

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF GENERAL KENNETH S.
WILSBACH, USAF, FOR REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF
GENERAL AND TO BE CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE AIR FORCE

Thursday, October 9, 2025

Washington, D.C.

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1 TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF GENERAL KENNETH S. WILSBACH,
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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 9:42 a.m. in
12 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger
13 Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

14 Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker, Fischer,
15 Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Sullivan, Cramer, Scott, Tuberville,
16 Mullin, Budd, Schmitt, Banks, Sheehy, Reed, Blumenthal,
17 Hirono, Kaine, King, Peters, Kelly, and Slotkin.



1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR
2 FROM MISSISSIPPI

3 Chairman Wicker: This hearing will come to order.
4 The Committee meets today to consider the nomination of
5 General Kenneth Wilsbach to serve as the next Chief of
6 Staff of the United States Air Force. We thank him and his
7 family for their decades of service and their commitment to
8 lead in this dangerous time.

9 The United States Air Force is a critical pillar of
10 our Joint Force. It is the most capable and lethal Air
11 Force in history. We saw their expertise on full display
12 in this year's Operation Midnight Hammer. This was a
13 complex, high-risk strike package. It was launched from
14 long range, coordinated across multiple domains, and
15 carried out with surgical precision. With this operation,
16 President Trump sent a clear message to our adversaries --
17 American air supremacy is unparalleled, and it has a global
18 reach.

19 With his long career service, General Wilsbach has
20 supported that air supremacy. The general brings deep
21 operational experience and understands what it takes to
22 lead in contested environments. If confirmed, he must
23 drive tough reforms and manage tight budgets. He must
24 speak plainly about the risks the force is resourcing and
25 that it is inadequate.



1 I already mentioned Operation Midnight Hammer. That
2 operation demonstrated capability, but it was only a moment
3 in time. We need the Air Force Chief of Staff to make
4 progress on our most challenging and enduring issues.
5 Among those are the ongoing pilot shortage, modernization
6 of our aging nuclear systems, the sustainment of our
7 current aircraft fleet, and the expansion of our fighter,
8 refueling, and cargo fleets.

9 As to fleet sustainment, we must all acknowledge the
10 ongoing problem of aircraft availability. The F-35 remains
11 the most advanced fighter in the world, but too many of
12 them are sitting idle on ramps. The readiness rates of our
13 aircraft continue to fall short of Pentagon goals. This is
14 known on this side of the ocean and around the world. The
15 force is plagued by persistent parts shortages, long repair
16 times, and sustainment costs that strain operational
17 budgets. The Air Force cannot project power if its most
18 advanced fighter cannot get off the ground. I look forward
19 to hearing how General Wilsbach intends to address this.

20 This Committee also recognizes the Air Force push to
21 retire legacy platforms to fund modernization. We need a
22 realistic plan to address the readiness gaps created in the
23 interim. We need aircraft that fly, bases that survive
24 missile attacks, and logistics that support operations far
25 from home. That includes hardened infrastructure and



1 prepositioned supplies. It means we must ensure airmen are
2 trained and equipped for austere, contested environments.
3 Some of the gaps in these capabilities have been created by
4 an ill-advised to invest strategy, and these gaps are
5 unacceptable.

6 Lastly, this Committee remains concerned by the slow
7 pace of nuclear modernization. China, Russia, and North
8 Korea are rapidly expanding their arsenals, quickly eroding
9 advantages we seek to retain. Deterring nuclear aggression
10 remains the Department's top mission, and the Air Force is
11 the very tip of that spear. I look forward to hearing how
12 General Wilsbach intends to make these nuclear
13 modernization programs a top priority.

14 And finally, none of this works without people.
15 Recruiting has begun to stabilize, but retention is the
16 greater challenge. The Air Force continues to face a
17 consistent pilot shortage, driven by a limit to flying
18 hours and readiness shortfalls that keep pilots from
19 flying. Retaining pilots, maintainers, and technical
20 specialists requires sustained investment across the full
21 lifecycle of an airman. Service in the Air Force must be a
22 first-choice career, not a fallback.

23 So thank you for being here. Thank you for your
24 willingness to serve, General Wilsbach. And I turn to my
25 friend and colleague, Ranking Member Reed.



1 STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE
2 ISLAND

3 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr.
4 Chairman, and good morning, General Wilsbach. Welcome, and
5 congratulations on your nomination. I would also like to
6 welcome your wife, Cindy, here today, and thank her for her
7 many years of service at your side.

8 General, you are exceptionally well qualified to serve
9 as Chief of Staff of the Air Force. During your tenure as
10 Air Combat Commander you helped lead the Services through a
11 critical period of modernization, and you have extensive
12 leadership experience at every level, from squadron to wing
13 and across the globe, including in combat.

14 If confirmed, you will lead at a challenging time.
15 Air power remains central to our strategic competition with
16 China and with other adversaries, and the entire Joint
17 Force depends on the Air Force's capabilities every day.
18 The Service must balance global operations with the need to
19 modernize aircraft and systems of the future. A key part
20 of that modernization is how the Air Force manages and uses
21 data to fight more effectively. The Service is developing
22 advanced networks and command and control systems that will
23 integrate information across domains and deliver it rapidly
24 to the right operator. These efforts will shape how we
25 detect threats, process information, and act quickly on the



1 battlefield. I would like to know how you plan to continue
2 resourcing and evolving these technologies to maintain our
3 edge.

4 The U.S. Air Force remains the most capable air power
5 in the world. However, recent consecutive budget requests
6 have proposed retiring or realigning hundreds of aircraft
7 across all missions. Any such proposal deserve careful
8 scrutiny. We must consider whether these reductions are
9 prudent in the near term and evaluate the impact on our
10 industrial base to ensure we do not make short-sighted
11 decisions that weaken our production and sustainment
12 capabilities. I would like to know how you would approach
13 these proposed retirements and how you would manage force
14 structure adjustments going forward.

15 I am encouraged by the Air Force's renewed focus on
16 contested logistics and its work to make operations more
17 agile and resilient, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. The
18 Service has been developing a concept for dispersed
19 operations from smaller airfields across the region, called
20 Agile Combat Employment, or ACE, which will be vital to
21 ensuring survivability and operational reach in a future
22 conflict. I would appreciate your views on how to further
23 develop this approach and strengthen logistics, which
24 contested conditions will make very much more difficult.

25 Finally General, I want to address the tense political



1 environment in which you will lead, if confirmed. The
2 military today faces an increasingly politicized and
3 divisive climate. Our service chiefs, combatant
4 commanders, and senior officers must navigate contentious
5 issues that can erode public trust and distract from
6 mission. Many have already been dismissed for reasons that
7 are still difficult to understand. It will be essential
8 for you to stand firmly by your airmen and guardians,
9 defend their professionalism, and provide your best, honest
10 military advice to civilian leaders, regardless of
11 political pressure. I hope you will commit to do so today.

12 General, the challenges before you are complex and
13 consequential. Thank you for your continued service and
14 willingness to lead at this critical moment. I look
15 forward to your testimony. Again, thank you, and thank
16 you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Senator Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator Reed,
18 for that statement.

19 General, I will now ask you a series of standard
20 questions this Committee poses to all military nominees.
21 Simply a yes or no is asked for.

22 To exercise its legislative and oversight
23 responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and
24 other appropriate committees of the Congress be able to
25 receive testimony, briefings, and other communications of



1 information. Have you adhered to applicable laws and
2 regulations governing conflicts of interest?

3 General Wilsbach: Yes, Chairman.

4 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree, when asked, to give
5 your personal views, even if those views differ from the
6 administration in power?

7 General Wilsbach: Yes, Chairman.

8 Chairman Wicker: Have you assumed any duties or
9 undertaken any actions which would appear to presume the
10 outcome of the confirmation process?

11 General Wilsbach: No, Chairman.

12 Chairman Wicker: Will you ensure your staff complies
13 with deadlines established for requested communications,
14 including questions for the record in hearings?

15 General Wilsbach: Yes, Chairman.

16 Chairman Wicker: Will you cooperate in providing
17 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional
18 requests?

19 General Wilsbach: Yes, Chairman.

20 Chairman Wicker: Will those witnesses be protected
21 from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

22 General Wilsbach: Yes, Chairman.

23 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree, if confirmed, to
24 appear and testify, upon request, before this Committee?

25 General Wilsbach: Yes, Chairman.



1 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree to provide documents
2 including copies of electronic forms of communication in a
3 timely manner when requested by a duly constituted
4 committee, or to consult with the committee regarding the
5 basis for any good-faith delay or denial in providing such
6 documents?

7 General Wilsbach: Yes, Chairman.

8 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. And now you
9 are recognized for your opening statement.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL KENNETH S. WILSBACH, USAF, FOR
2 REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF GENERAL AND TO BE CHIEF OF
3 STAFF OF THE AIR FORCE.

4 General Wilsbach: All right. Thank you and good
5 morning. Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and
6 distinguished members of the Committee, it is an honor to
7 appear before you today, and I am grateful for the
8 opportunity to speak to you. I look forward to our
9 discussions in the hours ahead. More importantly, if
10 confirmed, I look forward to working closely with each of
11 you, and with your colleagues in the Senate and the House
12 to advance the strength and readiness of our Air Force.

13 I am incredibly grateful to President Trump for the
14 trust and confidence he has placed in me with this
15 nomination to serve as the next Chief of Staff of the Air
16 Force. I recognize the enormous responsibility that comes
17 with this position, especially in the global security
18 environment. If confirmed, I pledge to give my all to
19 successfully fulfill the duties of the office on behalf of
20 the American people.

21 Our nation relies on the Air Force to deliver air
22 superiority, nuclear and conventional global strike, rapid
23 mobility, command and control, and intelligence,
24 surveillance, and reconnaissance. These are no-fail
25 missions. They are critical to our national security,



1 particularly in an increasingly dangerous world. While
2 peace is always our goal, it must be preserved through
3 strength, with a military so capable, lethal, and decisive
4 that no adversary would choose to challenge us.

5 If confirmed, I see two priorities as central to
6 ensuring that strength: readiness and modernization. The
7 most important thing we do as an Air Force is fly and fix
8 airplanes, and we must field new capabilities as rapidly as
9 possible. And I believe empowering command teams to hold
10 themselves and their airmen to the highest warrior
11 standards are the keys to success.

12 I would like to share a bit about myself and my
13 family. I have served in the Air Force for nearly 40
14 years, since I graduated from college. My wife, Cindy, who
15 is seated behind me, has been my partner through every step
16 of that journey, and she has been with me throughout my
17 entire career. She has always had a full-time job, but she
18 has always made time for families of servicemembers that I
19 have served with. Her compassion, her leadership, and care
20 have touched the lives of airmen, spouses, and families. I
21 know I would not be here today without our shared faith and
22 Cindy's selfless service and sacrifice. In many ways, she
23 has served the Air Force every bit as much as I have.

