



Congressional Hearing  
May 21, 2026

**Committee on Armed Services**

Job No. 1707701-001

1 TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE POSTURE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
2 THE AIR FORCE IN REVIEW OF THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION  
3 REQUEST  
4

5 Thursday, May 21, 2026  
6

7 U.S. Senate  
8 Committee on Armed Services  
9 Washington, D.C.  
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11 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m.,  
12 in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger  
13 Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

14 Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker, Fischer,  
15 Rounds, Sullivan, Cramer, Scott, Budd, Banks, Reed,  
16 Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King, Warren, Peters, Rosen, and  
17 Slotkin.  
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1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR  
2 FROM MISSISSIPPI

3           Chairman Wicker: This hearing will come back to  
4 order. I want to thank our witnesses for a very  
5 informative classified session, and now we will begin the  
6 public portion of this meeting. I welcome back Secretary  
7 Meink, General Saltzman, and General Wilsbach. I thank  
8 them, and their families for their service.

9           The Department of the Air Force has requested for  
10 \$338.8 billion dollars for the next fiscal year. That  
11 figure reflects the fact that deterrence is not free, and  
12 that weakness invites aggression.

13          At this point I am going to submit the rest of my  
14 opening statement for the record. I understand that  
15 Senator Reed is at a very important meeting of the  
16 Appropriations Committee, and he may very well want to  
17 submit his opening statement for the record also.

18          So at this point I thank Secretary Meink and recognize  
19 you, sir, for your opening statement.

20          [The prepared statement of Chairman Wicker follows:]

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1           STATEMENT OF THE HON. TROY MEINK, SECRETARY OF THE  
2 AIR FORCE

3           Secretary Meink: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Ranking  
4 Member Reed, and distinguished members of the Committee.  
5 Thank you for the opportunity to come here today and talk  
6 through the 2027 Department of the Air Force budget  
7 request. I am proud to represent 680,000 airmen, guardian,  
8 and civilians of the Department of the Air Force as well as  
9 their families and loved ones.

10           After the events of the last year, Operation Midnight  
11 Hammer, Absolute Resolve, and now Epic Fury, I do not think  
12 anyone doubts that the Space Force and the Air Force are  
13 the most capable in the world. But today we are in the  
14 middle of a generational shift in how we employ air power  
15 and space power. Advances in autonomy, adaptive  
16 manufacturing, AI, microelectronics, and more give us  
17 unique opportunities to drive down costs and drive up  
18 effectiveness across the board.

19           However, our adversaries recognize that opportunity  
20 every bit as much as we do. Those adversaries,  
21 particularly China, are modernizing at a very rapid pace.  
22 To stay ahead we must innovate faster in everything that we  
23 do. That means staying ready to fight tonight, next month,  
24 next year, next decade.

25           And fortunately for the past 25 years, the DAF's

1 budget request has been the smallest relative to GDP in its  
2 history. At the same time, the nation has asked more of  
3 it. To meet its mission needs, the DAF was forced to  
4 shortchange both foundational readiness and much-needed  
5 modernization. Fiscal year 2027 President's budget breaks  
6 that pattern with a \$338.8 billion request for the DAF and  
7 a 34 percent increase over last years.

8 I will start with our investment to win the fight  
9 tonight, foundational readiness. Boosting readiness  
10 requires increased and stable funding, particularly given  
11 the age of many of our platforms. The fiscal year 2027  
12 budget increases our foundational readiness investment by  
13 34 percent, providing a jump needed to truly recover. We  
14 are also looking at ways to operate more efficiently by  
15 accelerating decision-making, reducing barriers to entry  
16 for industry, and leveraging innovative contract structure.

17 The DAF's lean budgets over the last years has also  
18 resulted in a \$50 billion facilities maintenance backlog.  
19 This has compounded the way we have traditionally done  
20 MILCON, which results in costs almost twice what a  
21 commercial construction would. To reverse that, the 2027  
22 budget request nearly doubles the investment in MILCON and  
23 facilities sustainment, restoration, and modernization,  
24 which we will couple with the new authorities we have got  
25 from Congress -- thank you very much -- such as progressive

1 design build.

2       Second, production, particularly of munitions. While  
3 we retain enough munitions worldwide to meet mission needs,  
4 we need strong factory alliances to sustain and bolster our  
5 stockpiles. Therefore, this budget leverages existing  
6 commercial production capacity and takes full advantage of  
7 multiyear procurement for our most critical munitions. We  
8 expect 39,000 weapons to be delivered by fiscal year 3033.  
9 We are also developing weapons almost as capable as our  
10 high-end munitions but at a fraction of the cost and at a  
11 much higher production rate, which will enable that 39,000  
12 delivery.

13       I will note that while the money in this request is  
14 essential, time is our most precious resource, and the  
15 Department will focus on companies that can quickly scale  
16 production while still broadening the industry base to  
17 ensure competition in the future.

18       That leads me to number three, modernization. The DAF  
19 is currently engaged in the broadest program of  
20 modernization in its history. While not every program has  
21 been perfect, we have seen much success with our new  
22 proliferated space architectures collaborative, combat  
23 aircraft, the F-47 and B-21, and our command and control  
24 and battle management systems. The fiscal year 2027  
25 request accelerates those successes and applies lessons

1 learned from across the board.

2 To that end we are transforming acquisition. We are  
3 empowering our new Portfolio Acquisition Executives, or  
4 PAEs, and their teams with the authorities, resources, and  
5 talent they need to accelerate capability to delivery. We  
6 have delegated nearly every authority we are legally  
7 allowed to down to the PAEs. We are realigning portfolios  
8 to match mission outcomes. Our end state is all DAF  
9 acquisitions aligned with the PAE structure to ensure  
10 consistent, simplified, and rapid decision-making across  
11 the entire Space Force and Air Force.

12 Finally, our most decisive advantage remains our  
13 people, the airmen and guardians who make everything  
14 possible. This budget invests in them. That includes a 5  
15 to 7 percent pay raise for military, larger bonus pools for  
16 incentivizing high-performance civilians, increases to  
17 military end strengths, and a 300 percent in dormitory  
18 investments.

19 In conclusion, this budget represents a disciplined  
20 strategy to meet our threats. While fiscal year 2027 does  
21 represent a major increase in our budget, we are ready to  
22 execute that budget. Much of the new funding will  
23 accelerate mature programs with established contracts.  
24 Regardless of the final total, we will remain accountable  
25 and transparent to Congress and the American taxpayers.

1 Thank you very much, and I look forward to your  
2 questions.

3 [The prepared statement of Secretary Meink follows:]  
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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very, very much. General  
2 Wilsbach, you are recognized.

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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL KENNETH S. WILSBACH, USAF, CHIEF  
2 OF STAFF OF THE AIR FORCE

3           General Wilsbach: Good morning, Chairman Wicker,  
4 Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the  
5 Committee. I am proud to represent 665,000 total force  
6 airmen serving our nation. Thank you for the opportunity  
7 to appear before you today and your continued support for  
8 airmen and their families.

9           The United States Air Force exists to provide the  
10 nation with decisive options at both speed and scale.  
11 Every day our airmen deliver that capability by controlling  
12 the air, holding targets at risk, moving forces and  
13 supplies across the globe, and underpinning the Joint Force  
14 with these combined efforts. As illustrated in recent  
15 operations such as Operation Midnight Hammer, Absolute  
16 Resolve, and Epic Fury, they do it professionally and  
17 without pause.

18           We operate in an environment where distance no longer  
19 guarantees sanctuary, networks are contested, and  
20 adversaries are fielding capabilities specifically designed  
21 to deny us the advantages we have relied on before. That  
22 reality drives our focus -- readiness, modernization, and  
23 taking care of airmen and their families.

24           Readiness is the ability to generate combat power  
25 quickly, operate in contested environments, and sustain

1 operations over time. Today, our airmen are meeting the  
2 mission but are doing so while managing significant strain.  
3 We are flying aircraft that in many cases are older than  
4 the airmen who maintain them. We are operating at a high  
5 tempo across multiple theaters, and doing so while  
6 preparing to be ready for any future conflict.

7 Our fiscal year 2027 budget request prioritizes  
8 restoring depth in our force by increasing funding for  
9 flying hours, munitions, maintenance, and advanced training  
10 that reflects the reality of today and tomorrow's fight.  
11 Weapon system sustainment funding increased to over \$24  
12 billion and flying hours to nearly \$10 billion. We are  
13 focused on readiness that continues to remain credible and  
14 can deliver effects.

15 Modernization is not only about replacing old  
16 platforms with new ones but evolving how we fight. Speed,  
17 survivability, and decision advantage will define future  
18 conflict. It requires a force that is more connected and  
19 adaptable. To this end, we are increasing our research and  
20 development funding by 27 percent to over \$57 billion. The  
21 fiscal year 2027 budget request will accelerate our  
22 modernization programs. We are advancing the F-47 and  
23 collaborative combat aircraft to increase combat mass and  
24 complicate adversary targeting. We are upgrading our  
25 current fighter fleet to ensure it remains viable while

1 also investing in long-range strike, advanced munitions,  
2 and resilient command and control.

3       Additionally, our nuclear enterprise remains  
4 foundational. Investments now will sustain the  
5 modernization of the triad through the Sentinel, B-21  
6 Raider, and upgrades to the B-52 and the E-4B. These  
7 capabilities ensure that our deterrence remains credible  
8 and ready.

9       Third is taking care of airmen and families. We ask a  
10 lot of our people. Frequent moves and operational stress  
11 take a toll. Our Air Force continues to invest in  
12 improving options for health care, childcare, and spouse  
13 employment. Therefore, our budget request strengthens  
14 quality of life. We are executing the largest investment  
15 in our dormitories in over a decade, of \$2.7 billion in  
16 FSRM and \$330 million in MILCON for a total of \$3 billion.  
17 We are looking for solutions to meet the housing needs of  
18 our families with a request for \$1.3 billion while funding  
19 new construction projects to address childcare capacity  
20 shortfalls by adding about 1,700 childcare spaces.

21       The Air Force exists to be the best possible fighting  
22 force for our nation. We are building a force that can  
23 operate under pressure and deliver effects anywhere in the  
24 world. That requires sustained investment, disciplined  
25 choices, and an unwavering focus on our people. With your

1 support we will ensure they have the tools, training, and  
2 the backing they need.

