.

Thank you for being here. For Secretary Kendall and General Brown, I want to thank you for your continued collaboration as we secure a long-term future for the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson.

I have lost count of all the meetings that we have had, but I think our work together has brought real progress, and I am encouraged by the current plan to bring new, enduring missions to Davis-Monthan that would keep the base at the center of our National Security for years to come, as it should be.

The new plan would bring in additional search and rescue presence and brand-new electronic warfare platforms to DM that are important as the Air Force modernizes. The electronic warfare platforms, which is the new Compass Call aircraft, would be entirely based at DM, and the new Special Ops power projection wing would bring additional new flying missions and some exciting capabilities to DM under this plan.

General Brown, can you comment on this wing's importance in the context of

the Air Force's overall strategy?

GENERAL BROWN: Sure, Senator. Just as the name implies, the aspect of power projection. And with our SOF force from Air Force Special Operations Command, that will be part of the base, in addition to the electronic warfare capability from the EC-37B, helps us be able to execute that power projection aspect.

I think the other beauty of the – of coming into Davis-Monthan is being able to bring special operation capability out to the Southwestern United States, and the range capability, and the ability – they are able to train in the Western United States, not only in Arizona, but in other parts of the United States, will also help us with that power projection.

SENATOR KELLY: Yes, thank you. We have, you know, a very unique kind of weather situation, combination of weather and ranges. And also, this plan does have important aspects for our National Security.

And importantly, it retains the same number of quality, high paying jobs in Tucson. And I am glad to see that the site activation task force has now begun its work at DM to make preparations for these new missions, and I know you requested some site and environmental review funding in the budget request.

And for my part, I will be working to ensure that that gets over the finish line in this committee, as well as strong funding to advance the procurement of our new electronic warfare aircraft for DM and other assets in this plan.

Secretary Kendall, this is – this plan is ambitious, and I support that, but bringing this new mission and modernizing the others has a lot of moving parts here.

What assurances can you provide me that you will be able to manage all these elements and stick with the timeline?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I can assure you that we will be paying a lot of attention to this and doing everything we can to assure that it happens as planned. I was just at Davis-Monthan. Got some great people there, and we want to make sure we do what we have laid out in order to support them.

SENATOR KELLY: And anything specifically that you are doing to avoid any

potential delays?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I think we are working with all the affected organizations right now to make sure that that planning is in place. I know the Special Operations people in particular are leaning forward to try to be prepared for this. And we talked about the E-37s earlier and what is going on there. So, I think we are in generally good shape, Senator.

SENATOR KELLY: So full transparency is very important for me. So, could you please make sure you highlight any potential issues to Congress, to this committee, as soon as they are encountered? That would help us get through this as expeditiously as possible.

SECRETARY KENDALL: I will do that. General Brown, are you aware of anything that is –?

GENERAL BROWN: No particular issues. And having just finished the first SAG activation task force, I think we will be able to identify if there is any critical aspects that we need your support on. And also, we also appreciated the opportunity to meet with the community leaders as well. That happened roughly about the same time frame.

So, I think a good dialog, and we want to continue that dialog, and work – collaborate to make sure we make DM successful.

SENATOR KELLY: Right. Thank you. I look forward to working with you both through this process and making sure we stay on track. I also want to flag a totally separate issue in, you know, the SOUTHCOM region that I think could become a serious problem.

So, **China** is looking to sell fighter aircraft to Argentina, potentially use that sale to create a foothold for future military basing in the Western hemisphere, and I think we need to be very vigilant on this.

We can counter their pitch here by facilitating the transfer of Danish F-16s to Argentina. That is a possibility. This is not just a transfer of aircraft. You know, it has real geopolitical and strategic importance.

And so, I just want to make you aware of this and just get your thoughts. I am already over my time, but I have had a series of conversations about this with

U.S. Southern Command, with a number of our allies, and I think the Air Force has a real role to play here.

And if I could just get another 30 seconds, if Secretary Kendall or General Brown can comment.

SECRETARY KENDALL: I am aware of the case, Senator Kelly, and I agree with you that it is important. I think it is working its way through the interagency process right now. But I think there is an understanding of the importance of it for the reasons that you said.

SENATOR KELLY: All right. Thank you. Thank you, Mr.

Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Kelly. Senator Scott, please.