24 Service runs deep in both of our families. Cindy's
25 dad was a Marine. Her stepdad was a career National



1 Guardsman from the state of Florida. My grandfathers both
2 fought in World War II. One as a Marine and the other as a
3 submariner. And my father was a career Navy pilot, and two
4 of my uncles, who graduated from West Point, were career
5 Army officers. So when it came time for me to choose my
6 service, I chose the Air Force to round out our joint
7 family. And, in case any of you were wondering, we are
8 still working on our draft pick for the Space Force. I am
9 really thankful for my family's legacy of service, and more
10 importantly, for their love and support of me throughout my
11 entire career.

12 I will close with this. Cindy and I had planned to
13 retire to our home state of Florida and begin the next
14 chapter of our lives this year, but then I received a call
15 to continue my service. After much reflection and prayer,
16 I said yes, because I love this country and I love the Air
17 Force. My greatest motivation remains the young airmen and
18 especially those enlisted, who are doing the hard work
19 every day, like manning missile silos, and guarding
20 flightlines, and turning wrenches, flying on the leading
21 edge, and carrying out the many duties that make our Air
22 Force strong.

23 I am humbled by the opportunity, and I just want to
24 thank you for your time today and the consideration of my
25 nomination. I look forward to your questions. Thank you.



[The prepared statement of General Wilsbach follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, General. So I
2 will begin with my 5 minute period of questioning.

3 First of all, I have asked this to almost every
4 nominee this year. Much of the funding in the Defense
5 Reconciliation Bill is unspecific, because of our rules,
6 and will technically be at the discretion of the Department
7 of Defense, though we have provided recommendations for
8 them.

9 General Wilsbach, a quick yes-or-no answer. Will you
10 carry out congressional intent for reconciliation funding
11 in the One Big Beautiful Bill?

12 General Wilsbach: Senator, I will carry out the
13 funding in accordance with the law, and I will strive to do
14 my best with the intent of Congress, as well.

15 Chairman Wicker: So that is not an explicit answer,
16 is it?

17 General Wilsbach: No, but I definitely will follow
18 the law, Senator.

19 Chairman Wicker: Now let me ask you about one of the
20 things that I mentioned in my opening statement. Over the
21 past several years, the Air Force has faced persistent
22 decline in overall aircraft mission-capable readiness.
23 This includes the F-22, F-35, KC-135, and even the KC-46,
24 falling well below readiness targets. You are going to
25 have a job ahead of you changing this, but it absolutely



1 has got to be changed. We have got to reverse this rate of
2 declining mission capabilities. How are you going to do
3 that, sir?

4 General Wilsbach: The first thing, Senator, and we
5 have got a head start on this with the budgets that we are
6 employing right now and the ones that we expect here in the
7 near future, but we need to fund the weapons systems
8 sustainment accounts at a much higher level than they are
9 funded at this point.

10 What is happening, as the aircraft are flying, we have
11 the people available to fix them, but they determine we
12 need a part, and they turn around to the shelf to pull the
13 part off the shelf and it is not there. And it is because
14 we have not funded those accounts to the degree where --

15 Chairman Wicker: That is completely a funding.

16 General Wilsbach: It is not completely a funding, but
17 that is a large part of it.

18 The other aspect that I concentrated on when I was in
19 my last job at Air Combat Command is having commanders and
20 their senior enlisted leaders focus on their aircraft on a
21 daily basis, to look at what are the issues, and then the
22 enterprise comes to help them. So oftentimes a wing at a
23 particular base will need a part, and that part is
24 somewhere else. And they can reach out every single day to
25 the enterprise and get that part moving. But it is an



1 emphasis on daily attention to the maintenance of the
2 fleet.

3 Chairman Wicker: This has been a problem for a while,
4 and it has not been fixed. So you will be charged with
5 making a quantum change.

6 Now let me ask you this, for the record. I think I
7 know your answer. I certainly hope I do. The Air Force
8 fiscal year 2026 budget request proposes eliminating
9 program funding of roughly \$75 million for Junior ROTC. I
10 think this is completely wrong-headed and foolish, and I
11 need your assurance that we are not going to zero out
12 Junior ROTC.

13 General Wilsbach: Senator, thank you for your concern
14 about this. I share that, and I think that Junior ROTC is
15 a fantastic program where we can expose young people to
16 what it might be like to serve, in this case in the Air
17 Force, or Junior ROTCs for the other services, as well. It
18 also perhaps allows us to have a greater pool for
19 recruiting, because it exposes those young people to the
20 core values of our service earlier on, and perhaps may
21 stave off things that could potentially disqualify them at
22 a future point, like drug use or crime, keep their physical
23 fitness in check as well as their grades.

24 So I am supportive of Junior ROTC, and I look forward
25 to working with you further on this, because I would like



1 to see it funded.

2 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much for that answer.
3 And you mentioned that you intend to enforce the law. This
4 Committee and this Congress, through legislation signed by
5 the President of the United States, have for years ordered
6 that Junior ROTC be expanded, with the specific numbers.
7 And this is not a judgment advisory. It is the law, and we
8 intend for it to be followed and abided by. And so I
9 appreciate that assurance, and would join you in saying
10 that not only is it a great recruiting tool for all of our
11 branches of the service, but it is a citizenship builder,
12 and it represents a subset, in almost every school, of
13 higher achievers and more advanced graduates. So thank you
14 for your answer there.

15 Senator Reed.

16 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and
17 thank you, General. As I mentioned in my opening
18 statement, contested logistics will be a critical factor in
19 any future conflict. And as I mentioned, also the Agile
20 Combat Employment, ACE, system is being developed. Can you
21 talk about the capabilities and concepts that are shaping
22 that new system and how you will provide logistics support
23 and support yourself in that context?

24 General Wilsbach: Well, since we only have 4 minutes
25 and 30 seconds left I will go very quickly here, Senator,



1 because I could talk all day long about this. But the
2 first thing that is really important about contested
3 logistics is prepositioning. So ahead of time, while there
4 is no threat or very limited threat we purchase equipment
5 and supplies, and we put them in places where we intend to
6 operate from. One of the most important things we can do
7 to minimize especially the pressure on the system at the
8 beginning of a conflict, because the stuff that you need is
9 going to be at the place where you are operating from at
10 the beginning and you do not have to immediately start
11 resupplying. So prepositioning, really important.

12 The other thing is camouflage and concealment. So the
13 things that you put there, you do not want it to be a
14 sitting duck target. You want to try to hide it away.

15 And then the last thing is multiple modes of travel,
16 surface and air for those in the Pacific. In other places
17 around the planet you can use roads and rails, as well, and
18 taking advantage of all modes of travel to get it there.
19 And in some cases you will have to use, you only will be
20 able to use military because of the threat level, but if
21 there is an opportunity to contract that in, that is
22 another option, as well.

23 Senator Reed: And that is, as we discussed yesterday,
24 that is the reason why the military should have the
25 intellectual property for every system it employs, going



1 forward, so that soldiers, airmen, sailors, space guardians
2 can fix the equipment in the fields?

3 General Wilsbach: I agree with that.

4 Senator Reed: Thank you. You mentioned in your
5 opening statement, General, that your priorities are
6 readiness and modernization, and readiness is tied to
7 sustainment costs, which are very difficult to control.
8 The F-35 is the classic example. I think it is about
9 \$39,000 an hour to sustain. And that is one of the reasons
10 why, as the Chairman indicated, we are not retaining
11 pilots, because if you sit around at a simulator all day,
12 it is not as much fun as flying.

13 What are we going to do to improve readiness,
14 particular respect to sustainment?

15 General Wilsbach: Well, we definitely have to invest
16 in those accounts, so that the parts are on the shelves
17 when the aircraft flies. Incidentally, just speaking of
18 the F-35, when the aircraft begins its flight and takes
19 off, and they are fixed, they fly for extended number of
20 sorties before they break the next time. The problem with
21 the F-35 is now they have to wait for the part to be
22 shipped. So investing in those parts so that they are on
23 the shelves, so the airmen that work on the flightline can
24 turn around to the shelf, grab the part, put it in the
25 airplane, and now it is going to perhaps be several more



1 days before that jet needs to be maintained again. And all
2 that time where it is sitting, waiting for that part, is
3 downtime where we cannot use the aircraft to train. So
4 that investment is really important to backfill the shelves
5 with parts.

6 Senator Reed: Changing topics, the Air Force plans to
7 reduce force structure in a number of ISR platforms --
8 AWACS, JSTARS, U-2, Global Hawk. What that cause a
9 significant and consequential decrement in the ability of
10 other services to operate without these ISR platforms?

11 General Wilsbach: Right now we are in a transition,
12 and we have, in the past, used the airborne platforms quite
13 a bit. You mentioned many of them. And those have served
14 us well. And we are in a transition to moving much of our
15 intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance into the
16 space platform. And there are a lot of advantages of that.
17 One is the staying power and the ability to have access to
18 it 24/7. You do not have to turn sorties. Satellite is
19 there, and it is collecting almost nonstop.

20 That being said, you know, in that transition we do
21 get a lot of service out of some of our current platforms,
22 and there is an argument where, say, for example, an MQ-9
23 is not survivable in a highly contested environment. True
24 statement, but there are a lot of environments where it is
25 not contested, and that platform provides quite a bit of



1 benefit to us.

2 So I think we need to strike up a balance as we
3 transition.

4 Senator Reed: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr.
5 Chairman.

6 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Fischer.

7 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good
8 morning, General, and welcome.

9 General Wilsbach: Thank you.

10 Senator Fischer: General, we must ensure that the B-
11 21 fleet is sized appropriately to ensure that the United
12 States sustains the dominance in our air-based leg of our
13 triad. If confirmed, what factors will you consider in
14 determining how many B-21s the Air Force should procure?

15 General Wilsbach: Thank you, Senator. Good to see
16 you. Thanks for the time in your office earlier this week.
17 The B-21 is going to be an amazing platform, and it is
18 coming off the production line as we speak. As you know,
19 we have received two test articles, and it is going very
20 well from the standpoint of timeline. And I expect great
21 things with it.

22 As we look at the global threat and the ability for
23 our platforms that we have in the Air Force, not just the
24 B-21 but all of our platforms, to service the needs of the
25 combatant commanders, not just one but all of them, that



1 allows you to do the very complicated math problem of how
2 many we need. As you know, the current program of record
3 for the B-21 is 100 aircraft, and I look forward to working
4 with you and determining if that is the correct number as
5 we go forward.

6 Senator Fischer: You know, we spoke about this when
7 we met earlier, and the STRATCOM Commander, he has said
8 that we should have at least 145 B-21 bombers. At the time
9 that we were visiting, you suggested that perhaps B-52s
10 could also fill in there. I tend to disagree with you on
11 that. I think it is important to be able to trust the
12 judgment of our STRATCOM Commander on what is needed with
13 regard to the bombers, especially when we have to look at
14 the congested area that they are going to be flying in, the
15 dangerous environments that they are going to fly in.

16 So I hope that you will work, the Secretary will work,
17 with our STRATCOM Commander and work with this Committee,
18 as well, to make sure we take everything into consideration
19 that needs to be considered on that front.