3 Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

4 [The prepared statement of General Wilsbach follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, General  
2 Wilsbach. General Saltzman.  
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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL B. CHANCE SALTZMAN, USSF, CHIEF  
2 OF SPACE OPERATIONS

3           General Saltzman: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Ranking  
4 Member Reed, distinguished members of the Committee. Thank  
5 you for your support for the Space Force and our nation's  
6 guardians.

7           As the past year has demonstrated, space is more vital  
8 than ever to our economic prosperity, our national  
9 security, and the effectiveness of the Joint Force.  
10 However, our adversaries are constantly working to take  
11 away our military and economic advantages in the space  
12 domain. To defend our nation's interests in space the  
13 Space Force must do more than grow. We must evolve to meet  
14 the challenges of this new era.

15           To that end, the fiscal year 2027 budget's landmark  
16 investment of \$71.1 billion for the Space Force represents  
17 a generational opportunity to position the force to meet  
18 the rapidly expanding threats and demands of the nation.

19           I know some of the budget percentage increases being  
20 considered sound big, but let me put those in perspective.  
21 There are at least 25 individual military installations  
22 inside the United States that each have more personnel than  
23 the entire Space Force, and the top ten of those  
24 installations are all at least twice the size of our  
25 service. And the Space Force budget, in comparison to

1 other services, will still be less than 5 percent of our  
2 nation's total military spending, an extraordinary value on  
3 return of investment for the nation. That investment is a  
4 critical down payment to meet the accelerating demands on  
5 the service.

6 In 2025, the Space Force saw a drastic increase in  
7 mission requirements across Space Access, Global Mission  
8 Operations, and Space Control. This trend shows no signs  
9 of slowing. To position the service for this mission  
10 growth and inform our future needs, the Space Force has  
11 been working hard to define what we believe our future  
12 operating environment will look like over the next 15  
13 years, and then based on that we designed our objective  
14 force structure, which will provide a vector for our  
15 services' investments to meet the nation's expanding needs  
16 and defeat future threats.

17 Increases in the service budget and end strength are  
18 our national security imperative. That is why the fiscal  
19 year 2027 budget boosts our topline by almost 130 percent  
20 and our end strength by 27 percent. The proposed budget  
21 paired with this increase in end strength will allow the  
22 Space Force to recruit and train the guardians we need,  
23 build vital space capabilities for the Joint Force and the  
24 nation, and provide the support and infrastructure that the  
25 mission growth demands.

1 Today we deliberately build a cadre of space-minded  
2 warfighters, equipped with the skills required in an  
3 increasingly contested and evolving domain. We are  
4 preparing our guardian officers to seamlessly integrate  
5 with the Joint Force. We are bolstering the development of  
6 our enlisted force to ensure they become technical space  
7 warfighting experts, and we are developing our civilian  
8 guardians so that they can best provide their unique  
9 expertise, ensure continuity of operations, and bring a  
10 depth of support across the mission sets.

11 In order to execute all of expanding missions it is  
12 imperative that we responsibly and effectively convert this  
13 increased appropriation into combat capability and  
14 warfighting advantage. Unlike the other services, the  
15 majority of our budget, nearly two-thirds, is dedicated to  
16 developing and fielding new systems instead of personnel or  
17 operations and maintenance.

18 That is why the Space Force is so focused on taking  
19 advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to  
20 enhance our acquisition processes, all with the goal of  
21 accelerating the fielding of vital combat space systems at  
22 the speed and scale required for each mission. To that  
23 end, newly empowered Portfolio Acquisition Executives are  
24 positioned to make better and faster program trades,  
25 expediting our ability to delivery combat-credible systems

1 on operationally relevant timelines. We are simplifying  
2 our approach to requirements, bolstering our relationships  
3 with industry and allies, and ensuring our vital guardian  
4 workforce is expertly trained in the complex task of  
5 acquisitions.

6 Unlike other services that are modernizing existing  
7 systems, the Space Force cannot modernize what it does not  
8 have. We are creating some of these innovative  
9 capabilities for new missions from the ground up,  
10 particularly in Space Control, where we are investing in  
11 all categories of counter-space systems necessary to deter  
12 and defeat aggression in space.

13 Additionally, we are aggressively pursuing more  
14 resilient space architectures that can withstand attacks  
15 and continue to operate through an extended conflict. This  
16 includes expanding our Resilient Missile Warning and  
17 Tracking initiative that provides lifesaving alert to  
18 troops worldwide, enhancing satellite communications to  
19 connect Joint Force units and commanders around the globe  
20 during battle, and growing our Space Based Sensing and  
21 Targeting architecture to hold adversary forces at risk  
22 through space-based AMTI and GMTI anywhere in the world.

23 But the added manpower, missions, and capability  
24 require commensurate increases in the structures that  
25 support them, so the fiscal year 2027 budget request also

1 includes the required MILCON to ensure our guardians are  
2 fully supported. The Space Force has laid the  
3 organizational foundation, defined the compounding threat,  
4 and delivered the blueprint required to counter it. Now we  
5 must build those structures and systems to ensure domain  
6 superiority for years to come. With the continue advocacy  
7 from Congress our guardians stand ready to deter  
8 aggression, protect our space-enabled way of life, and if  
9 called upon, fight and win.

10 As I conclude my final presentation to this Committee  
11 as the Chief of Space Operations let me say thank you for  
12 enabling our successes and for the opportunity to highlight  
13 the exceptional work that our guardians are doing every day  
14 to secure our nation's interests in, from, and to space. I  
15 look forward to your questions.

16 [The prepared statement of General Saltzman follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Well, thank all three of you and  
2 thank you, particularly, Generally Saltzman, as you prepare  
3 to move on to another phase of your career.

4 For the record, Senator Reed was at a meeting of  
5 another important committee when we began this hearing. I  
6 submitted my opening statement for the record. You are now  
7 recognized, Senator Reed.

8 Senator Reed: I will adopt the wise posture of the  
9 Chairman and submit my statement for the record.

10 [The prepared statement of Ranking Member Reed  
11 follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: And I think it would be appropriate  
2 if you added some very important recognition.

3 Senator Reed: Well, obviously I want to recognize and  
4 thank General Saltzman for his service, remarkable service,  
5 and creating, not just shepherding, the organization Space  
6 Force. So thank you very much, sir, and gentlemen, thank  
7 you all for your dedication. And please convey our sincere  
8 thanks to the men and women, both uniformed and civilians,  
9 who you lead. Thank you.

10 Chairman Wicker: I think that reflects the feeling of  
11 the entire Committee.

12 I will defer my questions until later. Again, there  
13 are other important meetings going on today, and members  
14 will have to be going in and out. But at this point  
15 Senator Fischer is recognized for questions, and then to be  
16 followed by Senator Reed.

17 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I too  
18 would like to thank all of you gentlemen for your service,  
19 and General Saltzman, I wish you the best in your future  
20 endeavors. Thank you very much.

21 Secretary Meink, how would the investments proposed in  
22 this budget request scale the Air Force munitions  
23 production?

24 Secretary Meink: Significantly. I think by the end  
25 of the FYDP I think total procurement is on the order of

1 39,000 weapon systems, and we are really taking two kind of  
2 paths here. There are a number of the weapon systems that  
3 we have in production for years, we are scaling up those  
4 productions, but at the same time we are looking at a whole  
5 family of much lower-cost munitions that we can scale more  
6 rapidly, and to be honest, more cost effective in the long  
7 run. A combination of those two is what this budget's  
8 mission allows us to get after.

9 Chairman Wicker: What date will that be? You said by  
10 the end of the FYDP.

11 Secretary Meink: Yeah, by the end of the FYDP. So  
12 the '32, '33 timeframe, 39,000 weapons.

13 Chairman Wicker: This is a public hearing, and I just  
14 wanted to make sure. I apologize, Senator Fischer.

15 Secretary Meink: So yes, significant advancements in  
16 the number of weapons, which is critical for both the high-  
17 end and the low-end fight.

18 Senator Fischer: Thank you. And General Wilsbach,  
19 how is the Air Force rapidly fielding emerging technologies  
20 such as the counter-drone systems that we are all very  
21 interested in, in order to protect our airmen?

22 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator. Thank you. This  
23 budget request has around just over \$10 billion, and that  
24 is all of the Department, not just the Air Force but all  
25 the services, for just this purpose. And this year we are

1 fielding additional systems at some key bases. One of them  
2 is in your home state, and many other places, we also have  
3 fielded some systems. The Army has previously deployed to  
4 our bases in the Middle East.

5 Senator Fischer: And all of those are counter-drone?

6 General Wilsbach: Yes. Well, counter-drone, counter-  
7 one-way attack, and counter-cruise missile. As well as we  
8 go into 2027, that will continue to expand. Ultimately,  
9 Senator, we should have some systems protecting all of our  
10 bases, and we will get to that in future years.

11 Senator Fischer: Thank you. Mr. Secretary, or  
12 General Wilsbach, in the fiscal year 2027 budget request it  
13 also includes \$1.4 billion for developing collaborative  
14 combat aircraft. In this setting can you explain why we  
15 need those CCAs and what progress has been made so far on  
16 developing those systems?

17 Secretary Meink: I think a short response, and then I  
18 will turn it over to General Wilsbach, the CCAs represent  
19 an extremely cost-effective way to bring combat power into  
20 the fight. Essentially, they are very low-cost fighters  
21 that will operate collaboratively with our manned aircraft  
22 and deliver much more cost-effective capability. General  
23 Wilsbach?

24 General Wilsbach: Yes, correct. I agree with the  
25 Secretary. And, Senator, what this allows is additional

1 mass in the target area, in the area of engagement, that  
2 creates a number of more problems and dilemmas for your  
3 adversary and allows you to win. The first series of  
4 collaborative combat aircraft will be designed for air-to-  
5 air fight, and the future ones we can decide what else  
6 capabilities they will have.

7       Thus far we have two vendors that are making aircraft  
8 for us. They both had multiple flight. The autonomous  
9 systems are working. We are learning from it and adjusting  
10 as we go. But we are very pleased with the progress.