SENATOR SCOTT: Thank you, chair. Secretary Kendall, can you just want to talk about what you do, you know, every day to try to save money and how the process works and – because I assume it is part of what you have to do every day, because you have you probably have a lot of requests. So how do you go through the process?

SECRETARY KENDALL: We try to discipline ourselves, obviously, about how we operate. Generally speaking, we are operating the current force at what I would call an acceptable level, and we look at things like sustainment and readiness and so on.

There is no place that I can think of, frankly, where we are fat. The number that was mentioned earlier, if I could just find – it assumed there was a \$25 billion saving per year over the five years to get the \$125 billion. If I could find \$5 billion, I would be just so – I would be thrilled.

We had to work very, very hard to find the \$5 billion that we put in with the operational imperatives. The Department of Defense is not sitting there with a lot of excess cash lying around waiting to be found. That is not the way we are operating. I don't think there is any part of the Department that isn't operating on the edge of where it would like to be.

I know General Brown or Saltzman may talk about that, but when you look at

weapons systems sustainment accounts, you look at facility sustainment, you know, we are doing, I think, reasonably well by our people. In terms of compensation, we have got the pay increase and I don't think anyone should fault us for that.

That comes first. But we are operating in a way which is designed to use our funds as efficiently as we possibly can. We are constantly looking for efficiencies and savings, but when we find them, there are many uses for those funds that are immediately available in a reasonable priority.

So, there isn't – the perception that there is a lot of waste in the Department and there is money laying around to be found is just simply not valid. I would let my colleagues comment if they would.

SENATOR SCOTT: Do you guys want to add anything?

GENERAL BROWN: You know, what I find is we have more requirements than we have on resources. And so, you know –

SENATOR SCOTT: It is like running a company. Same thing.

GENERAL BROWN: Same – and this is the part where the Secretary, myself, and General Saltzman spend a lot of time with our staff determining how best to apply those resources to get us to not only take care of Airmen, Guardians, and their families, but the broadest, the most combat capability that each of those dollars will buy.

SENATOR SCOTT: Yes.

GENERAL SALTZMAN: I would just add, it is a continuous process to scrub requirements, whether that is hardware software requirements, whether that is personnel requirements, whether that is policy requirements.

We are in a continuous evaluation of those. And one thing I will give Secretary Kendall for is we don't show up to his conference rooms without data to support our decision-making process.

And so, I think that has been valuable as we have – as we look at different alternatives or different ways of doing our day to day business, we have to show up with data to make sure we get it right.

SENATOR SCOTT: Thanks. Secretary Kendall, first off, I appreciate what you said about A-10s, so hopefully we are making progress on that. I think it is the right thing to do for the country. Can you talk about homestead? I guess there are rumors that there is an interesting closing homestead. Is there anything happening on that?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I have not heard that rumor, Senator Scott. I am not aware of any – homestead.

SENATOR SCOTT: All right. If there is, if somebody would just call me and let me know. It is a big deal, as you expect. It is a big deal for Florida, right. Next, could you guys just talk about, do you have adequate resources to deter just two things if you want, and I know we don't have a lot of time, so two things.

Do you have adequate resources to deter **China**? All right. And when you talk to your friends and try to explain why we should help Ukraine and why should we be in position to deter **China** and Taiwan, what do you say to them?

I mean, this – you know, the global order doesn't sound very interesting to people. So, how do you say it to the just a layperson.

SECRETARY KENDALL: The answer to the first question is yes, but we are being challenged. I have not seen as aggressive or as capable a strategic competitor ever and that includes the Soviet Union. I had 20 years as a cold warrior.

So, we have got to stay ahead of **China**. And our deterrence in the region depends upon our relative capabilities. And **China** has been pretty smart about their investments and trying to attack what they see as our dependencies.

As far as Ukraine is concerned, **China** is watching Ukraine, and they are watching to see if Russia can get away with naked aggression and if there is a united response against it that is effective or not.

They are watching the economic consequences. They are watching how the alliance plays out in terms of its solidarity and other support. I have a litany of things that I think Xi Jinping that I would like him to learn from the Ukraine experience.

One is that the short war you expect may not be the war you get. One is that

your military may not be as good as they think – as they are telling you they are. Another is the economic consequence of aggression may be more than you can stand.

I hope those are all lessons he is getting, but we are not through this yet. We have a ways to go. And I think it is admirable that the NATO alliance is now stronger rather than weaker. That is not what Mr. Putin expected to have happen. And we need to continue down that path.