20 General Wilsbach: I absolutely will, Senator.

21 Senator Fischer: Thank you. I know we will have
22 discussions.

23 General Wilsbach: Yes.

24 Senator Fischer: Also, I appreciated your response to
25 the Committee's Advanced Policy Questions that you, quote,



1 "unequivocally agree that maintaining a credible and
2 effective nuclear deterrent is, in your assessment, the
3 Department's highest priority mission, and modernizing our
4 nation's nuclear forces is a critical national security
5 imperative," end quote.

6 I understand the Department is continuing to find ways
7 to accelerate and improve the Sentinel program as it moves
8 towards a Milestone B decision, and keeping this program on
9 track should be the Air Force's top priority. We also must
10 ensure the Minuteman III is sustained and remains credible
11 as we complete that transition to the Sentinel, and we also
12 discussed that.

13 If confirmed, will you commit to using all available
14 tools to support the Sentinel program and sustain the
15 Minuteman system as long as necessary?

16 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator, I will.

17 Senator Fischer: Thank you. What do you think of
18 proposals to restructure how the Department manages the
19 high-profile programs like Sentinel by utilizing the direct
20 reporting program managers? Would having that senior
21 leader solely focusing on improving and managing these
22 programs be beneficial, in your opinion?

23 General Wilsbach: They would, Senator. I am
24 supportive.

25 Senator Fischer: Thank you. Last question, on



1 munitions. I have kind of focused on munitions, and
2 obviously we talked a little bit about that, as well. How
3 do you view working with companies so that we can really
4 increase that munitions production capacity? As we have
5 learned over the last several years, modern conflicts, they
6 expend munitions at a much faster pace than we have
7 traditionally planned for. So how would you approach that?
8 We talk about it all the time. We have for over 3 years.
9 And I tend to worry about that. Put my mind at ease.

10 General Wilsbach: There are two parts that I think we
11 should concentrate on. One is to hold the contractors and
12 companies that are manufacturing the munitions to the
13 contract that they signed, and to pressure them to make
14 sure they are meeting the contract. On the government
15 side, the most important thing we can do is provide
16 predictable and stable demand signal. When we adjust and
17 vacillate it scares the companies, and then they under-
18 invest. And then what happens is they slow down.

19 So it is both sides. They need to meet the contract.
20 We need to be stable and predictable.

21 Senator Fischer: Thank you, sir, and I appreciate
22 your service and that of your family. Thank you.

23 General Wilsbach: Thank you, Senator.

24 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator
25 Hirono.



1 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome,
2 General, to you and your wife. Thank you for your service,
3 and, of course, as former Commander of Pacific Air Force.

4 I ask the following two initial questions of nominees
5 on all of my committees to ensure their fitness to serve,
6 so I will ask you these questions.

7 Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made
8 unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal
9 or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

10 General Wilsbach: No, Senator.

11 Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or
12 entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

13 General Wilsbach: No, Senator.

14 Senator Hirono: General, successive administrations
15 have identified China as the pacing threat to U.S. national
16 security, and the Indo-Pacific as the priority theater. It
17 is concerning that there are some rumors, recent reporting,
18 that the draft National Defense Strategy de-prioritizes the
19 challenges posed by China. General, as the former
20 Commander of Pacific Air Force, you are acutely aware of
21 the threat posed by China to our interests in the Indo-
22 Pacific AOR. General, would you agree that China continues
23 to be a significant, or the most significant, threat to
24 U.S. national security?

25 General Wilsbach: Well, first of all, aloha.



1 Senator Hirono: Aloha.

2 General Wilsbach: Aloha. And yes, I would agree.

3 Senator Hirono: Recent news reports -- that is
4 reassuring. I do not think we can afford to take our eyes
5 of the threats posed by China. Recent news reports have
6 indicated senior military leaders, including Chairman
7 Caine, have expressed serious concerns over the draft NDS
8 shift to the homeland and Western Hemisphere. So if
9 confirmed, will you commit to providing your best military
10 advice to the Secretary of Defense regarding this matter,
11 even if it is not what he wants to hear?

12 General Wilsbach: I will, Senator.

13 Senator Hirono: General, our strong network of allies
14 and partners in the Indo-Pacific is one of our greatest
15 advantages, and we have a lot of military exercises with
16 these partners. It is one of our greatest advantages over
17 China, and must remain a priority in the National Defense
18 Strategy. Recent exercises like Resolute Force Pacific
19 play a critical role in testing the Air Force's ability to
20 strengthen our capability, interoperability, and readiness
21 with our regional partners. And, in fact, this exercise
22 that I referred to involved over 25 partner nations.

23 Can you share some of the key lessons learned from
24 REFORPAC, the exercise I referred to? And if confirmed,
25 will you commit to prioritize funding for future Air Force



1 exercises and training in the Indo-Pacific, which are vital
2 to enhancing our relationships with our allies and partners
3 in the region?

4 General Wilsbach: The second part of your question
5 first. Yes, I will commit, not only to the Pacific but to
6 allies and partners all over the world.

7 As far as the lessons learned goes, one that you
8 mentioned straight away was the value of bringing the
9 allies and partners together. And what you realize from
10 that is interoperability, and in some cases
11 interchangeability. And when you get that, any adversary
12 that watches that, they do not have to just worry about the
13 United States. They have to worry about the United States
14 plus all of those partners that we have together. It is an
15 extremely valuable deterrence. That is probably the
16 biggest thing.

17 Senator Hirono: Thank you. With the ongoing
18 retirement of the aging E-3 fleet, Pacific Air Force has
19 identified an urgent need to field a replacement for early
20 warning and control aircraft as soon as possible.
21 Unfortunately, the Air Force initially cancelled funding in
22 the fiscal year 2026 budget for the E-7 Wedgetail, which is
23 set to replace the E-3, only reversing course after both
24 the House and Senate move to restore funding.

25 General, given the importance of the E-7 to operations



1 in the Indo-Pacific and the acknowledged delays in space-
2 based alternatives, will you support this program in future
3 budgets?

4 General Wilsbach: Senator, the requirement is for
5 domain awareness, and I support programs that provide us
6 that domain awareness. So as we go forward, I look forward
7 to working with you and the other members of the Committee
8 to figure out what is the platform that provides domain
9 awareness. Because I know that the combatant commanders of
10 all of the geographic combatant commanders are going to
11 need domain awareness.

12 Senator Hirono: This replacement aircraft has been a
13 long time coming, and I think we need to stay the course.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Senator Fischer: [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator
16 Hirono. Senator Cotton, you are recognized.

17 Senator Cotton: General Wilsbach, congratulations on
18 your nomination, and thank you for your lifetime of service
19 to our nation. I want to return to the theme of the
20 readiness crisis, because it deeply concerns me. We have
21 pilots today taking on risks flying combat missions in jets
22 that have not been updated since the 1990s. If fighter
23 procurement stays where it is now, where are we taking the
24 biggest risks over the next decade?

25 General Wilsbach: We have talked about the readiness



1 of the aircraft, just the availability of the aircraft. So
2 half of the aircraft that we have, say, it is not the exact
3 figure, but let's say half of the aircraft that we have are
4 available on any given day. That means that you cannot fly
5 your full fleet. So what that means is the pilots and the
6 crews are not training. So the first thing we do is
7 sustain the weapon system sustainment account so we get
8 that aircraft availability up. Now the pilots can train on
9 a more regular basis.

10 You do not look at any professional sports person,
11 athlete, that practices two times a week. They practice
12 almost every day. Well, our pilots are flying about two to
13 two and a half times a week in a fighter aircraft. That is
14 not enough. That is why, in my last assignment, I made it
15 a requirement for Air Combat Command fighter pilots to fly
16 a minimum of three times a week. When I was a lieutenant I
17 flew almost four and a half times a week. That would allow
18 the proficiency that we can develop so that we are ready.

19 Senator Cotton: So fair to say that today's young
20 lieutenants and captains in our fighters are not getting
21 the same level of training and preparation that Lieutenant
22 Wilsbach got back in the day?

23 General Wilsbach: I believe that is true. Now, they
24 have an advantage that I did not have, which is the
25 simulators that we have today are highly capable, and there



1 is a lot of value in the simulators. We did not have that
2 when I was a youngster, but we made up for it by flying
3 more. That is why I dictated three sorties a week versus
4 more than that.

5 Senator Cotton: Can our current fifth-generation
6 fighters execute our major combat operational plans without
7 the fourth-generation fleet?

8 General Wilsbach: Doubtful. The fourth generation
9 brings a lot of capability. For example, the F-15 is an
10 incredible workhorse. It is going to be able to fire some
11 of the more long-range weapons that do not actually fit in
12 the weapons bays of the fifth-generation aircraft. And you
13 can also use the fourth gen for missions that do not
14 require penetrating into highly contested environment like
15 your defensive counter air that tends to be defending your
16 bases, et cetera.

17 And then the fourth gen would obviously be doing
18 homeland defense, as well, which, in the current
19 environment you cannot just write off the fact that you
20 will not be targeted, because of the nature of the threat
21 are global now.

22 Senator Cotton: I agree that it is doubtful, at best,
23 probably. Given all that, are we currently flying our
24 legacy fleet at a significant risk level, and do you expect
25 that risk to increase over the next decade?



1 General Wilsbach: I think the risk level is
2 appropriate, and the commanders have authority to adjust
3 that on a daily basis, and the crews know what that means
4 in terms of execution.

5 Senator Cotton: I am still concerned about the risks
6 we are accepting as we wait for new capabilities to come
7 online. If confirmed, would you be willing to leverage
8 additional fighter production to replace our oldest jets
9 and strengthen our strike fighter fleet --

10 General Wilsbach: Absolutely.

11 Senator Cotton: -- if Congress can find the funds?
12 Send them your way?

13 General Wilsbach: Absolutely. Thank you.

14 Senator Cotton: Good. Finally, General Wilsbach, you
15 probably know that Fort Smith is the home now of the F-35
16 international training mission. We have stood up this
17 mission in record time, thanks to all-hands-on-deck
18 cooperation from the Air Force, the Air National Guard, and
19 state and local partners. Arkansas is already producing
20 combat-ready F-35 pilots for our allies. If confirmed, can
21 I get your commitment to ensuring that Ebbing Air National
22 Guard Base continues to receive the resources it needs to
23 effectively train our allied pilots?

24 General Wilsbach: I commit, Senator.

25 Senator Cotton: Thank you very much.



1 General Wilsbach: Thank you.

2 Chairman Wicker: [Presiding.] Thank you very much.

3 Senator Kaine.

4 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and
5 congratulations, General Wilsbach. I appreciated the
6 opportunity we had to visit the other day.

7 Ukraine's Operation Spiderweb demonstrated how
8 vulnerable Russian aircraft left out in the open would be
9 to UAS attacks. The Army has been designated the executive
10 agent for managing the counter-UAS operation within the
11 Department, but the Air Force, obviously, has a very vested
12 interest in timely and effective solutions to this
13 challenge. And I imagine you are particularly familiar
14 with the challenge because of your assignment at Joint Base
15 Langley-Eustis. So tell the Committee how you are thinking
16 about the counter-UAS threat at home and abroad, and what
17 coordination do you expect you will have with the other
18 stakeholders, including the Army, to deal with the threat?