11       Senator Fischer: Good to hear. General Saltzman, the  
12 Space Force is requesting a significant increase in funding  
13 and in personnel for fiscal year 2027. Can you explain to  
14 not just this Committee but to the American people why that  
15 growth is required and how would the investments propose a  
16 better positioned Space Force to operate in this worsening  
17 threat environment that we face?

18       General Saltzman: Thank you, Senator. I appreciate  
19 that opportunity. I think it is pretty clear that space  
20 has become critical to our economy. It has been critical  
21 to our national security and certainly the Joint Force's  
22 effectiveness. The new missions that have been given to  
23 the Space Force are going to require something on the order  
24 of about 49 new squadrons. That represents an increase of  
25 about 2,800 guardians and another 2,000 civilians just to

1 do the work of the new missions being added to address  
2 these threats and continue to provide the support to the  
3 Joint Force that we have had. The new systems alone are  
4 going to require ten new program offices to do the  
5 acquisition work to bring those systems and deliver them to  
6 the field.

7 So that growth in the new missions, in the squadrons  
8 that are required to operate those systems is what drives  
9 the manpower and the increase in budget for the systems.

10 Senator Fischer: Thank you, and thank you again,  
11 General, for overseeing the vast accomplishments of the  
12 Space Force to date. Thank you.

13 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator Fisher.  
14 Senator Reed.

15 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr.  
16 Secretary, the Air Force is requesting a total increase in  
17 F-35 aircraft and F-15EX aircraft. The F-35 increase would  
18 go from 24 to 38, and the F-15EX from 18 to 24. However,  
19 all of the increase of 14 aircraft for the F-35 production  
20 is in the reconciliation request, not the budget, and on  
21 the other hand, all the 15EX increases are in the  
22 discretionary budget. That raises a question, what will  
23 you do if you do not have a successful reconciliation bill?

24 Secretary Meink: Thank you, Senator. Yeah, the  
25 Department looked at this as one integrated request. There

1 was no prioritization done between the reconciliation and  
2 base funding. Again, as we get more data on what the  
3 topline will end up being there will have to be a  
4 discussion about how we prioritize. Everything we have in  
5 the budget is critical. We understand that we sometimes  
6 have to do prioritization, so we will continue to shoot for  
7 what we need to do the job. But if the budget is at a  
8 lower rate we will have to work on how we prioritize.

9       Senator Reed: Well, it is an interesting concept  
10 because usually the Department of Defense comes to us with  
11 their priorities in place represented in the President's  
12 budget that is given to this Committee, not an additional  
13 request in the Budget Committee for reconciliation funds.  
14 That is, I think, a bad practice to get into. And,  
15 unfortunately, I think you are going to have to make some  
16 tough choices with respect to the number of aircraft and  
17 with respect to other issues.

18       Let me just switch to Mr. Secretary and General  
19 Saltzman. The concept has been that all space assets are  
20 in the Space Force. That requires consolidation from other  
21 services as well as from the Air Force to the Space Force.  
22 Mr. Secretary, how are we doing in that consolidation? Let  
23 me put it that way.

24       Secretary Meink: I think we are doing well in the  
25 consolidation, and the discussion we just had on the end

1 strength of the Space Force needing to grow is  
2 representative of that. As the missions continue to  
3 increase across the Space Force they need people to manage  
4 that. So I think it is going well. But there is going to  
5 be significant growth in the Space Force to meet that  
6 demand. General Saltzman?

7 General Saltzman: I would just add that, which was  
8 not true 5 years ago as of today the U.S. Space Force  
9 controls, operates 100 percent of our satellite  
10 communications for the military, 100 percent of our missile  
11 warning space-based capabilities and ground-based, PNT. So  
12 we have consolidated. Pulling the Space Development Agency  
13 in, out from under OSW proper into the Space Force is  
14 another consolidation effect.

15 So we have taken to heart the fact that the Space  
16 Force needs to be accountable for all those programs, and  
17 we have done that consolidation.

18 Senator Reed: What do you consider to be still  
19 outstanding outside your scope, that you have to bring in?

20 General Saltzman: I do not think there is any  
21 additional capabilities that currently exist, and other  
22 services are external. I think it is about, as all of our  
23 services grow and consider the importance of space we are  
24 going to have to rightly put it in the right service, given  
25 the missions that they are considering to be done from

1 space.

2 Senator Reed: Thank you, sir. Mr. Secretary, we have  
3 been spending billions of dollars in the Persian Gulf, and  
4 we are still waiting for a supplemental to arise, which  
5 further complicates the budgetary situation. We are  
6 looking at the President's budget reconciliation and a  
7 supplemental. How soon will you need the supplemental so  
8 you avoid serious readiness problems and other constraints?

9 Secretary Meink: The Administration is working  
10 through the process to address the spending in the Gulf.  
11 The Department, as we do in every year, as we get closer to  
12 the end of the year, is working how we manage the cash flow  
13 going to the end of the year, and we continue to do that.  
14 And we will manage it.

15 Senator Reed: Have you already, or let me, General  
16 Wilsbach, what readiness issues have arisen, given this  
17 unexpected or unplanned operations in the Gulf?

18 General Wilsbach: Ranking Member Reed, I would not  
19 say that we have any arise because of Epic Fury. We  
20 already had them, readiness issues, because of  
21 underfunding, weapon system sustainment, flying hours, and  
22 parts. So they were established before Epic Fury started.  
23 And we have obviously supported our forces that are in  
24 Middle East, and we have pushed parts and we have pushed  
25 people over there so that we could execute at the top

1 level.

2 Senator Reed: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr.  
3 Chairman.

4 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Ranking Member Reed.  
5 Senator Cramer.

6 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank  
7 you to all three of you for being here and for your  
8 service, and a special thank you, General Saltzman, for  
9 your incredible leadership during the youthful season of  
10 that new force. You have brought it along nicely, and we  
11 appreciate you very much, more than you probably could  
12 know.

13 Mr. Secretary, you have talked a little bit, both you  
14 and General Wilsbach, about Sentinel. Maybe elaborate a  
15 little bit. Because I think not so many years ago, it  
16 almost seems like months ago, the dramatic information and  
17 data that led to the Nunn-McCurdy seemed almost to doom it  
18 for some people, not necessarily for people up here.

19 But just as dramatic has been the recovery, it seems  
20 to me. And having been out to Vandenberg with you, and  
21 having been out to Hill and Promontory, spent a lot of time  
22 with General White -- I think that was a stroke of genius  
23 to get him overseeing the entire modernization effort --  
24 maybe give us a little bit of a picture of that recovery,  
25 even to the point where it looks like we might even be on

1 track for accomplishing Milestone B this year. Maybe give  
2 us a sense of how all that could be possible in this  
3 setting.

4 Secretary Meink: I think it is actually a good  
5 example of what we are trying to do with all the PAEs, the  
6 acquisition transformation across the entire Department,  
7 where you put extremely talented leadership in charge, gave  
8 them the authorities to help manage the requirements. That  
9 was a big part of this, is working with the requirements  
10 community, which is quite broad in some of these programs,  
11 to get down to a set of requirements that are executable  
12 with the money and the timeline, making sure the program  
13 was funded well, and then working really collaboratively  
14 with the largest public works project since the last  
15 Minuteman program, or since the last ICBM program.

16 So working with all the players that are involved in  
17 delivering that, and they have made huge progress, looking  
18 at PDR, the program, the sheer weapon systems testing going  
19 on, the new modular approach to how we are going to build  
20 silos in the launch control facilities. Basically getting  
21 a good team and giving them the ability to work those  
22 requirements to accelerate and make it executable is what  
23 has done the job. And then we properly resourced that.

24 I mentioned in my comments that because of the low  
25 budget flexibility we have had over the last, really,

1 decades, there was not only readiness cuts made. Some of  
2 these big programs we were probably pretty optimistic on  
3 the costs, and that got us into the hole, so we are making  
4 sure we do not do that anymore.

5 Senator Cramer: Well, since you bring that part of it  
6 up, and I appreciated those comments, what are the lessons  
7 that we have learned? And I will just give you my sense of  
8 bias. Maybe we should think about maintaining, you know,  
9 on a more regular basis, in modernizing systems rather than  
10 just do a new one every 50 or 60 years. It is amazing how  
11 much institutional knowledge you lose in 50 or 60 years.

12 I mean, have we learned our lesson?

13 Secretary Meink: I believe we have learned our  
14 lesson. We need to make sure we keep remembering those  
15 lessons as we go forward. But, you know, it is always a  
16 balance, right. There always has to be prioritization made  
17 within the programs. We spend a lot of taxpayer dollars  
18 and we need to make sure we are executing it as efficiently  
19 as possible.

20 Senator Cramer: Well, let's document it well and  
21 memorialize it for future generations.

22 As long as I have you talking about acquisition, I do  
23 still remain a little bit concerned about the lack of  
24 meaningful competition in the proliferated low Earth  
25 acquisition efforts. I know you and I have talked about

1 that. But it is my understanding that the two most recent  
2 procurements, the AMTI and the Space Data Network, were  
3 technically competed. However, the timelines, the RFI were  
4 such that only one was able to really respond. Maybe help  
5 us better understand maybe two things, the need for speed  
6 and why that might be the case, on the one hand, and on the  
7 other hand, what are we doing to ensure that we are  
8 investing in viable second- and third-source providers so  
9 that we do not end up in some sort of a monopolistic  
10 situation or a vendor lock?

11 Secretary Meink: I think you kind of hit our strategy  
12 right there. There was a need for speed in some of these  
13 programs, and just the critical nature of some of these  
14 capabilities has driven us to push on what we can get into  
15 production right now, and we are driving that way.

16 But on the other hand, as you mentioned, both with the  
17 AMTI and many of the other programs, we are carrying  
18 multiple other vendors so that we can grow competition in  
19 the first place to make sure we have this continual  
20 competitive industry base going forward.

21 But what I would also say is that in many of the  
22 programs -- and again, AMTI is example -- we have multiple  
23 contractors that are competing, that will deliver and come  
24 up to speed in time. But SBI, Space-Based Interceptor,  
25 very broad field, and in many of the other programs we have

1 a very broad field of competitors, both primes as well as  
2 some of the new start, new entrance vendors, and in many  
3 cases they are performing very well.