And it is definitely being watched by **China** very carefully, and we want them to get the right lessons from this.

SENATOR SCOTT: Anybody else want to add anything?

GENERAL BROWN: Senator, I think we just take a look at history, and you think about the global order. It was in the interwar years and into World War II. Small events of any type of crisis can start a firestorm and this is something we have got to pay attention to.

And this is why it is important for our own security, for economic security, and our National Security, that we pay attention to what is going on around the world.

And it is probably, as the Secretary highlights, probably the most complex environment we have been in, in a number of years.

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Just very quickly, I would add, as Secretary Kendall mentioned, that it is one of the asymmetric advantages of the United States that it can build a coalition of like-minded nations. It is a tremendous power, strength, and showing a demonstrated commitment to our allies and partners, and I believe **China** is taking notice.

SENATOR SCOTT: Right. Thanks for what you guys do.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Scott. Senator Peters, please.

SENATOR PETERS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Kendall, during Operation Desert Storm, the Air Force fielded 139 fighter squadrons spread out across the entire service, 49 of those squadrons belonged to the National Guard.

And according to Air Force numbers, the total fighter fleet has been reduced

now to 81 squadrons, with the Air Guard only fielding 26 of those. That means that over the past 30 years, we have seen nearly a 50 percent reduction in Air Guard fighter fleet.

And this comes at a time when global tensions are at their highest in 50 years, and as we just heard from your answers to the previous Senator, the complexity is significant. We have a hot war in Eastern Europe.

We have a looming threat of conflict in the **Pacific**.

So bottom line, I am concerned about the fact that we have a declining fighter plane fleet, and we are at a time where we need every single plane that we can possibly get our hands on. We have let our fighter fleet shrink significantly and are now continuing to reduce the number of fighters in order to, "divest to invest." As you are aware, Selfridge Air National Guard Base is home to A-10s that will be divested by the end of the decade with no replacement mission yet stated. You and I have spoken considerably about this issue and will continue to do that in the future. But my question is a little broader about procurement and actually having aircraft that will be stationed in various places, and certainly related to modernization.

So, I have a specific question is, how is the Air Force actually budgeting for the procurement of aircraft across the service necessary to ensure the full recapitalization of the Air National Guard fighter fleet?

And what support specifically do you need from Congress in order to accomplish that procurement budgeting that you are working on?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Thanks, Senator Peters. The – now, I was in the Pentagon for the first Gulf War, and what we had at the time was a legacy force essentially left over from the Cold War. So, the numbers were quite a bit higher than they ultimately came down to be.

The way we are budgeting is to try to balance the near, mid, and long term capabilities of the Air Force.

And what we look at is total combat capability. And what we are trying to get to is the next generation of capabilities as quickly as we can, while we sustain the current force which is adequate to meet our needs.

The A-10 in particular is an aircraft that has been – it is over 40 years old now. It was a fantastic aircraft in its day, but it is aging out and we are going to have to replace it. And we are working with you and the other communities to try to do that in a way which has a minimal impact and preserves some of our capabilities.

You mentioned the Guard. I have had a job opportunity now to visit a lot of Guard units, including yours in Michigan. They are highly capable units, and they are very important and cost-effective part of the force. We want to sustain the right balance between active guard and reserve and have the right mix of mission capabilities.

That mix is changing over time. And as war becomes more about information dominance than it does necessarily about kinetic power, we need things like ISR and intelligence and cyber and EW, electronic warfare.

So, we are trying to move towards that world and get that mix right. So, the recapitalization of the fighter fleet, if you will, is one part of a much deeper and richer fabric of things that we are trying to do.

We also, of course, have the Space Force, which introduces a whole new set of capabilities as well. And in some cases, space capabilities are going to be taking over for some of the traditionally air capabilities that we have had. Areas like communications and surveillance, for example.

So that is the picture that we are dealing with, and we are trying to get to the new capabilities that we want to field in greater numbers in the future as quickly as we can. That is a priority for us. While we sustain a reasonable sized current fleet. Does that help?

SENATOR PETERS: It is. Thank you. Secretary, for more than 13 years, the Air Force has been investigating PFAS contamination at the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda, Michigan.