19 General Wilsbach: Yes, thank you, Senator. Great to
20 see you again, and thanks for your time in the office the
21 other day.

22 First thing, there is offensive counter-UAS -- sorry.
23 There is offensive UAS, which you addressed, and then there
24 is counter-UAS on the defense side, and they are both
25 things that we have to take on and improve our capability.



1 Let's talk defense first, and you mentioned Langley,
2 which happened in December of '23. The current defensive
3 systems that we have are not adequate for the current
4 threat, so we actually need to acquire systems that work.
5 It is very complex in the U.S., because it is very easy to
6 shoot these down with kinetic weapons. But you obviously
7 would not want to do that in a city like Hampton, Virginia,
8 because the bullets drop on somebody's home. So you have
9 to do this non-kinetically. So the equipment that we
10 purchase for the States has to work. So that is the
11 defensive side.

12 On the offensive side, it is very difficult, and we
13 are seeing the success that Ukraine is having with these,
14 And it is very difficult to defend against these, and they
15 are seeing success in their battle with the Russians by
16 using these systems. And they are very inexpensive. They
17 are on the right side of the cost curve, and we should
18 invest in that capability.

19 The Secretary of War has recently stood up Joint
20 Interagency Task Force 401, that is helping all of the
21 services to understand what is the best equipment to buy.
22 Almost every company that I talk to has a deal they want to
23 sell you, you know, a widget that will do this, and it is
24 very difficult to cut through the wheat and the chaff, to
25 find the wheat in the chaff. So that is what they are



1 going to help us with, as well as the authorities. That
2 was another lesson learned that came up during the December
3 '23 at Langley is the complex rules of engagement and
4 authorities that were available to us at the time --

5 Senator Kaine: Yeah, local law enforcement, FAA.

6 General Wilsbach: Right.

7 Senator Kaine: I mean, the whole level of --

8 General Wilsbach: Homeland defense.

9 Senator Kaine: Yeah.

10 General Wilsbach: The FBI, everybody. So yes, so we
11 have got to cut through that and make the rules of
12 engagement and the understanding of the authorities much
13 clearer.

14 Senator Kaine: Do you have a sense how far down the
15 road we are in that? Because we have been saying that,
16 yeah, we need to do that. We recognized after Langley
17 December '23 that we had this authorities problem,
18 especially in domestic airspace, and we need to coordinate.
19 Do you have a sense of how the stakeholder process is
20 going, or how far down the road we are in figuring this
21 out?

22 General Wilsbach: Well, even since before JADA 401
23 stood up, we had moved, and there were additional
24 authorities, and we had a lot more clarity even before that
25 stood up. We still have some more work to do, and I feel



1 very confident in the interagency process, all the
2 stakeholders are in the meeting, and they are making good
3 progress. And I am confident we are going to get to a good
4 spot in the near future.

5 Senator Kaine: So my takeaways are we are making
6 progress, we still have more to do, but also we do not have
7 the platforms that we need to successfully defend against
8 this threat now. So that is something that the Committee
9 has to pay attention to as we are thinking about, you know,
10 probably next year's NDAA and beyond.

11 You mentioned the word "widget," and I am going to
12 finish there. You are familiar with the proverb that
13 begins "For want of a nail"?

14 General Wilsbach: Yes.

15 Senator Kaine: So for want of a nail, the kingdom was
16 lost, is the way it goes. It is attributed to the poet
17 George Herbert or Benjamin Franklin or Shakespeare. But I
18 think we all get what the proverb means.

19 You have talked about this maintenance issue, and one
20 of the issues that you described, in particular, is parts.
21 If you do not have the right parts, then you cannot fix the
22 planes. If you cannot fix the planes, folks cannot fly the
23 number of missions my colleagues are talking to you about.
24 What do we need to do to fix this parts problem? Is it all
25 a matter of private industry, or are there things that the



1 Air Force can do with additive manufacturing and other
2 innovations to be its own parts producer?

3 General Wilsbach: So yes, we do need to fund the
4 parts. It is generally more economical because the
5 industry will make the parts in bulk than to make them one
6 at a time. That is very expensive. Even if you are doing
7 it yourself it becomes very expensive.

8 But in crisis you would like to be able to have that
9 capability. So for example, if you are deployed to a small
10 island in the Pacific and you are in a conflict, you do not
11 have a week to wait. So having that capability is
12 something to look into.

13 Senator Kaine: Thank you. I yield back.

14 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator
15 Rounds.

16 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me
17 begin by thanking you and your family for your service
18 already rendered to this country, and I appreciate your
19 consideration coming back out and taking on a real
20 challenging position at this time.

21 I shared with you, while we were visiting in my office
22 that there is one area in particular that I ask almost
23 every single four-star that comes before us. That has to
24 do with regard to the concern over spectrum and the need to
25 protect spectrum that is critical for the defense of our



1 country, including those different bands for communication
2 and radar. So I will begin by just simply saying that I
3 think forcing the Department of Defense to vacate or share,
4 in a suboptimal manner, the 3.1 to 3.45 GHz and the 7.4 to
5 8.4 GHz bands of the spectrum would have a severely
6 negative consequence for our warfighting capabilities,
7 including homeland defense missions and force protection of
8 our deployed forces.

9 General, how important is spectrum to the American
10 military?

11 General Wilsbach: It is almost everything, Senator,
12 because we use certain spectrums based on the physics that
13 are characteristic of that spectrum, and we invent
14 capability using that physics for our advantage. And if we
15 have to move out of that spectrum, we then have to invent
16 nearly a new technology to be able to accomplish the
17 mission that we have already spent countless dollars to be
18 able to use that part of the spectrum for the purpose of
19 military objectives.

20 So moving out, one, you may not be able to invent the
21 new technology if you are in a different spectrum. And
22 two, if you do it is going to take you a while and it is
23 going to be very expensive.

24 Senator Rounds: The U.S. Navy, in terms of their
25 discussion in front of this Committee, indicated that the



1 cost for them just for their destroyers, the radar that was
2 on their destroyers, would have been about a quarter of a
3 trillion dollars, \$250 billion, and approximately 20 years
4 to move to other parts of the spectrum. And we were
5 specifically talking about the 3.1 to 3.45 GHz band. Does
6 that impact the Air Force's capabilities?

7 General Wilsbach: It does. In today's world, the
8 Joint Forces interconnect, and we count on one another for
9 situational awareness, weapons employment, and many, many
10 other things. And if the Navy is not capable of providing
11 situational awareness then there might not be any, in this
12 case. So we all rely on one another, and we do the same
13 thing for them. We provide them situational awareness, at
14 times, because we link together.

15 Senator Rounds: Would it be fair to say that China
16 would love to see us eliminate the use or the delivery of
17 the spectrum in the 3.1 to 3.45 and the 7.4 to 8.4 GHz
18 band, they would love to see us send that over and restrict
19 it to commercial use?

20 General Wilsbach: Not only would it be fair to say,
21 we know that they are lobbying us to move out of that
22 spectrum. And yet, at the same time, they are building
23 their systems to use that same part of the spectrum. It
24 makes you wonder why.

25 Senator Rounds: Because it has got the best physics,



1 doesn't it, for that particular purpose?

2 General Wilsbach: I believe that is true.

3 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir. Thank you. And I
4 will also share with you, in the past, uniformed officers
5 have had to stand up to individuals with suits and ties,
6 and they have had to make very clear that this is a
7 significant threat to being able to defend our country.
8 Are you prepared to stand up to those individuals that do
9 not wear a uniform but wear a suit and tie, and to tell
10 them specifically how critical this issue of spectrum
11 management is?

12 General Wilsbach: I am, Senator.

13 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Senator Fischer did a
14 very nice job of explaining how critical we believe the
15 development and the deployment of the B-21 bomber is. I
16 fully support her belief that more than 100 are necessary.
17 And I understand that while you are not in that position
18 and that you are going to have to work with a lot of
19 people, it would be fair to say that as the analysis
20 continue to come in, more than 100 may very well be
21 required. In that case, are you prepared to advocate for
22 that higher number?

23 General Wilsbach: If confirmed, I will.

24 Senator Rounds: Thank you, sir. Let me ask you, you
25 raised a really interesting thing when you talked about



1 parts and the F-35. And I think one question I have got
2 for you, it is one thing that we may have a broken piece
3 and it may take a couple of days to get it back in, and
4 that is expensive. At what point do we decide that if the
5 piece breaks time and time again, how easy is it, or what
6 do we do about actually getting the piece to be modified so
7 that it is not breaking once a week?

8 General Wilsbach: That is normal business for us,
9 Senator. So we analyze things like that. So you have a
10 particular part. Say it is an electrical generator on an
11 aircraft, and we realize that it is continuously breaking
12 at a higher than predicted rate. We go back to the
13 manufacturer of that part and we say, "You need to redesign
14 it and get it back out to us so that it is on the aircraft
15 for a longer period of time." That is normal business for
16 us, and we do it constantly.

17 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator King.

19 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I never
20 thought I would be at a hearing where the exciting and sexy
21 topic of maintenance would be dominating the discussion.
22 But it is critically important for all the reasons you have
23 mentioned, General.

24 A couple of points that have been touched upon. We
25 are in the world of 3D printing, and you can 3D print with



1 metal. So two points, and I think the Ranking Member
2 mentioned this. We should be buying the IP with every
3 platform we buy. We should have the intellectual property
4 so we have the right to print parts. I believe every
5 hangar should have a 3D printer. They are not that
6 expensive, and it is sort of the right-to-repair idea.
7 That is one point.

8 Second, I would hope, given what I believe you
9 characterize as a serious problem, if not a crisis, that
10 you would convene a high-level team to take a blank sheet
11 of paper and say, what is the problem? What are the
12 bottlenecks? Is it parts? Is it workforce? What is
13 slowing us down? If Delta Airlines had an availability of
14 50 or 60 percent of their airplanes, they would be out of
15 business. And these airplanes are expensive.

16 So I commend to you those two suggestions. I hope
17 that is something you might be considering.

18 General Wilsbach: Absolutely. In fact, I actually
19 did this in my last job, did exactly what you said, is get
20 the team together, pad and a pencil, and what are the
21 issues that are causing us the problems and what are the
22 things that we can do to fix it? And if confirmed, I would
23 like to expand that to the rest of the Air Force.

24 On the 3D printing, we do quite a bit of 3D printing
25 already, and the innovation of our airmen to figure out how



1 to do that is incredible. I take your suggestion that we
2 could look at expanding that. It would be valuable to us.

3 Senator King: By the way, the Air Force is not unique
4 in this problem. The Navy is in exactly the same position
5 with their availability of their ships and the length of
6 time they are out of service in maintenance.

7 Question about drones, and to me it underlines the
8 cumbersomeness of our military procurement system. AI
9 tells me that Ukraine is now producing 200,000 drones a
10 month, at an average price of \$500. We do not have
11 remotely that capacity here. And I believe we are missing,
12 I think, the major lesson of Ukraine, which is the
13 importance of drone warfare.