4 Senator Cramer: Sounds like you are balancing the  
5 message well. It is important, obviously, what we say and  
6 the kind of demand signals we sent to industries. Thank  
7 you.

8 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator Cramer.  
9 Senator King.

10 Senator King: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I  
11 want to join my colleagues in congratulating you, General  
12 Saltzman, on your illustrious career and your years of  
13 service. I started out as a skeptic on this Committee  
14 about the necessity of a Space Force, and you have largely  
15 made me a believer. I think what you are doing is  
16 incredibly important, and I think you have pursued it in a  
17 very thoughtful, systematic, and impressive way.

18 I do want to note that I looked through the budget  
19 documents, and in both the Space Force and the Air Force  
20 there is this category called "mandatory spending." There  
21 is no such thing as mandatory spending except in areas  
22 where there is a legal obligation to expend the money.  
23 Mandatory spending is a term of art in government  
24 budgeting, and it refers to principally Social Security and  
25 Medicare. There is nothing mandatory about part of your

1 budget. It is being put in this budget as a part of  
2 reconciliation, which is a bypassing of the normal  
3 administration of appropriations in the Congress. It is an  
4 abdication of the Congress' appropriations responsibility,  
5 but it also a usurpation of that.

6 This so-called mandatory spending, which is almost 20  
7 percent of the budget that has been proposed, General  
8 Saltzman, it goes through no oversight process, no  
9 committee process, no appropriations process. It is a  
10 purely partisan process which is inconsistent with the way  
11 appropriations have been done here for time immemorial.  
12 And since I have been in this body the majority has changed  
13 four times, and I would suggest to my colleagues that using  
14 reconciliation in this way is a very dangerous precedent.

15 Now, having said that, different subject. Mr.  
16 Secretary, one of the things we have talked about in this  
17 Committee very frequently is right to repair, and there has  
18 been a lot of talk this morning about readiness. One way  
19 to improve readiness is to be able to repair our aircraft  
20 on -- I almost said on the fly, but on the ground without  
21 waiting for the manufacturer to send us a part. In my  
22 view, we should (a) buy the IP for any platform that we  
23 buy, and (b) we should have 3-D printers in every hangers.  
24 I hope that this is an area that you will pursue with your  
25 procurement people, because as you know, readiness in the

1 Air Force is an issue, depending on the airframe, 50, 60  
2 percent readiness, sometimes higher, sometimes lower.

3 Do you agree with me that we really need to stress our  
4 ability to repair our own equipment and to do so in a  
5 timely basis.

6 Secretary Meink: Absolutely, Senator. And as we look  
7 particularly at the new programs going forward, that is a  
8 big focus, to make sure we have that right. And to some  
9 degree back to our discussion already, some of these  
10 programs, the decisions made were trying to save costs  
11 wherever possible, and those kind of short-term decisions  
12 did not prove to be cost effective long-term. And, to be  
13 honest, we are trying to reverse a lot of that now and  
14 going forward.

15 I also believe this is an area that there have been  
16 multiple proposals with respect to congressional language  
17 associated with access to data rights. And I think all  
18 those things are necessary to make sure that going down the  
19 road we have that right to be able to do that.

20 Senator King: I hope that you will pursue that  
21 actively, because having a \$100 million airplane that  
22 cannot fly for want of a valve or a part is malfeasance.  
23 So I think that is an important way to attack that problem.

24 Mr. Secretary, the other thing that is concerning me  
25 is the speed of adaptation. We have had a tremendous

1 lesson in Ukraine about adaptation, where a country that is  
2 three or four times as large has now been stopped cold on  
3 the battlefield by Ukraine's incredible adaptation and  
4 utilization of drone warfare. I fear that we are still  
5 stuck in a kind of longer-term, sclerotic process of  
6 procurement, and it has got to be the perfect weapon rather  
7 than 80 percent weapon that we can then innovate as we are  
8 moving forward.

9 Drones and directed energy are two areas that I think  
10 we are just slow to adapt. We are still knocking down  
11 \$50,000 drones with several million dollar missiles. And I  
12 know we are moving in that direction, but I think it has  
13 got to move much, much faster. We can take a lesson. In  
14 fact, I think we should benchmark against Ukraine in terms  
15 of productivity level, speed of innovation, and cost. I  
16 hope that is something you will take back to the  
17 Department.

18 Secretary Meink: Absolutely. I think you probably  
19 heard me say time and time again that we not only have to  
20 be innovative, we have to innovate faster than all of our  
21 potential adversaries, or in the end we end up losing. So  
22 that is our focus going forward.

23 Senator King: It is the militaries that adopt the new  
24 technologies the soonest that win. The Battle of Agincourt  
25 is probably one of the best historical examples, where the

1 longbow overcame a supposedly vastly superior French army.  
2 So let's remember the Battle of Agincourt. Thank you.

3 Chairman Wicker: I hope we all agree that the FORGED  
4 Act has gone quite a long way in moving us away from the  
5 previous sclerotic process. Senator Kaine.

6 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you  
7 to the witnesses. One of the costs of the Iran War has  
8 been rising fuel prices. The estimate as of today is that  
9 American consumers have paid \$40 billion more for fuel just  
10 because of the Iran war. The estimate is Memorial Day  
11 weekend, a time when people will drive to see family or  
12 drive to the beach, is going to cost about \$3.5 billion  
13 more in fuel costs for Americans, just over the coming  
14 weekend, and the estimate is that by the end of 2026, the  
15 American public will have paid \$193 billion in excess fuel  
16 costs because of the Iran War, based on projections.

17 In the preparation of the President's budget, I know  
18 the way it is done, the different units, for example, Air  
19 Force, Space Force, do budget submissions, and those work  
20 their way up through the chain of command and to the Office  
21 of Management and Budget. My understanding is the  
22 President's budget submitted to us did not include any  
23 costs that were costs related to the Iran War because it  
24 has been largely prepared and submitted through this  
25 budgetary chain of command before the Iran War started.

1           There is a portion of the Air Force budget that is a  
2 big portion, the purchase of aviation fuel. And I am  
3 assuming that in the Air Force budget the aviation fuel  
4 number was based upon a supposed or predicted price for  
5 fuel. Can you tell me, General or Secretary, what the  
6 budget price for aviation fuel is in the PB and what it  
7 actually is today? Because as we are grappling with  
8 writing this bill we are going to have to take into account  
9 the new reality. On the commercial side I have been  
10 reading that aviation fuel has increased by about 50  
11 percent, but how about in terms of the President's budget  
12 for the Air Force, for fuel purchases, and compare the  
13 budget to what the current number is please.

14           General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator. So we did account  
15 for an increased flying hour cost from 2026 to 2027, and  
16 like you said, we figure that number well before the market  
17 determines what the actual cost will be. Some years it is  
18 more. Some years it is less. So we will adjust our  
19 dollars if we end up having to pay more per dollar for a  
20 gallon of fuel, if it ends up being more than we assessed.

21           Senator Kaine: Do you know what the assumed per  
22 gallon cost was in the PB that we are analyzing right now?

23           General Wilsbach: The increased costs in flying hours  
24 was roughly about, I believe it is about a 10 percent  
25 increase of what we anticipated from last year to this

1 year.

2 Senator Kaine: So you took last year and, again, just  
3 kind of --

4 General Wilsbach: We did.

5 Senator Kaine: -- proposed an increase by about 10  
6 percent?

7 General Wilsbach: Yes.

8 Senator Kaine: If what I am reading is accurate, that  
9 on the commercial side aviation fuel has increased by about  
10 50 percent since February 28th, would that be similar to  
11 what the prices for aviation fuel necessary for Air Force  
12 operations would be?

13 General Wilsbach: Well, the current market price is  
14 not necessarily what we pay, because we bought the fuel in  
15 the past.

16 Senator Kaine: Right. You have some long-term  
17 contracts. You have some storage.

18 General Wilsbach: We do. We do. So the specifics of  
19 this will be known at such time when we are finished  
20 burning the fuel.

21 Senator Kaine: Yep. But I imagine you have got some  
22 people who are looking at the price of aviation fuel pretty  
23 carefully. Have you reached any conclusion about whether  
24 your 10 percent suggested increase is going to be close to  
25 where we are, or are we going to be needing to look at a

1 significantly greater fuel cost?

2 General Wilsbach: It is hard to say at this point,  
3 but what I will tell you is this is routine for us. Every  
4 year the cost of flying hours changes from the time we  
5 budget for it to the time we execute it. And we work it  
6 out with moving money around in various accounts to cover  
7 down on the costs.

8 Senator Kaine: Do you know whether that is a factor  
9 that is being contemplated in the preparation of a  
10 potential supplemental bill? I mean, obviously, this is  
11 not just an Air Force issue. Aviation fuel is bought by  
12 all the service branches. Is this one of the items that is  
13 being contemplated, Mr. Secretary?

14 Secretary Meink: Yeah. We looked at the total cost.  
15 I think when the Secretary, I don't know what committee he  
16 was at but I think he mentioned we were looking at about a  
17 \$29 billion impact. And I am fairly confident that  
18 includes the total, including some of the O&M fuel costs.

19 And it really depends on how long those costs stay  
20 high to what would be the impacts, so it really depends on  
21 that, as well.

22 Senator Kaine: Yeah. I will conclude, Mr. Chairman,  
23 just order of magnitude. We are going to have a very, I  
24 think, challenging debate today. It is going to be a very  
25 long day, on a reconciliation bill, where we are proposing

1 to spend \$70 billion for ICE and CBP. We gave them \$140  
2 billion last year, of which \$100 billion remains  
3 unobligated. But that \$70 billion for ICE and CBP that we  
4 are going to talk about with some degree of intensity  
5 today, compared to the prospect of \$193 billion being paid  
6 by American consumers between now and the end of the year,  
7 just because of this war, gives you some sense of the  
8 challenge that American families are facing. And I suspect  
9 as we are looking at the military budget we are going to  
10 see a similar need to adjust it pretty dramatically because  
11 of fuel costs.

12 With that, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

13 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator  
14 Hirono, are you ready for your questions?