As a result of the contamination, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services has issued five separate public health warnings to the community, unsafe fish, venison, small game, as well as for unsafe shoreline foam – and foam, as well as unsafe drinking water.

However, there is still, still no cohesive cleanup plan in place, and the residents

of Oscoda are understandably frustrated at what they perceive as being unnecessarily dragged-out process on the part of the Air Force rather than dealing with the problem directly.

And so instead of waiting for additional studies to be completed by either the Air Force or the EPA, and before seeing any progress, the community is right now seeking urgent action to stop the flow of PFAS contaminated groundwater into the public waterways in the Oscoda area.

These are called interim remedial actions, and there is a plan that has been submitted by the State of Michigan and local experts outlining exactly what needs to happen.

So, my question for you, sir, is, can I get your commitment to taking these interim remedial actions now, now without any further delays?

SECRETARY KENDALL: Senator, I would have to take a look at that plan. I am not aware the details of it. What we have been doing with PFAS is, first of all, making sure people have safe water to drink. And we have had a program to make sure that that was the case. In some cases, providing bottled water to people.

We have stopped the use of PFAS for the most part. We are getting it out of all of our installations where it has been a fire suppressant. We haven't found a replacement for PFAS to put out fires yet, aqueous firefighting foam, but we are still doing research on that.

And as you know, I think EPA has come out with what we think will be a final criteria, four parts per trillion, which would then be the basis for cleanup efforts. And in the meantime, we have been trying to understand the extent of pollution around our bases so that we could fully appreciate the depth of that as far as a health hazard, but also so that we could do cleanup effectively.

So, we are making progress, even though it seems very slow. I am not aware of the interim plan that you described, but we will take a look at that. And if there is an Air Force responsibility there, we will meet that responsibility.

SENATOR PETERS: Could you make a commitment to look at that plan so that we can have another discussion in the near future?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I will look at it and have a follow up conversation with you, yes, sir.

SENATOR PETERS: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Peters. Senator Sullivan, please.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Gentlemen, thank you for your testimony. General Brown and Secretary Kendall, I want to just get your assessment. I am going to do a little bragging here on behalf of the active duty and Guard forces in Alaska, with the spy balloons and the Russian bear bomber incursions, and the rescue mission, and the search and rescue mission on some really challenging weather events where they are saving lives.

Our Air Forces in Alaska have just been, in my view, doing exceptional work over the last several months. They do it all the time. These are hard missions, right, going to intercept a, you know, spy balloon or unidentified aircraft in the middle of the night over the North Slope of Alaska.

It takes a lot of work in darkness and crummy weather.

Can you talk to the importance of how they are doing, and including the JPARC training ranges and the future you see for them in the Air Force?

SECRETARY KENDALL: I have had a privilege to visit Alaska bases multiple times in my tenure, and I am incredibly impressed by the quality and capabilities up there. And I also hear about missions people do, and as you mentioned, in extreme conditions to do rescues and to do intercepts and so on.

So, it is an enormously effective part of our force.

Alaska's strategic position matters a great deal, too. You have got good access to a lot of parts of the globe that are very important to us. And your forces participate in some key missions, both for homeland defense and to support in the **Indo-Pacific** region.

So Alaskan JPARC in particular, is a range kind of capability that we don't have anywhere else in the U.S.

So, all very, very valuable to us. And we are investing in these capabilities. There are investments in our budgets to improve JPARC, to make it more effective as a training range.

And I am looking forward to coming up there in the summer and being there for one of those exercises.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Good. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

General, do you want to talk – any lessons learned on – maybe you can't do it in the hearing right now. But, you know, our active duty forces were quite busy, the F- 22s, the F-35s, with these bare bomber incursions, which are kind of normal. But the Russian – the spy balloons and things like that. Any lessons learned that you can reveal right now or maybe in the closed session?

GENERAL BROWN: Senator, what I would like to, and you have you have already addressed it in some of your comments here, just the value of the teamwork across the force, because it is not just the fighter mission, but it is also our maintainers that get the aircraft in some pretty tough weather conditions, as well as our early warning with the E-3 and how all that command and control comes together to be able to execute the missions.

You know part of that, you know, skill set comes from their day to day training they are able to get on JPARC, a very, you know, capable range that we continue to invest in. And so, it is a combination of all those together that provide us that capability, that is in a very important part of the country.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Right. Thank you. Let me turn to kind of a related question. This year's budget includes a request for 72 new fighters, 48 F-35As, 24 F-15 Eagles.