14 I would hope that this might be, again, a place of
15 renewed -- not renewed -- of new emphasis, not only
16 defensive, which you have mentioned, but also offensive. I
17 find it astounding what the Ukrainians have been able to
18 do. Think of that -- 200,000 drones produced a month,
19 average cost \$500. We have got to have a major initiative
20 in this area, in my view. Do you agree?

21 General Wilsbach: I do, Senator, and we have come to
22 the same lessons learned that you have, that this is a
23 tactic that would be useful for us. And it creates massive
24 dilemmas for your adversary because they have to honor
25 those 200,000 a month. They do not know what they are up



1 to. They might have a weapon on them. They might just be
2 a decoy. But they have to honor them. And you end up
3 overwhelming their defenses, and then you eventually get
4 one to the target, and you achieve objective. So we are
5 learning that lesson. And by the way, 3D printing, you can
6 3D print one-way attack drones at scale, so we should
7 invest in that, I believe.

8 Senator King: Thank you. Final point. An
9 interesting change in the law was made with Goldwater-
10 Nichols in 1986. Prior to that, the principal military
11 advisor to the President was the Chairman of the Joint
12 Chiefs of Staff, and the other chiefs were subsidiary, if
13 you will. In 1986, the law was changed in an interesting
14 way, providing that you, that the individual chiefs, had
15 the oppy and, in fact, responsibility to provide their best
16 advice to the President, the National Security Council.

17 It is very interesting that the committee report uses
18 this language: "This subsection would create a very
19 important mechanism that is designed to encourage
20 diversity" -- we could not use that word today, I don't
21 think, but anyway -- "to encourage diversity in the
22 military advice provided to senior civilian decision-
23 makers. Although the views of the Chairman as the
24 principal military advisor should be clear and undiluted,
25 the other members of the JCS would be free to submit



1 dissenting or supplemental views."

2 I hope you will take that responsibility seriously and
3 provide your independent military advice, when requested by
4 civilian leaders.

5 General Wilsbach: I take it very seriously, Senator,
6 and I will absolutely give my best military advice at all
7 times, even when it might not even be asked for.

8 Senator King: That is exactly what I wanted to hear.
9 But I also, and I think you said this earlier, you have had
10 a 40-year career. You have coming out of almost retirement
11 to do this job. You do not really need this job. I
12 sincerely hope that you will provide that advice, even
13 though it may not be what the policymaker wants to hear.

14 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator, I will.

15 Senator King: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Senator Cramer: [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator
17 King. I now recognize Senator Ernst.

18 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Senator Cramer, and good
19 morning, General. It is great to have you here. And thank
20 you so much for taking the time to be in front of our
21 Committee. And I also want to thank your wife for being
22 here, as well. We know that you cannot achieve great
23 things without having wonderful people supporting you all
24 along the way. So thank you so much for being here.

25 You know what I am going to start with. We started



1 with this in my office. It is no surprise to the Committee
2 that I will talk about this either. But I really want to
3 focus on an issue that is really important not just to Iowa
4 and to me but also our nation's readiness and our homeland
5 defense, and that is the modernization of the Sioux City
6 Air National Guard's runway. And for years the Air Force
7 has acknowledged the critical role of the 185th Air
8 Refueling Wing in Sioux City.

9 The unit flies our KC-135 Stratotankers and it enables
10 our joint allied aircraft to project their power globally.
11 They also stand ready to refuel NORAD aircraft and respond
12 rapidly to homeland defense missions. And their ability to
13 launch and respond quickly is a key part of our layered
14 deterrence posture here at home.

15 And yet, in spite of the Air Force's stated
16 commitment, the runway repair and modernization funding has
17 repeatedly flipped off of their radar. But Congress has
18 not forgotten about that commitment, and we do expect that
19 it will be honored.

20 So General, if confirmed, can you commit to ensuring
21 that the Air Force fully funds and completes the Sioux City
22 runway project on schedule and without further delay?

23 General Wilsbach: I will do my best, Senator. I know
24 that you know this. I was very encouraged to learn that in
25 August of 2025, so just a few weeks ago, we got the 100



1 percent design, which is something that we wish we would
2 have done a while ago. We finally got that done. So that
3 was the next step, so we can move forward now. We have got
4 the budget request in for fiscal year 2026, and then we can
5 go from there. But I will do my best. I promise you.

6 Senator Ernst: For today I will accept your soft
7 answer, but I will keep pressing on this. I do think it is
8 very important that we honor that commitment to this
9 incredible unit.

10 General Wilsbach: I look forward to working with you.

11 Senator Ernst: Thank you so much, sir. How are you
12 prioritizing infrastructure modernization for Guard and
13 Reserve installations like the project that we have in
14 Sioux City?

15 General Wilsbach: My thoughts on the Guard and the
16 Reserve and the active duty is that priority scheme,
17 especially for infrastructure, should be relatively flat.
18 So what I mean by that is do not privilege any one of those
19 components. We rely so much on our reserve component, both
20 the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve, and in
21 many cases the units are actually combined. And what
22 should encourage everyone is in those units, you go in
23 there and you cannot even tell who the guardsman is or the
24 active duty or the reservist, because everybody is so
25 professional, everybody is a warrior, and they are getting



1 the mission done.

2 So I do not believe that you should shortchange a
3 Guard unit or a reservist because they are a Guard unit, or
4 a reservist. We need the facilities to be up to par,
5 because our facilities for the Air Force are power
6 projection platforms.

7 Senator Ernst: Mm-hmm. And thank you for that. And
8 just a little bit more on that, because we are running
9 short on time. I just want to point out, too, that their
10 mission is very critical. It does not matter whether you
11 are active, Air Guard, Air Force Reserves. It just does
12 not matter. So when it comes to modernization we need to
13 make sure each one of those components gets a piece of that
14 pie and that we are paying attention to it.

15 So I am going to jump to my last topic, which I
16 discussed with you, but a clean audit. I could go through
17 a number of examples where we have lacked accountability,
18 not just Air Force but across the spectrum at our
19 Department of War. But if you would, please, detail how we
20 will get to a clean audit within the Department of the Air
21 Force.

22 General Wilsbach: We have been tasked by the
23 Secretary of War to pass the audit. We are going to pass
24 the audit. And the way that you get to that, because it is
25 quite complex, as you know, there are many factors and



1 facets of passing that, but we know what the test questions
2 are. And so we need to start working at it and taking
3 time. It is the adage that we talked about in your office
4 -- How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. That
5 is what we have to do at the audit. But it is not a
6 mystery how to pass the audit. It is clear how to do it.
7 We just have to take our time, go to the sources, complete
8 the work, and we will be fine. I started this when I was
9 in my last job, with Air Combat Command, and if confirmed,
10 I would like to expand that out to the entire Air Force.

11 Senator Ernst: Thank you. Thank you for your
12 service. I look forward to supporting your confirmation.

13 General Wilsbach: Thank you, Senator.

14 Senator Cramer: Senator Kelly is recognized.

15 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General,
16 congratulations on your nomination. Thank you for your
17 continued service to our country.

18 I recently visited Ukraine, also recently spoke with
19 several of their F-16 pilots, in Tucson, in Ukraine, here
20 in my office. And these aviators are doing a fantastic
21 job. It was obviously a little rough going in the
22 beginning, getting them up to speed on the platform. These
23 guys are flying multiple sorties a day, sometimes four or
24 five in a single day, under constant treat, continuously
25 being locked up by surface-to-air missile systems and



1 Russian aircraft. They still manage to intercept thousands
2 of enemy drones, cruise missiles.

3 Despite these successes, there remains clear
4 opportunities for us to help them further. They are
5 struggling with the math on how much this costs. A Shahed
6 drone costs maybe \$50,000. As you know, an AMRAAM, if they
7 shoot an AMRAAM at one, that could be up to \$900,000, a
8 million dollars, maybe more in some cases. A-9s are rather
9 expensive, as well, not as expensive. But this is becoming
10 sort of a math problem, and we have got to get the costs
11 down for them to intercept these cruise missiles and
12 drones.

13 We also have problems with throughput of F-16 pilots.
14 They only get so many slots a year at Tucson International,
15 at the 162nd. I would like to see that increased, if we
16 could find a way to do that. I know we have our own
17 training requirements for our own F-16 pilots, and we have
18 got contracts with other countries for FMS programs that we
19 have.

20 But General, will you commit to working with me to
21 identify some ways to try to expand and accelerate F-16
22 pilot training opportunities for Ukraine?

23 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator, I will.

24 Senator Kelly: And then second, I talked about the
25 air-to-air-munitions. They have been shooting Zuni



1 rockets. My understanding from my staff is, I think we
2 have sent the last Zunis that we have had, pretty cheap
3 option to take out a cruise missile or a drone. Still
4 rather expensive. They have gunned some of them. That has
5 worked.

6 I think we have a lot of AIM-9Ms still, some Mikes
7 still in inventory that we do not use anymore. That could
8 be another option to try to give them more capability
9 without risking having -- we do not want to be shooting
10 AIM-9Xs and AMRAAMs.

11 So could you work with me to try to identify some
12 further munition options to help them in this fight?

13 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator, I would love to.

14 Senator Kelly: The other thing they need, and I do
15 not know if we have given this any consideration here, is
16 more help with the airborne EW system. Something like the
17 ALQ-167 pod. I think we are able to hang those on F-16s.
18 I flew something like that way back in 1991. And I think
19 that could go a long way to making a difference on the
20 battlefield.

21 So that is the third thing. Would you be willing to
22 work with us to try to find some airborne EW system that
23 can help assist the Ukrainians.

24 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator.

25 Senator Kelly: Thank you. Thank you. And then real



1 quick, in my remaining minute, the NDS, in 2018, identified
2 China as the top national defense concern, national
3 security concern for us. Now, less than a decade later, it
4 does seem that we are pivoting to the Western Hemisphere.
5 And as you know, the NDS does not only influence current
6 defense posture, it also informs future spending. And in
7 my view, our biggest concern should still be the Western
8 Pacific, INDOPACOM, the threat from the People's Republic
9 of China. And these are two totally different problem
10 sets.

11 Just as an example, to penetrate the A-280 bubble in
12 the Western Pacific, I think the NGAD is one of the
13 platforms we really need, and I am glad to see that moving
14 forward. If we do this pivot to the Western Pacific, this
15 then becomes a big question.

16 So if confirmed, will you work with my office and this
17 Committee to ensure that the Air Force is resourced for any
18 potential future fight, especially against our most
19 significant adversaries?

20 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator.

21 Senator Kelly: All right. Thank you.

22 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Senator Kelly. I
23 recognize Senator Scott.

24 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman. First off,
25 congratulations on your nomination. You are going to do a



1 great job.

2 General Wilsbach: Thank you.

3 Senator Scott: So first can we talk about Homestead
4 Air Force Base. Unbelievable location, right, and you see
5 the problems we are having in the Gulf of America now and
6 with adversaries that have come into Central and South
7 America. Can you talk about the importance of Homestead,
8 the location, and talk about how we can make sure we have a
9 flying mission there so we have something to ensure
10 deterrence?