15 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Space  
16 Force is planning to build up to seven additional  
17 telescopes on Haleakala to support space domain awareness.  
18 Monitoring and tracking the increasing number of objects in  
19 orbit is critical to supporting the Joint Forces. However,  
20 Haleakala also holds cultural significance to the Native  
21 Hawaiian Cabinet meeting, and I know you are currently  
22 reviewing public feedback for the final EIS, which is  
23 scheduled for publication this fall.

24 And given the unique environment and cultural  
25 sensitivities of Haleakala, will you commit to continuing

1 to work with and incorporating the concerns of local  
2 stakeholders to ensure transparency and community  
3 engagement as the Space Force prepares to make a final  
4 decision on this project? And I am sure that you are aware  
5 that we are engaging in some pretty important leads -- the  
6 Army, the Navy, et cetera -- so what you are doing on  
7 Haleakala is part of all of that activity by our services.  
8 And it is really important to our community that their  
9 voices are heard, so I would like your commitment that will  
10 be happening.

11 General Saltzman: Yes, Senator. Haleakala is a very  
12 important site for us. Also we understand the cultural  
13 significance to the community, and we take it very  
14 seriously. And we are committed to working with them as we  
15 move forward.

16 Senator Hirono: Thank you. For Mr. Secretary, timely  
17 procurement of a capable airborne command and control and  
18 tracking capability is vital to our forces in the Indo-  
19 Pacific, especially as the remaining E-3 planes are phased  
20 out. And funding for a potential replacement, the E-7  
21 Wedgetail, was originally not included in the Air Force's  
22 fiscal year 2027 budget. But just last week Secretary  
23 Hegseth reverse course and told the House he had just sent  
24 a budget amendment to OMB to restore the funding. And I am  
25 not clear on how much the restored funding is, but Mr.

1 Secretary, can you clarify where things stand regarding  
2 funding for the E-7?

3 Secretary Meink: Yes, Senator. Thanks. We have  
4 submitted a budget amendment. I do not believe it is on  
5 the Hill yet, but it is approximately \$1.5 billion in 2027,  
6 and then we will work the out years as we do the 2028  
7 budget build. And again, what was the driver is it was  
8 never that the program was not important. It was that at  
9 the time we were looking at about an \$890 billion topline,  
10 and at that topline a number of important programs were  
11 cut, including the E-7. We had to have the space-based  
12 AMTI. We wanted to have the E-7 capability, but under the  
13 budget constraints it was cut, but now with more budget  
14 flexibility we put it back in.

15 Senator Hirono: I think it is important because that  
16 whole program has encountered a number of delays, as you  
17 probably know.

18 General Wilsbach, funding for the Joint Base Pearl  
19 Harbor Hickam Airfield Development Plan remains a  
20 continuing concern of mine. And I raised the issue on  
21 Tuesday with Admiral Caudle and received his commitment to  
22 ensure the Navy's support for planned facility restoration.  
23 And I am particularly concerned about the runway  
24 restoration and repair projects will be on schedule, not  
25 delayed.

1           Given your background as the Commander of Pacific Air  
2 Forces and your current role, I would like you to briefly  
3 discuss the importance of these upgrades to the Joint  
4 Forces in the Indo-Pacific and get your commitment to  
5 continuing to work closely with the Navy to ensure that  
6 these projects are completed on time and on budget.

7           General Wilsbach: Mahalo, Senator. Thank you for  
8 that opportunity. I was actually just in Hawaii last week,  
9 and we actually went around and looked at the taxiways and  
10 the runway, and we had a discussion. Thank you for your  
11 continued support.

12           Hickam Air Force Base is a power projection platform  
13 for the entire Pacific for the Air Force, and really for  
14 the entire Joint Force. We use that as a spot to refuel,  
15 refit, to move cargo and people from the Pacific back to  
16 the States and vice versa. So it is an incredibly  
17 important power projection platform for the nation.

18           Senator Hirono: And that agreement between the Air  
19 Force and the Navy, in my view, was about time, I would  
20 say, so I wanted to just make sure that it continues. And  
21 this is certainly an issue that you brought to my  
22 attention. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23           Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Blumenthal.

24           Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The war in  
25 Ukraine has provided a lot of lessons. I think you would

1 agree, beyond drones and air defense, the conflict has  
2 underscored how essential fighters, that is aircraft,  
3 space-based surveillance, satellite communication,  
4 electronic warfare, and resilient command and control  
5 networks are in a highly contested fight like that one, or  
6 any for that matter.

7       At the same time, Ukraine has shown how difficult it  
8 is to operate in an environment that is shaped by  
9 persistent surveillance -- GPS jamming, advanced air  
10 defenses, cyberattacks, and long-range precision strikes.  
11 Ukrainians have fought back and pushed back the Russians  
12 because they have made use, very ingeniously and  
13 creatively, not only of drones but of all kinds of other  
14 instruments that disable the Russian aggression.

15       Assumptions the United States has relied on for  
16 probably decades, particularly around air superiority and  
17 uncontested access to space-enabled systems can no longer  
18 be taken for granted in a future potential conflict.

19       The Administration is now committing tens of billions  
20 of dollars to next-generation fighters and missile defense  
21 and space systems, specifically with China in mind. Are  
22 any of the lessons of Ukraine applicable to the potential  
23 conflict with China?

24       General Wilsbach: Thanks, Senator. I think one of  
25 the biggest lessons to take away, which perhaps is the

1 reason why the conflict has drawn out for so long, is  
2 neither side established air and space superiority. And  
3 they go together. You have to have space superiority in  
4 the 21st century if you hope to achieve air superiority,  
5 because of the reliance we have on our systems in space,  
6 communication and navigation and timing.

7 So the fact that neither side ever established air  
8 superiority is why it has drawn out to a really long  
9 conflict, which is why our budget emphasizes air and space  
10 superiority with a number of the systems that we are  
11 wanting to field.

12 Senator Blumenthal: But the United States is not  
13 going to establish air superiority against China if there  
14 is a potential invasion of Taiwan, is it?

15 General Wilsbach: We actually intend to try to  
16 establish air superiority. It is important not to confuse  
17 air superiority with air supremacy. Air supremacy is much  
18 like what we had in Afghanistan, where we could fly around  
19 anytime, anywhere. But what you saw in Iran, both just  
20 recently and at other times, we would establish air  
21 superiority where we would establish maybe a smaller part  
22 of the airspace where we can fly around and execute the  
23 missions that we would like to do. And then you would  
24 maybe get out of that airspace and you would no longer have  
25 air superiority, but you did not care because you are not

1 there anyway.

2 Senator Blumenthal: I think that is an important  
3 distinction. Do you foresee Ukraine establishing or moving  
4 toward air superiority?

5 General Wilsbach: I would probably defer that to my  
6 EUCOM colleagues. But it is possible that they could, and  
7 it is also possible that Russia could. But what we are  
8 seeing is neither side really ever achieving air and space  
9 superiority.

10 Senator Blumenthal: But the trend there, in my view,  
11 simply on the basis of nonclassified information, is that  
12 the Ukrainians, in their use of drones and cyber and  
13 satellite intelligence have come a long way, farther than  
14 the Russians have done.

15 General Wilsbach: I go back to, Senator, the  
16 foundational lesson that I have taken out of that conflict,  
17 is the principality of establishing air and space  
18 superiority allows you to do so many other things with your  
19 military to achieve objectives, and the lack of having air  
20 and space superiority really limits you to the objectives  
21 that you can achieve.

22 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. Thank you very much,  
23 Mr. Chairman.

24 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.  
25 Senator Slotkin.

1           Senator Slotkin: Thank you. I apologize. I sound  
2 like I am smoking a pack of cigarettes a day. I am not,  
3 but I am a little bit under the weather.

4           I want to start out by thanking Secretary Meink and  
5 General Wilsbach. We had some important things culminate  
6 in Michigan in the past week on Selfridge Air Force Base.  
7 We worked with you all on commitments after the President  
8 made the decision to replace the fighter mission at  
9 Selfridge Air Force Base. And I know that has been a  
10 really big and complex problem set for you all, and I just  
11 want to thank you for doing that. Yesterday, the State of  
12 Michigan, per our discussions, approved, on a bipartisan  
13 basis, we have a split Democrat and Republican House and  
14 Senate, approved \$152 million to start work now on the  
15 runway at Selfridge, which I know unlocks a lot of what we  
16 are able to do there.

17           So thank you for putting into the FYDP in the next 5  
18 years almost \$800 million into upgrades there. We, of  
19 course, would like you to move some of that forward now  
20 that we have lived up to our end of the bargain, but this  
21 is a genuine thank-you. And I am really proud of how my  
22 state, over the past 12 years, have worked state, local,  
23 Federal, Democrat, Republican, everyone has done their  
24 part, and this is a huge deal for us and a huge deal for  
25 our economy, so I want to thank you.

1 I also want to say you both should come to Michigan  
2 and see it in action. We would love to have you come  
3 through one of our Gant chart conversations to see the puts  
4 and takes. We will be sending you a formal invitation.

5 I do also want to raise the issue -- break, break --  
6 of PFAS in Oscoda, Michigan. This is PFAS contamination of  
7 a very pro-military community that lives near the closed  
8 Air Force base, Wurtsmith Air Force Base, that have been  
9 dealing for the better part of 20-plus years with  
10 contamination that came from that Air Force base. They  
11 have been through the wringer, and yesterday were told by  
12 Air Force officials that they are now further delaying the  
13 clean-up commitments they had made for another 5 years. I  
14 am sure no one at the local level put together that you all  
15 were coming up here for your hearing.

16 The Air Force has, in recent years, been working more  
17 productively on the ground with the residents there, and  
18 made commitments. But there are plumes of this  
19 contamination like under lakes that host YMCA camps. It is  
20 at risk of going into other lakes and into the Au Sable  
21 River, things that are just fundamentally why people buy  
22 property and live up there.

23 So I have to ask, again -- and again, this long  
24 precedes you -- but I just ask you to think about what it  
25 is like to be a family in that community. Some of the

1 residents there have the highest PFAS blood levels of  
2 anyone in the entire world, and they have been put off, and  
3 put off, and put off since 2010. We finally got to a  
4 decent commitment, and yesterday were told it is another 5  
5 years.