You know, we have over 100 5th Gen fighters in Alaska, F- 22s, F-35s.

In the event of a conflict with the **PRC**, probably most, if not all of those aircraft, would be deployed there under the **INDOPACOM's** control, currently INDOPACOM Commander's control. This would require other aircraft to backfill the homeland defense mission in Alaska, which we just saw was so important.

How will the Air Force fighter acquisition plan improve homeland defense, and what risks will the Air Force incur if the procurement timeline is interrupted,

given that scenario I just kind of talked about?

GENERAL BROWN: Senator, it would – as we have looked at not only the procurement aspect but also how we would execute the mission. I do think we are on a good path for procurement for this particular budget.

It is something we want to continue to pay attention to, not only the aspect of the aircraft themselves, but also the capabilities that support and complement those aircraft, whether it is munitions, whether it is command and control.

You know, as we have operational scenarios that is the beauty of air power, the flexibility that we would have to do in order to move some of our 5th Gen capability and munitions to combat our adversaries.

At the same time, how we would flex our total force to take care of the homeland mission, the homeland defense mission as well. So, this is where, you know, I think we have pretty good capability to be able to be responsive in a crisis with air power.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. And, Mr. Chairman, just a real quick final question for General Saltzman. General, you know, Alaska is also the cornerstone of America's missile defense in terms of ground-based missile interceptors at Fort Greely, and the radar systems that we have throughout the State.

Recently, NORTHCOM completed its testing of the long- range discrimination radar system at Clear Space Force Station in Alaska. Can you talk to the committee about how this LRDR system has dramatically improved our missile defenses and domain awareness? And is it on track, the way in which you want it to be?

GENERAL SALTZMAN: Well, it is a very important radar in a very important location. It is highly discriminating in terms of target. It produces high fidelity tracks, that enable our missile defense system and secure the homeland from missile threats.

Day to day, it also will be capable of supporting the space domain awareness mission, which I am heavily invested in. And so, the number of tracks from that part of the sky is a significant contribution to our overall space domain awareness.

SENATOR SULLIVAN: Thank you. Thank you, Mr.

Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Senator Duckworth, please.

SENATOR DUCKWORTH: Thank you, and good morning to each of our witnesses. I had a very engaging 20 whole minutes, actually, thanks to the subcommittee Chairman Kelly discussion with – on Air Force design at the Airland subcommittee hearing last week. As the entire Joint Force reorganizes and modernizes, Congress has to play an active role in oversight to ensure that the DOD is equipped for competition with the best weapon systems and the most effective organization of our troops.

The Marine Corps published a Force Design 2030 document, which provides a detailed roadmap and vision of what its future force will look like. The Navy published its Force Design 2045 document, which looks – which goes through its shipbuilding aspirations.

And I understand from today's testimony that the Space Force is also working on a force design effort, though it doesn't sound like that has been completed quite yet. In contrast, the Air Force published its future operating concepts, which does not feature the level of detail that the other forces have articulated – that the other services have articulated.

Mr. Secretary, I know that the Department of the Air Force has operational imperatives to help orient it to services' investments, but if neither service has an explicit roadmap for force design, the Air Force or Space Force, what is informing recruiting and retention goals, or specific RDT&E investments? And Mr. Secretary, is your Department truly organized for competition?

SECRETARY KENDALL: That is a great question, Senator.

The short answer is yes, but we have basically limited maneuverability over the next few years in terms of what the ultimate force structure will be. But there are some efforts – General Brown and I have talked about this several times, and I have had a similar conversation with General Saltzman.

We need to be thinking about the long-term future and what the future looks like given the strategic competitors that we have, particularly **China**. And as

you can see from the initiatives we started with the operational imperatives, we are moving towards modernization that will be effective against that threat, but that is a dynamic threat. It is constantly changing. It will respond to what we do.

So, we need to think very carefully about the future, what our future posture might look like, and create some options at this point that will be fleshed out as we move further along. We also need to look at how we are structured.

I have asked my scientific advisory board to take a look at this. The posture the Air Force has evolved into over time is one that was essentially derived from the kinds of operations it was conducting, which were largely counterinsurgency, with a lot of deployments overseas for people, and a certain kind of tactical combat operations.