11 General Wilsbach: Yes. So the Makos are stationed
12 there, the Air Force Reserve F-16 squadron. Great
13 squadron. It is a great location, especially for homeland
14 defense. We can set up alert there. Other agencies use
15 that airfield as well, which is helpful. And the Air Force
16 Reserve is in the running as we look at strategic basing
17 and fighter flow into the future. That base is in
18 consideration for a future F-35 base. So we are still
19 going through the competition there, but they are in the
20 running for that.

21 Senator Scott: Okay. If there is anything you think
22 I need to be doing to make sure they are not just in the
23 running but they win, just let me know.

24 General Wilsbach: I will.

25 Senator Scott: Second, can we just talk about China?



1 So China decided to be our adversary. We foolishly have
2 become very dependent on China for a lot of things in our
3 country, whether it is computers, TVs, drugs, all sorts of
4 things. I just had a hearing yesterday, the Special
5 Committee on Aging. Eighty percent of our generic drugs
6 come from China and India. Eighty percent of the
7 ingredients come from China. If they do what they are
8 doing with rare earth minerals, we have got weeks, maybe
9 just a few months of drugs in our country, and we will be
10 in trouble. Our military is very dependent on Chinese
11 drugs, which makes no sense to me. We are still buying
12 computers. We are still buying all sorts of systems from
13 China, TV sets, all sorts of things.

14 So what can you do in this role to make sure that
15 stops?

16 General Wilsbach: Thank you, Senator. I appreciate
17 you asking that question. Some of what you just described
18 is outside the lane of a potential future service chief.
19 But what I will tell you is I do not think the Air Force
20 should be buying equipment from China. It is very easy to
21 attach a covert or clandestine tracking device-slash-
22 intelligence device, and then they have got their built-in
23 intelligence equipment. It is also very easy if they are
24 inside of the supply chain to manufacture faulty equipment,
25 so when we install it, it does not work, et cetera. There



1 are many things that they could be doing, and just to avoid
2 any of those threats I would say buy American is a better
3 choice.

4 Senator Scott: What about drugs? Do you think our
5 military ought to be dependent on China for generic drugs?

6 General Wilsbach: I would like to steer away from
7 that one. That is outside of my area of expertise.

8 Senator Scott: All right. Thank you.

9 General Wilsbach: Sure.

10 Senator Cramer: Senator Slotkin, you are recognized.

11 Senator Slotkin: Thank you. Welcome, General, and
12 welcome to your family. If you are getting down to my end
13 of the dais, you are almost done, so it is almost over.

14 General Wilsbach, thank you for coming and meeting in
15 my office. We talked about there the great excitement that
16 we had in Michigan when the President of the United States
17 announced, on April 29th, that Selfridge Air Force Base in
18 Macomb County was going to be getting a replacement fighter
19 mission, a bunch of F-15s, to replace our retiring A-10s.
20 The President came to Michigan, made this big announcement,
21 to great fanfare. We are very excited about it. This is
22 something that our Federal and state officials have been
23 working on for a long time, about a decade, so it was the
24 culmination of a lot of that.

25 But we are hearing that the bureaucraties at the



1 Pentagon are looking to push out the arrival of those F-
2 15s, delay the arrivals, such that we would have a gap. We
3 would retire our A-10s, all our pilots, all our mechanics,
4 all our logisticians would depart, and then something like
5 years later we would get this fighter mission and lose all
6 of that good training and manpower that we have.

7 The official documents that we saw were that these
8 fighters were going to be arriving in fiscal year 2028.
9 That makes sense to us, because I am assuming President
10 Trump wants to be in office when those fighter jets arrive,
11 and that is the timeline we are looking for.

12 So if confirmed, can you tell me what you will do to
13 ensure that we live up to the President's, the commander in
14 chief's timeline of getting those heel-to-toe fighter jets
15 into Michigan?

16 General Wilsbach: Yes. Thank you, Senator. I
17 appreciate you asking me the questions. First of all, I am
18 super excited for Selfridge, not only to get the F-15
19 squadron but also a KC-46 squadron. The associated
20 infrastructure improvement that come along with those two
21 platforms I think are going to make Selfridge Air Force
22 Base, Air National Guard Base, the best base in the
23 country. I mean, because you are going to have --

24 Senator Slotkin: Mere lips to God's ears. We are
25 thrilled.



1 General Wilsbach: -- you are going to have the most
2 modern aircraft and facilities that go along. So we are
3 excited. And yes, you do have my commitment to work with
4 you. As you know, as we phase out the A-10 and move into
5 the F-16, we have to train all the crews and all of the
6 maintainers, as well as the pilots. So they cannot step
7 out of an A-10 one day and into an F-15 the next. Usually
8 there is about a year and a half, six months to a year and
9 a half of training for those crews. So we will have to
10 work that timing. But you are right, fiscal year 2028 is
11 when the F-15s should arrive.

12 Senator Slotkin: Great. Well, we look forward to
13 working with you on that and holding to that.

14 On the refuelers, you know, we were very happy that
15 the former Secretary of the Air Force announced 12
16 refuelers also to replace our current refueler mission. We
17 are now hearing whispers again from the bureaucraties at
18 the Pentagon that it may not be 12, that it could be a
19 lesser number. We went and looked around, did our
20 homework, in places like New Hampshire and New Jersey. The
21 package is 12. So do I have your commitment that we will
22 keep the 12, as announced by the Secretary of the Air
23 Force?

24 General Wilsbach: Let me work with you on that. I
25 know it was said before. I also know what the Service is



1 saying now and also what the state is feeding back to us,
2 as well. So I would like to work with you more on that.

3 Senator Slotkin: Okay. We would like to receive the
4 commitment that we were presented with, but look forward to
5 pushing and pulling on that with you in the future.

6 And then just lastly, I mean, on a totally different
7 topic, it is hard to have a hearing like this and not let
8 the news of the country come into the room. We are
9 watching National Guard be deployed into American cities.
10 We are watching, in some cases, active duty being sent into
11 American cities. And over the weekend there was a leaked
12 conversation about potentially sending in the 82nd
13 Airborne, an active-duty Army unit, not Air Force. But
14 that unit has Apache helicopters. It has Blackhawk
15 helicopters, Chinooks. Again, not Air Force assets but air
16 assets. And I think the idea that air assets would ever be
17 used in American cities really sends a shiver down the
18 spine of most Americans.

19 So tell me what you would do if an active-duty Air
20 Force unit was called in to help participate in quelling
21 protests or participating in immigration raids. What would
22 you do, standing there, holding the line, not knowing that
23 the American people are scared that these assets could be
24 used inside the United States?

25 General Wilsbach: So I have been a commander nine



1 times. I have gotten orders many, many times, to include
2 using force. And every time I get one of those orders,
3 what I do is I check the law, and I do not take the word of
4 anybody else. I get in the room with my lawyer, chapter
5 and verse, what is the law. If the order is legal, I am
6 permitted to execute that order. And in the case of a
7 senior commander, you have to make sure that everyone in
8 your unit understands what the rules are with respect to
9 using force, whether that is against an enemy or, in the
10 case of a domestic, the appropriate escalation. So they
11 have to know what those rules are.

12 If the order is not legal, you go back to the issuing
13 authority and you discuss that with them, and you say,
14 "Boss, I don't see how you got to legality on this one. We
15 can't do that, or you have to give me a different order."

16 Senator Slotkin: Well, we hold you to that. Thank
17 you very much. I yield back.

18 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Senator. Senator Sullivan
19 is recognized.

20 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General,
21 nice to see you and your wonderful wife. Congratulations.
22 We are really thrilled about your nomination. I look
23 forward to strongly supporting it. And like the Chairman
24 said, like the Ranking Member, Senator Reed, said, you are
25 very qualified, and I am really excited. So congrats to



1 you and your family. I want to thank your family. You
2 guys, as you mentioned in your opening statement, it was
3 great, about how the families work so hard.

4 So it is not surprising to you I am going to talk a
5 little bit about Alaska. Now, the great news, one of the
6 many attributes you have is you know a lot about Alaska,
7 having been the ALCOM Commander very recently. But not to
8 disappoint my colleagues here, I just want you to just
9 remind everybody what Billy Mitchell said about Alaska when
10 he was talking about Alaska.

11 General Wilsbach: Billy Mitchell said that Alaska was
12 the most strategic place on Earth, and whoever controlled
13 Alaska controlled the world.

14 Senator Sullivan: Great. And do you agree with the
15 father of the U.S. Air Force?

16 General Wilsbach: I do believe that it is the most
17 strategic spot on Earth.

18 Senator Sullivan: Great. Well, that is great to
19 hear. So do our adversaries. You and I talked about this
20 yesterday. We have had a lot of Russian and Chinese
21 incursions into our ADIZ, into our EEZ, joint Russian-
22 Chinese incursions. It makes no news down here in the
23 Lower 48, by the way. We have had six, seven if you
24 include Putin's flight to Alaska, incursions into our air
25 space since August.



1 So General, can you just talk briefly, because you
2 know better than anybody, are those easy mission? You
3 know, people are like, "Oh yeah, an incursion. No big
4 deal." Talk a little bit about our great Air Force, they
5 fly 1,000 miles, they have got to get tanked three
6 different times. By the way, I love Michigan, but no
7 offense, all these tankers going to Michigan, I think it
8 strategically makes zero sense, when my state has been
9 begging for tankers.

10 Let me just ask, before you answer the other question,
11 the KC-135s, I have been begging for four -- four -- for
12 almost my entire time in the U.S. Senate. Four. Michigan
13 is getting a gazillion. No offense, but Billy Mitchell did
14 not call Michigan, you know, a strategic place at all.

15 Every Secretary of the Air Force and Chief of Staff of
16 the Air Force, in this hearing, has said to me, "Senator,
17 we will get you those four KC-135s." I have been waiting
18 10 -- I was going to use an adjective, but I will just be
19 calm -- 10 years for that.

20 Can I get your commitment to fulfill the commitments
21 of I think four Chiefs of Staff and Secretaries of the Air
22 Force to get at least four KC-135s? In my view we should
23 have at least a squadron of KC-46s, because every aircraft
24 in the world is going to surge to China for war, and they
25 are going to fly right over Alaska. Can I get your



1 commitment on those KC-135s? You know the issue very well.
2 It is a real frustration of mine, and I cannot figure it
3 out. Five thousand, you know, tankers to Michigan, zero to
4 Alaska -- it makes zero sense.

5 General Wilsbach: I will do my best, Senator. I
6 remember this issue when I was stationed in Alaska. You
7 and I talked about it back then. And I will strive to do
8 my best to get them.

9 Incidentally, I will just share with you the package
10 to make that happen is currently at the Joint Staff, so
11 hopefully we are going to make some headway soon.