6 So while I am thrilled with what we have done on  
7 Selfridge and genuinely thank you, I have to ask that you  
8 pull in the troops, your people on the ground, and say,  
9 what are we doing to this community. Because the other  
10 thing that happened this week is the Trump administration,  
11 on Monday, notified that they are reverting and going back  
12 to old PFAS standards, changing the Federal standards  
13 through the EPA. So if you are in this community you are  
14 just feeling like, whatever progress we made, 2 steps  
15 forward, we are now going to be taking about 10 steps back.

16 So can I get some commitment that you will just pull  
17 the folks together and try and understand why we have  
18 another 5-year delay, after 20 years of waiting on the Air  
19 Force?

20 Secretary Meink: Senator, thanks. Again, thank you  
21 for the support at Selfridge. It is going to allow us to  
22 get the airplanes in the air, leave them there, so we  
23 really appreciate that.

24 Yeah, on this we will continue to support. We doubled  
25 the PFAS investment in the fiscal year 2027 budget

1 submission to keep getting after these problems. I think  
2 we are making progress there, with a number of things,  
3 significant resources spent, and we are starting to do  
4 clean-up.

5 I am still trying to get to the bottom of where that  
6 5-year delay is coming from. I will figure out where that  
7 is coming from and I will get back to you on it. But we  
8 are not changing our commitment.

9 Senator Slotkin: Yeah, we will follow up. I hate to  
10 congratulate you in one breath and thank you in one breath  
11 and then ask. But you would be doing the same thing if you  
12 were in my position, for people who have waited 20 years to  
13 drink their local water and swim in their local lake.

14 I yield back.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator  
16 Slotkin. Senator Warren.

17 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. President's  
18 war with Iran has raised prices across the country and  
19 around the world, and this means higher prices for the  
20 Pentagon, as well. Sometimes those price hikes will be a  
21 direct consequence of the war, like the rising cost of jet  
22 fuel, as Senator Kaine discussed this morning. But it also  
23 creates a big opportunity for defense contractors to sneak  
24 in extra price hikes to pad their profits with American  
25 taxpayers.

1           The Air Force has experienced this price gouging  
2 firsthand. The Department of Defense's Inspector General  
3 found that Boeing charged the Air Force more than a fair  
4 and reasonable price for one out of every four spare parts  
5 that the Air Force bought, including charging 80 times more  
6 than the commercially available cost for a plain old soap  
7 dispenser. And for anyone who wants to do the math on  
8 that, that is, for example, a \$10 soap dispenser that now  
9 costs \$800 when the Air Force buys it.

10           Now, the IG recommended requiring Boeing and other  
11 contractors to notify the Air Force of any price increases  
12 above 25 percent. Secretary Meink, would it be easier for  
13 the Air Force to keep costs under control if companies had  
14 to affirmatively disclose when prices shoot up by more than  
15 25 percent?

16           Secretary Meink: Senator, I am not familiar with the  
17 specific number you quoted, but we do have, in many of our  
18 contracts we do have requirements to, as a matter of fact,  
19 that they cannot raise prices. As a matter of fact, as we  
20 go to many of the fixed price contract structure,  
21 multiyear, fixed price contract structures, the contractor  
22 is not allowed to raise costs. So yes.

23           Senator Warren: I appreciate that you put that in  
24 some contracts, but I am actually asking a somewhat  
25 different question if I can, and that is what is the

1 baseline for every defense contractor working? Last year,  
2 the House and the Senate's NDAA included my bipartisan  
3 Transparency in Contract Pricing Act, with Senators Ernst,  
4 Slotkin, and Grassley, and it would implement the IG's  
5 recommendation. Unfortunately, it was removed in  
6 conference, and the reason I am asking you about that and  
7 asking you for support is we want to try to get this across  
8 the finish line, and I would just like your help on that.

9 Secretary Meink: Well, Senator, I will take a look at  
10 that and I will definitely get back to you if we have any  
11 suggestions there. But, I mean, I will not mince words  
12 here, that we support any help from the Congress to get  
13 improved access to data rights. That is one of my biggest  
14 concerns is data right access, and those sorts of things.  
15 But I am happy to work with the Committee on that.

16 Senator Warren: Let's pick up on data, because I  
17 agree with you. Let's do this one and try to get it  
18 across. But one of the things that is happening is that  
19 defense contractors monopolize their repair by improperly  
20 labeling repair data as proprietary, even when the Air  
21 Force had rights to the data, and then banking on it being  
22 too hard for DoD to catch the mistake in how they had  
23 labeled it.

24 Rand found that Boeing's inappropriate restrictive  
25 markings on software prevented the Air Force from repairing

1 the KC-46 itself, or contracting with somebody else to do  
2 it. So let me just ask you on that one, Secretary Meink.  
3 Would rules incentivizing contractors to provide accurate  
4 markings allow the Air Force to repair aircraft both faster  
5 and improve readiness?

6 Secretary Meink: Any help to support right to repair,  
7 I think is the broader term that we use, and access to data  
8 rights is a big part of that, yes, is important.

9 Senator Warren: Good. I am trying to get us in as  
10 much detail as we can here.

11 You know, this Committee has heard from senior  
12 military leaders across the services that they need right  
13 to repair. Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit a letter  
14 from Senator Sheehey and I that we sent to this Committee  
15 collecting that testimony, for the record.

16 Chairman Wicker: Is there objection? Without  
17 objection, it will be submitted and received.

18 [The information follows:]

19  
20  
21  
22  
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25

1 Senator Warren: Okay. And I just want to one more  
2 quickly if I can, because bid contractors are trying to  
3 trick us by offering an alternative to right to repair  
4 called "data as service," which is really pay-per-view.  
5 And it is a module that keeps the big contractors in  
6 control. The Air Force knows how unsustainable that model  
7 is. When it wanted to access the repair manual for the AC-  
8 130J, Lockheed Martin charged the Air Force \$900 per page,  
9 just to look at the repair manual.

10 So tackling the broken contracting around sustainment  
11 and pricing would be transformative for our readiness. The  
12 GAO has found that obtaining needed technical data could  
13 save billions of dollars just for ship sustainment.  
14 Extending that to the Air Force's programs could be huge.  
15 The Air Force has already found that making its own C5  
16 pressure door handle could cut costs for that by 95  
17 percent.

18 So I look forward to working with the Chairman and the  
19 Ranking Member to try to get more of this into our NDAA and  
20 all the way through and signed into law. Thank you, Mr.  
21 Chairman.

22 Chairman Wicker: Well, thank you much, Senator  
23 Warren. And you were able to talk long enough to allow Sn  
24 Rosen to arrive, and she is now recognized.

25 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Ranking

1 Member Reed, for holding this hearing. Thank you to our  
2 witnesses today and for serving our country. I appreciate  
3 you.

4 Secretary Meink, I want to talk about presumption of  
5 exposure parity. As we discussed last year, servicemembers  
6 who served at locations at other U.S. government agencies  
7 deemed contaminated, like the Department of Energy  
8 considers portions of the Nevada Test and Training Range to  
9 be, should have the same presumption of radiation exposure  
10 as DOE employees who served alongside them. We are just  
11 asking for parity.

12 But because DoD does not consider places like the  
13 Tonopah Test Range to be a location where contamination  
14 occurred, as DOE does, and because the service records of  
15 those stationed there are data masked, these veterans  
16 cannot prove to the VA that they ever served there. This  
17 is a problem that DoD has the power -- you have the power  
18 to solve this.

19 So Secretary Meink, recognizing that this is a DoD-  
20 wide problem, not singular to the Air Force, I have several  
21 questions. What progress has the Department made to  
22 identify servicemembers who served within the NTTR at DOE-  
23 covered facilities, locations which DOE considers  
24 contaminating, and will you commit to providing the VA with  
25 adequate documentation of these veterans' services?

1 Secretary Meink: Senator, thanks for the question.  
2 Protecting the health both on active duty and retired of  
3 our servicemembers is critically important. And we do  
4 continue to work that. The general focus has been trying  
5 to get to the data, uncover all the data, and then provide  
6 dose ratings and those sorts of things to the VA so that  
7 the VA can make an assessment on how to provide --

8 Senator Rosen: Are you working on this?

9 Secretary Meink: Yes. Yes, we are.

10 Senator Rosen: Can you commit to a completion date?

11 Secretary Meink: Yes, we are, and we have made some  
12 progress on that, but it something we need to continue to  
13 work on.

14 Senator Rosen: Will you come to talk to us about when  
15 your completion date will be, because I have veterans who  
16 are waiting on this very thing in order to get the care  
17 that they desperately need. They were injured in their  
18 service, and they need some help.

19 I also want to ask you a question, if you will commit  
20 to classifying the NTTR as a location where contamination  
21 occurred. That puts the DoD in parity with the DOE. It is  
22 not right that one agency says contamination, so civilian  
23 employees are covered, and our veterans are not.

24 Secretary Meink: Senator, we will continue to work on  
25 this issue.

1 Senator Rosen: How long --

2 Secretary Meink: I do not know if I actually have the  
3 authority to designate the entire thing, but --

4 Senator Rosen: So how long? So you said you are  
5 continuing to work on it. You do not even know if you have  
6 the authority. Let me tell you, you need to come talk to  
7 us, because how long -- this has been going on since tests  
8 have started in the 1950s.

9 Secretary Meink: So Senator, maybe to be very clear,  
10 we do have the authority to work through and make sure that  
11 we have uncovered the data so that we can provide it to the  
12 VA so that we can get the proper care for those. Declaring  
13 all of the test range --

14 Senator Rosen: Not all of the test range --

15 Secretary Meink: -- is something, the authority that  
16 I am not sure I have.

17 Senator Rosen: I appreciate you come speak with my  
18 office and we can get into this in more detail.

19 I also want to ask you about the C-130J basing. As we  
20 have discussed, the Nevada Air National Guard's 157th  
21 Airlift Wing in Reno flies the dangerous Modular Airborne  
22 Firefighting System, the MAFFS. They fly it with the  
23 legacy C-130Hs. As the only MAFFS unit still flying H  
24 models, the only one, upgrading to C-130Js would provide  
25 increased power, cargo capacity for fire retardant, which

1 equals increased flight safety and firefighting capability.  
2 In fact, during the summer C-130Hs fully loaded with fire  
3 retardant cannot even take off from Reno with a full tank  
4 of fuel due to heat and elevation.

