

April 29, 2014

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Levin and Ranking Member Inhofe:

On behalf of the nation's governors, thank you for your efforts to establish the National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force (Commission) and to ensure thoughtful consideration of its recommendations.

Governors commend the Commission for its open and active engagement with all stakeholders and its thorough consideration of Air Force mission requirements both at home and abroad. We were encouraged that the Commission recognized governors' role as essential stakeholders in force structure decision making, as well as the need for the Air Force to better engage with states through existing arrangements such as the Council of Governors' (Council) budget consultative process agreement (attached).

We also were pleased the Commission recognized the role and importance of the Air National Guard within states and the experience and cost-effectiveness that it provides to the Total Force. The Commission's findings took into account a number of key principles that governors believe should inform all future budget and force structure planning, including:

- The National Guard should continue to serve as an operational force;
- The National Guard is a highly trained, battle-tested force that should continue to be resourced and equipped to meet the needs of both the federal government *and* states; and
- The National Guard's cost-effectiveness should be leveraged to the fullest extent to meet the fiscal and operational challenges confronting the nation.

A significant contribution of the Commission is the collaborative engagement process it encouraged throughout the Air Force over the last year. Leaders from the Active, Guard and Reserve components, along with Adjutants General (TAGs), are now working together more closely to address the difficult budget challenges facing the Air Force. We appreciate the leadership of Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Mark Welsh to work with National Guard Bureau Chief General Frank Grass and TAGs during the early stages of the budget and Future Years Defense Planning review. This reset of relationships has paid dividends in fiscal year 2015 budget planning.

During the Council's February meeting, governors were encouraged to hear directly from Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James and General Welsh that they are committed to incorporating many of the recommendations of the Commission. The Air Force still has room to improve its engagement with governors through the Council's budget consultation agreement, but the Commission's work has encouraged unity of

effort among the active and reserve components and a strategic outlook that encompasses the Total Air Force.

Commitments now must be followed up by action. While the Air Force may not agree with all of the Commission's recommendations, we urge the Committee to hold Air Force leadership accountable to their assurances to implement many of the Commission's recommendations and ensure future collaboration with governors and the Council. The development of meaningful timelines and benchmarks also would ensure that the Air Force has a long-term plan for implementing the Commission's recommendations and provide a means by which the Committee and outside stakeholders could measure progress.

Governors are extremely proud of the role the National Guard plays in protecting the nation and its citizens. The National Guard is a highly experienced, capable force and an essential state partner in responding to domestic disasters and emergencies. The Commission has been an important voice in this endeavor.

Thank you for your leadership and support for the value and influence of the Commission to future force structure decision making across the Total Air Force.

Sincerely,

Governor Jay Nixon
Chair
Committee on Homeland Security & Public Safety

Governor Rick Snyder
Vice Chair
Committee on Homeland Security & Public Safety

Governor Terry E. Branstad
Co-Chair
Council of Governors

Governor Martin O'Malley
Co-Chair
Council of Governors