12 Senator Sullivan: Good. I would like just an update
13 once you get confirmed on where we are. This is an
14 enormous frustration of mine. But other infrastructure
15 that we are talking about, you know, talk about briefly,
16 because I have a few more questions, on the intercept
17 missions, right. People think, oh, it is a piece of cake.
18 It is not a piece of cake. Our airmen do it so well up in
19 Alaska, once a week almost -- those are real-world missions
20 with Russian Bear bombers, MIG fighters, sometimes Chinese
21 -- how tough are those missions, and how much more
22 infrastructure do we need to carry them out?

23 General Wilsbach: Pretty tough. Like you said,
24 sometimes the intercepts are 1,000 miles apart when they
25 begin. And that is not easy to do, and the environment is



1 a harsh environment, as you know. It could be completely
2 dark in the wintertime north of the Arctic Circle. You
3 know, tough weather to deal with. There is not a lot of
4 infrastructure, if you have an emergency, to land at. And
5 so that is the point you are making, which I totally agree
6 with. You have to have some alternatives.

7 Senator Sullivan: So the NORTHCOM Commander and the
8 INDOPACOM Commander have testified here about needing more
9 infrastructure to address these Russian and Chinese
10 incursions in our airspace and our waterways. They have
11 talked about Galena. They have talked about Barrow. They
12 have talked about -- not talked about, this Committee said
13 Adak is going to be reopened, right. We have \$115 million
14 in the One Big Beautiful Bill.

15 Can I get your commitment to work with us on those
16 infrastructure needs, which your combatant commanders both
17 testified here say we need to protect our northern flank in
18 America?

19 General Wilsbach: Yes, Senator.

20 Senator Sullivan: Finally, you know, the PJs up in
21 the 212th Rescue Squadron are outstanding, and they are
22 very, very busy, not just real-world missions in warzones
23 like Afghanistan. They conduct real-world missions in
24 Alaska all the time. One weekend last year they conducted
25 five rescues, which is kind of unbelievable. Parachuted



1 into a part of Alaska where there was a plane crash. They
2 have always had a carveout with regard to AFSOC with regard
3 to their unit structure. But we are hearing that they are
4 going to lose that carveout.

5 Can I get a commitment from you to continue the
6 existing policy for the 212th Rescue Squadron to ensure
7 that the units in Alaska have the capacity, surge
8 capability, personnel stability required to meet the unique
9 demands in training, real-world missions in Alaska, also
10 overseas, that the CSAR operations of the 212th do in our
11 state? Again, you know this very well.

12 General Wilsbach: I know it very well. I love the
13 guardsmen in Alaska that save lives every single week, and
14 you have my commitment. I will definitely look into it. I
15 was not tracking the carveout, so let me look into that.

16 Senator Sullivan: Okay. We will put that in the
17 record as a QFR. Thank you, General. Congratulations
18 again.

19 General Wilsbach: Thank you, Senator.

20 Senator Cramer: Now I recognize Senator Peters to
21 defend the honor of Michigan in his rebuttal.

22 Senator Sullivan: I love Michigan, but Billy Mitchell
23 never talked about Michigan.

24 Senator Peters: Well, welcome, General.
25 Congratulations --



1 General Wilsbach: Thank you.

2 Senator Peters: -- on your nomination. I did listen
3 with interest to my colleague from Alaska saying we are
4 going to get 5,000 KC-46s. Did I miss an announcement?
5 Are you ready to announce today that we are going to get
6 more than anticipated?

7 General Wilsbach: I am not prepared for that one.

8 Senator Peters: Well, it is great to see you here,
9 General. And as you know, recapitalizing military aircraft
10 is absolutely vital for us to stay ready for the future
11 fight. But as you also know, new platforms require modern
12 training for pilots, maintainers, communication personnel,
13 to be able to operate effectively. And investing in the
14 people who operate, fix, and support these systems is just
15 as critical as actually getting the airframes. And without
16 updated facilities like hangars and flightlines and
17 airstrips, it is very difficult to accomplish that.

18 So my question for you, sir, is as Selfridge Air
19 National Guard prepares for the divestment of our current
20 aircraft and the arrival of our new KC-46, at a number much
21 lower than the Senator from Alaska put out, and F-15EX
22 fighters, could you speak to how the DoD is prioritizing
23 preparing the personnel at Selfridge, specifically, to
24 include pilots, maintainers, and support folks for this
25 transition? What should we expect?



1 General Wilsbach: So first of all, the
2 infrastructure, and there is quite a number of dollars -- I
3 do not have the exact figure; it is a fair amount of
4 dollars -- just to either construct or renovate the current
5 infrastructure to accommodate the F-15s and the KC-46s.
6 And so that, like I mentioned before, it is going to be
7 exciting for Selfridge to have maybe one of the most modern
8 Air National Guard bases in the country. So the
9 infrastructure to accommodate that, to do all the things
10 you just talked about -- maintenance, similar training,
11 making sure that the runways and taxiways and hangars that
12 can support maintenance, all of that -- is in good shape to
13 accommodate what is coming in.

14 Senator Peters: And the personnel training?

15 General Wilsbach: Sure. That is all encompassed. So
16 the simulators as well as maintenance, and they will be
17 trained likely before they get there, but they will
18 continue their training once they get there.

19 Senator Peters: Right. Great. General, I have
20 received several classified briefings about the Air Force's
21 Collaborative Combat Aircraft program, and I certainly
22 understand the critical importance of how CCAs are going to
23 literally transform air dominance. And as you well know,
24 but for folks listening, these are autonomous systems which
25 will work in tandem with manned fighters, including the F-



1 15EX, and I have heard even the KC-46s are a potential
2 platform as we think through how we operate these aircraft
3 in the future. And they are going to basically increase
4 lethality and decrease risk to manned platforms.

5 I am happy to learn that the CCA program remains on
6 time and on budget. I think it serves as a model for
7 successful collaboration between the Air Force and
8 industry. But as this program continues to develop, I
9 remain hopeful that this cutting-edge technology will also
10 be concurrently fielded in the Air National Guard.

11 So my question for you, sir, is given the National
12 Guard's evolution from an important strategic reserve into
13 an operational force, how is the Air Force planning for
14 concurrent fielding of the CCA to include the National
15 Guard, and do you plan on fielding these systems with
16 existing fighter squadrons, including perhaps an F-15EX
17 squadron? Is that something you are thinking about? If
18 you could give me some insight into where the thought
19 process is.

20 General Wilsbach: Sure. So we have a lot of learning
21 to do with these platforms. The first flight just occurred
22 on one of the versions. By the end of the year we expect
23 the second version will have its first flight. So we have
24 a lot to learn on this. We are thinking that they are not
25 going to be embedded in current fighter squadrons but



1 rather they are going to be their own squadrons, and they
2 will be dispersed, and there will be a strategic basing
3 process with these. And to my knowledge, at this point --
4 and I can come back to you with further -- I do not see why
5 the Air Force Reserve, the Air National Guard, and the
6 active duty would not be considered.

7 Senator Peters: Great. Well, I would love to have
8 further conversations with you, if confirmed, and I will
9 look forward to having that. Thank you. Thank you,
10 General.

11 General Wilsbach: Thank you.

12 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 Senator Cramer: Thank you. Senator Tuberville.

14 Senator Tuberville: Thank you very much. General,
15 good to see you.

16 General Wilsbach: Good to see you.

17 Senator Tuberville: Congratulations. I look forward
18 to working with you and on your important mission in front
19 of you. While we are on these KC-46s, I do not think any
20 of us know how far along we have gone. We have gone a long
21 time trying to build these things. Give us your
22 evaluation. Are they working now? Do we have enough range
23 in the Indo-Pacific? Where do we stand with that? Because
24 we can do all these sorties we want and build all these
25 planes. If you cannot refuel them in the Indo-Pacific, we



1 have got problems.

2 General Wilsbach: Exactly right. So fuel in the air
3 is the key to our success. My experience with the KC-46
4 has been positive. And I know that we have some issues
5 that we have to take care of, specifically with the boom
6 system that needs to be fixed at this point. But overall,
7 very happy with the platform, and it does provide us with
8 not just air refueling but it does many other missions. We
9 cannot talk about those in this setting. We can come back
10 in a closed session to talk about some of the other things
11 that that gives us, which other tankers did not give us in
12 the past. So it is a force multiplier there.

13 So I am pretty pleased, and I think the progress that
14 we are seeing with the fixes that are coming in are
15 promising.

16 Senator Tuberville: Yeah. Thank you. In your career
17 you have had probably a lot of experience, you and your
18 wife, family, of base facilities. Recruiting is very
19 important. We are getting a lot of bad information --
20 well, I cannot say it is bad information -- a lot of
21 information from some of these bases that we are having
22 problems with base housing facilities. And we have not
23 done enough. I mean, if we do not take care of our
24 families, we are not going to be able to recruit people to
25 be in our military. I do not care what leg of the



1 military. What are your thoughts on that?

2 General Wilsbach: So, Cindy and I have traveled all
3 over the Pacific and all over the continental United
4 States, visiting airmen and their families. Cindy has
5 spent a lot of time with the families. And you are right,
6 Senator. At almost every base she also meets with the
7 first sergeants who talk a lot about living in the dorms.
8 That is what the Air Force calls the barracks. And there
9 are multiple complaints. In many places there are
10 complaints.

11 And you are exactly right. We owe it to America's
12 sons and daughters to have quality of life and quality of
13 service, and part of that quality of life is the place that
14 they live. And when they live on base in a facility, that
15 facility should be safe, it should be clean, and it should
16 be of high quality, just like their service.

17 Senator Tuberville: And we have to put that a
18 priority. If we do not do that, they are not going to get
19 any better.

20 General Wilsbach: Agreed.

21 Senator Tuberville: And since I have been here I have
22 heard a lot of rhetoric about, hey, we are going to do this
23 and that. But still we have a lot of our bases that are
24 sending back problems in terms of housing, and schools and
25 things, to where we educate our kids. That is very, very



1 important.

2 General Wilsbach: Agreed.

3 Senator Tuberville: And I hope we continue to make
4 that a priority.

5 You know, I am on the Personnel Committee, and I am
6 also on the Air Force Academy Board of Visitors. And we
7 have had problems there. Are you aware of any of the
8 problems, and will you get personally involved in making
9 sure that we train leaders to fight foreign adversaries
10 instead of this woke nonsense that a lot of our academies
11 have been in for a few years?

12 General Wilsbach: I will, Senator. And if confirmed,
13 I do want to get personally involved there. So I share a
14 passion, that I know that you do, of making warriors that
15 are physically, mentally, and spiritually tough. And I
16 believe that you get there by doing hard things together,
17 and teaching, coaching, and mentoring after those sessions,
18 where maybe you did not meet the standard but next time you
19 will.

20 And the Air Force Academy is a great place for that to
21 happen. I just had a conversation with the superintendent
22 yesterday, and the Academy today is starting one of those
23 exercises, with all of the cadets, and they are going to
24 get tougher in the next couple of days, which I love.

25 Senator Tuberville: Thank you. Congratulations, and



1 good luck to your Florida Gators, you and your wife. She
2 is wearing her Gator colors today.