5 The High Rollers have maintained a greater than 95  
6 percent mission ready rate in spite of operating and  
7 maintaining an aging fleet with a dwindling supply chain.

8 So it is no surprise that the 192nd Expeditionary  
9 Airlift Squadron was tasked and able to deploy across the  
10 Atlantic 72 hours after receiving orders in support of  
11 Operation Epic Fury, and then again picked up on 72 hours'  
12 notice to move into a completely different AOR and mission  
13 set at the drop of a hat. On behalf of all Nevadans I want  
14 to thank them for answering our nation's call and I pray  
15 for their safety.

16 But Secretary Meink, given all of this, and with  
17 another basing decision to be made after Congress  
18 appropriated another eight C-130Js in recent years, can I  
19 have your commitment that the 157th Airlift Wing will  
20 finally receive the C-130Js they need and deserve to  
21 complete their mission?

22 Secretary Meink: Senator, I commit to working through  
23 the strategic basing process to allocate those airplanes as  
24 we go through the criteria. I would say though, Senator --

25 Senator Rosen: I want to tell you, we have worked on

1 that strategic basing. I have seen the spreadsheets.  
2 There were four places. They got them allocated. There  
3 were four more. We were first on the list, and then we  
4 were dropped down to the last one. We have completed  
5 everything. There is nothing more to work through. It was  
6 a different decision. Please come again to our office and  
7 we can show you how we have met every criteria over the  
8 last so many years. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Secretary Meink: I would be happy to do so, Senator.  
10 I do just want to reinforce the fact that they do great  
11 work. There is no question about that.

12 Senator Rosen: Oh, we are so proud of them.

13 Secretary Meink: So are we. But the H models, you  
14 know, that is a very capable platform. You are right, it  
15 does not have the exact performance of the J model, but  
16 those platforms have a lot of life left in them. So we  
17 take all those things into consideration.

18 Senator Rosen: Well, we will have a discussion in my  
19 office about we were first on the remaining for bases that  
20 were supposed to get them and when we got moved to the  
21 last. So that is a different discussion. I see people are  
22 waiting. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Rosen. Senator  
24 Sullivan.

25 Senator Sullivan: Gentlemen, thank you for your

1 service. I think all three of you are doing an exceptional  
2 job, so thank you. I want to thank you also, you made the  
3 decision to get the four KC-135s to Eielson. Every other  
4 Chief of Staff of the Air Force and Secretary of the Air  
5 Force committed to me to doing that, for 10 years by the  
6 way, and you were the two who did it, so thank you.

7 Can you explain why that is so important, not just for  
8 Eielson but for the national security of America, on the  
9 KC-135s?

10 General Wilsbach: The geography of Alaska allows it  
11 be a very strategic location, mainly because, especially  
12 for air power advocates, because we can get to just about  
13 anywhere in the Northern Hemisphere within 9 hours of  
14 flying time, if you went in a straight line. Obviously,  
15 international borders do not always allow you to do that,  
16 but can project power from Alaska better than a lot of  
17 other places in our country. So having additional air  
18 refuelers at Eielson helps us to project more power.

19 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, gentlemen, and on that I  
20 want to talk about the other big initiative in the  
21 President's budget, in the Air Force's budget, and that is  
22 the Fighter Town Recapitalization. General Wilsbach, I  
23 appreciated the classified briefing on that. But can you  
24 and Secretary walk through again that, which is a huge  
25 investment in the Air Force's budget, a request of

1 essentially \$7 billion, \$2 billion to be appropriated this  
2 year. But why is that such a national security priority  
3 for the Air Force in highlighting that?

4 Secretary Meink: Yes, Senator. Kind of along the  
5 lines of --

6 Senator Sullivan: And this is what I am talking about  
7 is the JBER recapitalization.

8 Secretary Meink: Yep, the JBER recapitalization.  
9 Just as the General was saying, it is a very strategic  
10 location. Making sure that the infrastructure, there is  
11 about \$7 billion across the FYDP to do that Fighter Town  
12 Recap. So just due to the location and the criticality of  
13 it, we need to make sure that the infrastructure there is  
14 good, and that is the investment. General?

15 General Wilsbach: The only other thing that I would  
16 add is that for years we have been operating out of some  
17 pretty old facilities, and built in the 1950s, a lot of  
18 them, at JBER, right, Senator? So this brings us up to the  
19 21st century, and as we are operating fifth-generation  
20 aircraft from Elmendorf, we will have buildings that are  
21 commensurate with the technology and the aircraft.

22 Senator Sullivan: General, as a former ALCOM  
23 Commander, can you talk about the importance of, again,  
24 what you were talking about in terms of Alaska's strategic  
25 location, but this Fighter Town Recapitalization, the F-22s

1 the already exist at JBER, the J-35s that already exist at  
2 Eielson, over 100 fifth-generation fighters, how do our  
3 adversaries view that, given what you talked about. We are  
4 so close to them and can be in their backyard in a matter  
5 of hours, especially if we go supersonic.

6 General Wilsbach: Well, I have not talked to them  
7 about this, but if I was them I would be worried. But the  
8 thing I would be worried most about is the JPARC, the  
9 airspace that is between Eielson and Elmendorf. I am sure  
10 they watch what we do in there, and they can see the  
11 capabilities that we have with our fifth-generation  
12 aircraft, which is extraordinary. But that airspace allows  
13 us to train at the highest levels, frankly, just about  
14 anywhere in the world, because it is big enough and it has  
15 the capabilities to replicate the threat. So that JPAC  
16 airspace is a crown jewel.

17 Senator Sullivan: So the Fighter Town  
18 Recapitalization is \$7 billion. It does not include what  
19 we have done in terms of the new runway at JBER. In the  
20 JITTC expansion, which are already happening, we are  
21 breaking ground on the JITTC expansion, close to \$400  
22 million in the budget, and we pretty much finished the new  
23 runway at JBER.

24 Can you talk about those and their importance and  
25 really, as many Air Force officials have told me, with that

1 expansion, JPARC, the new runway, the Fighter Town  
2 Recapitalization, JBER is now looking to be certainly one  
3 of the most important Air Force bases on the Planet Earth.

4 General Wilsbach: Well, the runway extension is going  
5 to allow continuous operations regardless of the winds.  
6 Previously, the north-south runway was really too short  
7 when the runway condition was either wet or icy and the  
8 winds were out of limits for operations. The about 2,000-  
9 feet extension on the runway allows, almost no matter what  
10 the winds are, aside from a completely iced-over runway, we  
11 are going to be able to operate all year round, day and  
12 night. So you just have a lot more access to the airspace  
13 and you can get off the airfield and do real-world missions  
14 if you need to do that.

15 The JITTC, the Test and Training Center, will allow a  
16 much more realistic training for all the crews, both at  
17 Eielson and at Elmendorf, and people from other parts of  
18 our country will be able to go there and use that facility.

19 Senator Sullivan: When they are doing Red Flag and  
20 other exercises.

21 General Wilsbach: You could, absolutely.

22 Senator Sullivan: Great. Thank you very much, Mr.  
23 Chairman. This is a really exciting time for JBER and  
24 Eielson, and I appreciate the leadership General Wilsbach,  
25 Senator Meink, and General, we will get to you with some

1 QFRs, because what you are doing is important, as well.

2 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator  
3 Sullivan. Senator Budd.

4 Senator Budd: Thank you, Chairman. Gentlemen, thank  
5 you for being here. Thanks for all you do for our airmen  
6 and for our guardians.

7 Secretary Meink, thanks for supporting my Airpower  
8 Acceleration Act a few weeks ago, especially for the  
9 provision to increase the 15EX fleet by an additional 200  
10 aircraft. I think that is the right number to recapitalize  
11 the 8 current F-15E squadrons.

12 So after the six initial F-15EX bases receive their  
13 aircraft, what is your vision for where the aircraft next  
14 go?

15 Secretary Meink: Yes, Senator, and I appreciate your  
16 support on that. It is a critical platform, critical what  
17 you do in your state to support that platform. We really  
18 appreciate that, and it has been demonstrated time and time  
19 again, even in combat, how good a platform that is.

20 With respect to as we build those out, we will set up  
21 the strategic basing criteria to go off and work that. I  
22 cannot say exactly where they are going to go, but it will  
23 be a combination of active and Guard and Reserve units that  
24 will be looked at.

25 Senator Budd: Thank you. Secretary, continuing with

1 you, on the topic of these F-15EXs, what is your plan to  
2 stand up the two squadrons at Kadena Air Base in Japan as  
3 quickly as possible? The background, I have been seeing  
4 constant fighter deployments to Kadena for almost 5 years  
5 now to fill the vacuum of the F-15Cs that started leaving  
6 in 2022, I believe.

7 Secretary Meink: Yes. I believe we start -- I am  
8 looking through my numbers here -- I think we actually  
9 deliver the first aircraft next year. Is that right?

10 Senator Budd: General Wilsbach, do you want to add  
11 anything to that?

12 Secretary Meink: I think it is next year and we  
13 finish by '28 or '29? 28? As you know, Senator, we are  
14 pushing hard to ramp production. Boeing has fallen behind  
15 a bit. A lot of it is due to the strike, but we are  
16 working closely with them to increase production, to get  
17 well beyond two per month, which will not only enable what  
18 we are doing in Korea but also the rest of the bases around  
19 the world.

20 Senator Budd: Thank you. Anything else to add,  
21 General?

22 General Wilsbach: No, Senator. Thank you.

23 Senator Budd: Secretary, another piece of my Airport  
24 Acceleration Act is the provision to allow multiyear  
25 procurement, for the F-35 and for the F-15EX. Can you

1 describe the benefits this authority would bring to the  
2 service, to the industry, and to the taxpayer, multiyear  
3 procurements?