That is not what our future looks like. And so, we have got to look at how we are training the R-4 Gen. The R-4 Gen model that General Brown is using is a piece of that to get us to a better cycle for how we utilize the force and how we prepare for next – more stressing operations.

But we have also got to look at how we are structured to do acquisition. We are not transitioning science and technology as quickly in the products as we should be, or as efficiently as we should be. So, there are a number of things that we need to take a look at.

And on my list of to do is at this point in time is to work with my teammates here to try to define the structure we are going to need for the long-term strategic competition we are in, and that is a work that we really haven't completed yet.

I am very comfortable with where we are going over the next few years, but we need to posture ourselves for a longer-term competition.

SENATOR DUCKWORTH: So, there will be some sort of a document in the future, because you understand, we have to do our jobs here, right. And so, at some point, decisions are required to shape these investments going into the future. And for example, the Marine Corps says that they required 31 amphibious ships.

And Congress and this committee can authorize and advocate for those ships and hold leaderships at all levels accountable. And I do think that Air Force and

Space Force needs to work constructively with Congress to appropriately allocate the resources and measure its modernization success.

But how can we do that if neither the Air Force nor the Space Force has an explicit modernization roadmap based on some sort of future looking force design effort?

SECRETARY KENDALL: There is a well-known aphorism, Senator that plans are nothing and planning is everything.

We have started the planning work, but we don't have the plan yet. But I think, I agree with you that would be a valuable document to have, to lay out where we are going to go.

And we will be working on that for our own purposes, but I agree with you that it will be valuable probably for the Congress as well.

SENATOR DUCKWORTH: Thank you. I am going to follow up on this and keep at it, just so you know. I wanted to also talk about recruiting, retaining, and effectively leveraging the organic talent within the services.

For example, we have the ability for service members to test out on a language and say, I am a native Spanish speaker, I am a native Thai speaker, I speak French, and you can actually get that designation by taking the language test and then the force knows that you have those Airmen – those Guardians that have those resources, those capabilities.

But I believe that we risk overlooking the skills of service members, particularly those in the reserve component, who have critical digital skills from their civilian careers. And I introduced the Managing Active and Reserve Tech Talent Effectively Act – it is a mouthful, I know – to fix that.

And my bill directly directs the services to establish career field policies and processes to identify members across the total force who have skill sets in advanced technology areas such as computer programming, coding, AI, ML.

It gives the Department discretion and flexibility to figure out the best way to do that. But my bill requires that the reserve component service members be able to use their skills and experiences from their civilian jobs to qualify for these military career fields.

General Brown, General Saltzman, I would like to hear from each of you about the benefits to your services that come from leveraging the digital skills of its total force service members, particularly those in the reserve component who have tech skills from their civilian careers.

GENERAL BROWN: They are very important. And there are a couple of programs that we are looking at to deal – one was out of DIU back in December entitled Gig Eagle.

It is an aspect of identifying those who have those specific skill sets that you can bring on for a short period of time to work for you.

A complex issue because of their civilian expertise.

The other part we are also looking at is how we get better visibility on their certifications, and how we use that information and for promotion boards and other areas. Not just your academic degrees, but you are certified in areas that don't require an academic degree.

How we have better visibility on those and how we track that particular talent with the special experience identifiers so we can tap into and provide those opportunities for those outstanding service members that can help us in areas, just because of the work they do in the civilian sector.

SENATOR DUCKWORTH: Thank you.

GENERAL SALTZMAN: I agree, they are critical. In fact, they are so critical, I am trying to make sure that the Space Force has a reserve, has the part time workforce integrated into it, so that we can continue to leverage it.

One of the things I have found is that those part time Guardians, Airmen now, Guardians in the future, would be able to stay at the highest levels of those competencies because they are integrated into the commercial sector, and they can bring those skills readily in when we need them.

So, it is a critical effort that I support.

SENATOR DUCKWORTH: I mean, you need to know where all you're MCSCs or CCNAs are, and know how many you have and say, hey, I need that guy. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN REED: Thank you, Senator Duckworth. Mr.

Secretary, General Saltzman, and General Brown, thank you for your testimony and for your service. At this point, let me, for the benefit of my colleagues, remind them there is a vote ongoing. We will reconvene at 12:15 p.m. in SVC-217 for the closed session. And with that, I will adjourn the open session.

[Whereupon, at 11:47 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]