3 General Wilsbach: That is right.

4 Senator Tuberville: Big win last week. But they are
5 all big. So good luck to the Gators. Thank you.

6 General Wilsbach: Thank you, Senator.

7 Senator Cramer: Thank you. I now recognize the
8 physically, mentally, and spiritually tough Senator Budd.

9 Senator Budd: It is a great intro. Thank you,
10 Chairman. General, great to see you in the office this
11 week. Also, I think it was 2 years ago this week you
12 hosted me at PACAF. Thank you for that. Very insightful,
13 and good to see you here.

14 You know, in your opening statement you talked about
15 one of your priorities being modernization. You and I have
16 had lots of conversations about that. I agree with it, but
17 I am concerned that the previous administration, they
18 signaled a lot of poor decision-making, particularly for
19 the F-15E enterprise, under the guise of modernization. As
20 you know, North Carolina is home to Seymour Johnson Air
21 Force Base, which is the epicenter for the 15E fleet.

22 General, what do you see as the value in the future of
23 the Strike Eagle community at Seymour, both from a training
24 and a combat mission perspective?

25 General Wilsbach: So the F-15 is our workhorse,



1 especially the F-15Es. I mean, you see, in recent
2 operations, the F-15 is often there, and they are doing a
3 great job. And the aircraft that we have, even though they
4 are older, fourth gen, they still have a lot of life left
5 in them. So the future for the F-15 is still bright, and I
6 see Seymour Johnson being at the center of that. It is the
7 training base for the F-15, and I see that remaining so.
8 And as we move around F-15s when they are replaced by F-35s
9 in other places, we will obviously move around -- and keep
10 the newest ones and then the oldest ones will eventually
11 make it to the boneyard and retire those. But the ones
12 that still have life on them, a lot of them are going to
13 still be at Seymour Johnson for the foreseeable future.

14 Senator Budd: Well, if confirmed, and I believe you
15 will be, we are going to continue to have that
16 conversation. I am going to hold you to that.

17 You know, the increased procurement of the 15EX -- we
18 also talked about that -- it has been one of my priorities
19 in the NDAA and also in defense approps bills. I think the
20 platform is critical for modernizing the F-15 fleet and
21 increasing the total fighter aircraft we have in play for
22 future conflict. How do you view the 15EX procurement
23 across the future years' defense program? General?

24 General Wilsbach: Yes, thank you. The F-15EX is a
25 tremendous platform. It has the capability to carry



1 weapons that very few other platforms do, these very, very
2 long-range weapons, perhaps hypersonic weapons, that do not
3 fit in the internal weapons bay of our fifth and future
4 sixth generation aircraft. The F-15E also can do these
5 things. So for that reason I think we ought to keep a
6 close eye on how many F-15EXs we want to do our Air Force
7 business, and certainly would love to, if confirmed,
8 continue to work with you and see what the right number is.
9 Right now it is about 120, give or take a couple. I do not
10 have that number exactly down, but it is about 120. But
11 happy to look at that number in the future and see if we
12 might need more.

13 Senator Budd: Thank you. And, you know, we talked
14 earlier this week about pilot retention. There has been a
15 lot, in this room, of discussion about pilot retention. It
16 is obviously a readiness issue. How are you thinking about
17 the problem, and can we solve it simply with this bonus
18 incentive structure? Or are there additional things that
19 you would also do?

20 General Wilsbach: Thank you to the Senate for
21 approving the bonus, because that means a lot to our air
22 crew. But that is not the only thing that we can do. A
23 few of the things that they complain about, or feel like is
24 a challenge, are two things that come up all the time. One
25 is, "I came in to be a pilot and you don't let me fly



1 enough." That goes back to the comments that I made
2 earlier of, hey, minimum of three times a week. I mean, if
3 you are not flying and you came in to be a pilot, there is
4 a likely chance that you are going to go somewhere else
5 where you can fly. So that is one reason why people are
6 getting out, because there are other opportunities to fly,
7 and that is what they want to do. So sorties matter.

8 The second one that we hear often is, "I'm PCS-ing too
9 often." So I am getting ready to, perhaps, if I get
10 confirmed, have my 24th move in 40 years. Do the math.
11 That is often. But if you could stretch that out so that
12 families can stay in one location for a longer period of
13 time, their kids can get settled in school, their spouses
14 can get employment and keep it for longer periods of time,
15 they can build equity in a home, those sorts of things are
16 valuable to our folks. And so reducing the number of
17 permanent changes of station moves is the third part of
18 what I think we should be doing to help retain folks.

19 Senator Budd: Thank you very much. I look forward to
20 your confirmation and continuing to work together.

21 General Wilsbach: Thank you, Senator.

22 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Senator Budd. I will
23 recognize myself while I stall for other members that might
24 be on their way.

25 First of all, thank you for being here, General, but



1 thank you most of all for answering the phone, and thank
2 you, Cindy, for letting him say yes to the request. I have
3 to say, I cannot imagine a person better prepared and
4 equipped than you are for this job, so I am really grateful
5 you said yes, and I am really grateful you got the call.

6 I also, having spent time with you and Cindy in Grand
7 Forks, saw firsthand what you describe in Cindy. Cindy,
8 not just with your words and not just out of obligation,
9 but your heart, you clearly care about the airmen, and
10 thank you for that. It means the world to all of us and to
11 all of them.

12 A couple of things. I want to say thank you for your
13 commitment to the Sentinel program, as asked by Senator
14 Fischer and others. It is really important to us, of
15 course, in Minot having two of the three legs. But to know
16 that Sentinel, we are going to see it all the way through.
17 We are not going to stop two-thirds of the way. So it is
18 really important. In fact, I maintain that if you are
19 going to stop anywhere along the way of developing Sentinel
20 and putting those new missiles in the ground, you should
21 not start. They are most capable with all of them. So I
22 really appreciate your commitment to Sentinel.

23 With regard to others, I want to talk a little bit
24 more, get a little more definition on the ISR references
25 and commitments. Because you used the word "balance" as



1 you talked about the potential gap as we get to space. And
2 whether or not space alone will ever fulfill all the needs,
3 I am not sure, but clearly you are right. There are
4 capabilities that space provides and will provide.

5 But in the meantime, in Grand Forks we are trying to
6 keep together nine RQ-4s with some duct tape and baling
7 wire, at a time when they are in higher demand today than
8 they were a number of years ago, with the MQ-9s that are
9 flown out of Fargo. We are already well below the number
10 that are in demand by the COCOMs and that the threat
11 requires.

12 So what is your sense, or do you have a plan for how
13 we either maintain or, better yet, acquire some airborne
14 ISR while space catches up to the demand?

15 General Wilsbach: Well, caveating I am not in the
16 seat yet and I have to say if confirmed, but you are
17 exactly right. The RQ-4, the MQ-9, both are really
18 important to us, especially prior to the conflict.
19 Admittedly, if they go into a high-threat environment, they
20 could be shot down. But if it is not a high-threat
21 environment, we can get great value out of those platforms
22 to do missions that, if we did not have them, and you did
23 not have that capability on space, you would have to go
24 without.

25 So as we go forward into the future, we need to



1 balance that, and frankly, it is a simple math problem.
2 You take the entirety of the collection that you wish to
3 have, and you determine what you are actually collecting.
4 And if you have a big gap, then you can easily make
5 decisions, resource decisions, on what you want to keep and
6 what you can afford to get rid of, because you have that
7 capability to collect elsewhere.

8 Senator Cramer: Thank you. I would add to that, we
9 have a number of airmen that are not really sure what they
10 are going to fly in a couple of years, or whether there
11 will be a mission for them, and some communities wondering
12 the same thing. So, you know, I do not need 5,000 KC-46s
13 or a gazillion 135s. But as you are moving F-15s around,
14 to use your terminology, there might be a place for them in
15 North Dakota. But we will talk more about that not, but
16 when, you are confirmed, and I look forward to helping that
17 happen.

18 And with that I recognize Senator Banks.

19 Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General,
20 earlier this year President Trump came to the Midwest, to
21 Michigan, and highlighted his continued support for the Air
22 National Guard. He said, quote, "The previous
23 administration was willing to surrender Air National Guard
24 fighter units across the country by retiring aircraft that
25 were not being replaced. Under the Trump administration we



1 are correcting that injustice." Do you believe, General,
2 that President Trump's directive to the Air Force was very
3 clear that we need to invest more in the Air National Guard
4 fighter fleet?

5 General Wilsbach: Well, I do not want to speak for
6 President Trump, so if you would not mind I will just tell
7 you what my opinion is on the Guard, and that is that we
8 have the active duty, we have the Air National Guard, and
9 we have the Air Force Reserve, and all three of those --
10 well, two components and one split in half between the
11 Reserve component, but you have the Air Force Reserve and
12 the Air National Guard -- but they are critical to our
13 capability to generate air power. We do almost nothing
14 without a guardsman or an Air Force Reserve in the mix, and
15 that is every single day, and in times of crisis, where we
16 could mobilize those forces even better.

17 So as we look at the Air Force writ large, the team
18 consists of active-duty Air National Guard and Air Force
19 Reserve, and frankly, I try to avoid differentiating.

20 Senator Banks: Good. The 122nd Fighter Wing in Fort
21 Wayne, Indiana, is one of those Air National Guard units
22 where the Air Force has not provided a plan to modernize or
23 replace its aircraft. We have now transitioned from A-10s
24 to F-16s, but our pilots have not been given the enablers
25 that they need to make the transition a success, such as



1 the simulators and the arresting gear.

2 How is the Air Force implementing President Trump's
3 agenda on the Air National Guard's fighter fleets like the
4 122nd?

5 General Wilsbach: So I know you are familiar. They
6 are just getting their latest Block 40 jets there, so we
7 are going to continue to build that out. And certainly
8 things like simulators and arresting gear for normal
9 operations should be looked at, and if confirmed, I will
10 take a peek at that and see if we can get those things --

11 Senator Banks: I look forward to working with you
12 further on that, after you are confirmed.

13 General, in the previous administration the Air Force
14 leadership tried to force DEI literally into every aspect
15 of military life. One of the worst examples of this was
16 Air Force leadership signing off on racial and gender
17 quotas for different applicant pools. They openly stated
18 that their goal was to decrease the number of white males
19 joining the Air Force as officers from 52 percent to 43
20 percent.

21 Do you support Secretary Hegseth's push to only select
22 and promote airmen based on their merit and achievement?

23 General Wilsbach: I do.

24 Senator Banks: I appreciate that commitment. I
25 believe Secretary Hegseth and President Trump have done so



1 much to get DEI and all of the woke politics out of our
2 military and get our military back focused on what it is
3 supposed to be focused on. And I know that you are going
4 to be a big part of that. I look forward to supporting
5 your nomination and working with you for a long time to
6 come.

7 With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

8 Senator Cramer: Thank you. Well, this concludes
9 today's hearing, and I want to thank our witness. General,
10 thank you again for answering the call.

11 For the information of members, questions for the
12 record will be due to the Committee within 2 business days
13 of the conclusion of the hearing, which is right now. We
14 are adjourned.

15 [Whereupon, at 11:31 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]
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