4 Secretary Meink: Yes, Senator. Increasing our  
5 flexibility to use multiyear procurement is just critically  
6 important. The F-15 is an exemplar of that, because of the  
7 instability in the production rates and the unknown future.  
8 The contractor just could not make the investments  
9 necessary to tool up and improve and really modernizing how  
10 they are doing production of that aircraft. So doing that,  
11 that long-term stability allows the contractor to do those  
12 things that it will eventually saving us money and it will  
13 allow us to produce those aircraft quicker. So it is  
14 important there.

15 The F-35, not only on the aircraft production but also  
16 on the parts production, having a stable, long-term,  
17 multiyear contract on parts, as well as the aircraft  
18 themselves, or spacecraft in that case, or in other cases,  
19 is just super important. Year-to-year, it is inefficient  
20 but it also does not allow us to do the things to improve  
21 the systems going forward, as well.

22 Senator Budd: Thank you very much for that answer.

23 General Wilsbach, on pilot retention, I have helped  
24 introduce the RETAIN Act with Senator Shaheen, and a lot of  
25 my colleagues on this Committee join me. This bill aims to

1 boost pilot retention through monetary and non-monetary  
2 incentives. Can you talk a little bit about what the Air  
3 Force is specifically doing to help better pilot retention?

4 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator. I would say we have  
5 a trifecta approach. The most important one, I believe, is  
6 pilots want to fly, so getting them in the cockpit and  
7 flying multiple times a week is the biggest complaint that  
8 they have that they are not getting to do. So the 2027  
9 budget dedicates \$24 billion to weapon systems sustainment,  
10 which will generate additional sorties, and then the \$10  
11 billion for flying hours will allow pilots to get more  
12 sorties. That is the first of the trifecta.

13 The second is incentives via pay. There is your  
14 monthly flight pay and then the bonus. Congress has helped  
15 us out this year with maximizing those amounts in the 2027  
16 budget request, that maximization, as well. That is  
17 meaningful to the families.

18 And then the last one is quality of life measures.  
19 Probably the biggest complaint we hear is too many moves.  
20 So we have instituted a number of programs where pilots can  
21 choose to stay at locations for longer periods of time and  
22 reduce the number of moves. And that provides stability  
23 for their families.

24 So those three features are thing we believe are going  
25 to help us with retention.

1 Senator Budd: Very helpful. Thank you all, Chairman.

2 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator  
3 Peters, you are recognized.

4 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank  
5 you, gentlemen, for being here, testifying here today, and  
6 certainly I appreciated the opportunity in our closed  
7 session prior to this open session to talk about a number  
8 of important issues.

9 Secretary Meink, as you know, in April 2025, President  
10 Trump visited Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Michigan  
11 and announced that Selfridge would be receiving 21 F-15EXs  
12 in addition to the previously announced KC-46s. In  
13 preparation for these aircraft the Air Force requested the  
14 State of Michigan to fund Selfridge Runway Encroachment  
15 Project, and as you know and as you heard today, or heard  
16 before today, as well, this project is critical to ensure  
17 on-time military construction, and the Michigan legislature  
18 actually passed that funding and signed it into law. So  
19 accomplishing a checkmark on a critical piece of all of  
20 that.

21 This was following months of advocacy from folks at  
22 the state, local, and Federal level. And now with the  
23 state delivering on the funding I think it is imperative  
24 that we move forward as quickly as possible.

25 When we met last month, General Wilsbach, or with

1 General Wilsbach, you shared that successful completion of  
2 all necessary military construction projects, including the  
3 state's vital contribution, will make, and I like the  
4 phrase you said, "it will make it the finest Guard base in  
5 the country." I am going to quote you often on that,  
6 because that is wonderful.

7 So my question for you, sir, is do you have a  
8 commitment to work to actually accelerate as much as  
9 possible Selfridge military construction projects? We want  
10 to make sure not only does it live up to the finest base in  
11 the country, but understand, and I have been around long  
12 enough to know until shovels get in the ground and things  
13 start moving that things could occur at some point that  
14 will slow that down. And if we slow that down, that could  
15 potentially impact actually bedding down those aircraft in  
16 a timely fashion. I would certainly love to work with you  
17 to see if there are ways that we can accelerate the  
18 timeline that you have put out.

19 Again, I appreciate your commitment. We have had  
20 amazing conversations about this. I know you are fully  
21 committed. But I also believe that any kind of  
22 acceleration ensures for sure that this actually gets  
23 accomplished. I would just love to have your thoughts on  
24 that and hopefully a commitment to try to figure that out.

25 Secretary Meink: Sure, Senator. And I did not write

1 it down but I think may have said "the most capable Guard  
2 base." I don't know if I said "the finest." I may have  
3 said -- you said the finest?

4 Senator Peters: Yeah. The General did. I love his  
5 words. I really do.

6 Secretary Meink: No question about that. For the F-  
7 15s as well as the tankers, it is going to be a very, very  
8 capable Guard base, as many of our Guard bases are.

9 So again, thank you for the work. As we discussed  
10 many times, the key to the state's investment was to get  
11 the runway done in time for the F-15s to show up, so that  
12 we actually would not have to move them until a runway was  
13 fixed and then come back. So that dramatically simplifies  
14 and lowers the risk of being able to keep the aircraft  
15 there once they show up. So again, thank you very much. We  
16 really appreciate that.

17 And as I am sure you are also tracking, there is about  
18 \$8 to \$9 million of additional MILCON that has to occur  
19 there, not just for the 15s but for the KC-46s, as well.  
20 So we are looking now, with the flexibility, now that the  
21 state has approved the funding, looking now at what options  
22 do we have to pull things back and potentially with some  
23 funding flexibility that that gives us.

24 So we are working on that, and we will get back to you  
25 on that.

1           Senator Peters: I appreciate that and appreciate your  
2 efforts on that, and look forward to getting that  
3 completed. I have also been working with the Air Force for  
4 years to address the PFAS contamination, particularly at  
5 Wurtsmith Air Force Base in Oscoda. And I certainly  
6 recognize the complexity of this clean-up effort. I have  
7 been working on it, as I said, for years, and I also  
8 appreciate the time and energy that the Air Force has  
9 dedicated to it and the continued communication we have had  
10 related to the clean-up, that it is done correctly.

11           But I am extremely concerned and disappointed by some  
12 recent reports that show that clean-up efforts may be  
13 delayed by as much as 5 years, with remedial action  
14 construction now set in 2035. That is 25 years after  
15 contamination was first identified in the state.

16           We just cannot keep this community waiting forever.  
17 It is unacceptable. We need a clean-up done right, and we  
18 need it done as soon as possible. And if there is a way to  
19 get this clean-up back on track, whether it is a matter of  
20 funding or some other factor, we need to pursue those  
21 options.

22           So really, my question for you is, how can we get this  
23 back on track? I would love to have your commitment to  
24 work with me to try to figure out how we can reassess that  
25 delay. And as part of that I am hoping you could provide

1 me and the community -- and the community desperately needs  
2 this -- a detailed rationale for why this delay was  
3 announced. And I would also like to know the current  
4 status of ongoing interim remedial actions at the site and  
5 how this delay is now going to impact those remedial  
6 actions that are going on at the site.

7 I hope you agree with me, Secretary, and I know you  
8 care about these issues. We have had a lot of discussion  
9 about it. But certainly the community deserves to have  
10 more detailed answers than they are getting right now, and  
11 I hope I could have your commitment that we could get that  
12 done and meet with your team, and my team meet with yours,  
13 whatever it takes, and have an opportunity to let everyone  
14 know that this will get done, and hopefully much sooner  
15 than what is being contemplated now.

16 Secretary Meink: Yes, Senator, absolutely. We do take  
17 these issues serious, both for our airmen and for the local  
18 community. So I will get back to you on that. I am  
19 actually trying to dig up where that 5-year delay came  
20 from. I actually cannot find where that is actually going  
21 to occur. But I am going to dig into it and get back to  
22 you on it.

23 Senator Peters: I appreciate it. Thank you for your  
24 efforts. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Peters. And

1 gentlemen, there will be an unusual amount of questions for  
2 the record, and Mr. Secretary, you will be able to  
3 supplement your answer to Senator Peters in our follow-up  
4 answers to the record.

5 We are almost through. But General Saltzman, this may  
6 be the last question you ever answer before this Committee,  
7 and I want to give you an opportunity. You pointed out  
8 this is a lot of money that we are asking for. Every bit  
9 of it is justified. It is a 124 percent increase in the  
10 budget, alongside a 27 percent increase in end-strength.  
11 And you are going to be standing up a lot of very essential  
12 things on something that is relatively new.

13 Assure us and assure the taxpayers and the public that  
14 we will be able to absorb this amount and actually put it  
15 to work and put these capabilities in place in short order.

16 General Saltzman: Well, thank you very much, Senator,  
17 for the opportunity to say that. It is a historic  
18 increase, 124 percent in one year. Mostly it is obviously  
19 attributed to the 12 or 15 new systems we are bringing on,  
20 the number of people we are going to have to bring on to  
21 operate those systems, the program offices to do the  
22 acquisition work, the MILCON that is necessary to build out  
23 the resiliency.

24 We are taking some constellations that were 4 or 5  
25 satellites and turning them into constellations of 300-plus

1 satellites. This is not an inconsequential investment.

2 But what I can tell you is we have done the design  
3 work. The architecture is in place. The contractor  
4 vehicles are in place. I am looking at my numbers here.  
5 Ninety percent of the budget request are already on  
6 existing programs. Only 7.6 percent will require new  
7 starts, for example.

8 So we believe we have the structure in place, the  
9 contract vehicles in place, the design work has been  
10 complete, and now we can simply add the resources, attract  
11 the new personnel, train them, and spend the money that is  
12 being allocated to the Space Force.

13 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, and God speed  
14 to you. Senator Reed, do you have further questions?

15 Senator Reed: No, sir. Just again to thank everyone  
16 here, and congratulations and well done, General Saltzman.

17 General Saltzman: Thank you.

18 Chairman Wicker: This concludes the open portion of  
19 today's hearing. I want to thank our witnesses. And for  
20 the information of members, questions for the record will  
21 be due to the Committee within 2 business days of the  
22 conclusion of the hearing. And with that we are adjourned.

23 [Whereupon, at 12:08 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

24

25

	36:12	11:20	49:14	<b>2028</b>
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