

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 20, 2015

F-35A Pacific Operational Basing EIS
354th Fighter Wing Public Affairs Office
354 Broadway Avenue, Suite 15A
Eielson Air Force Base, AK 99702

Dear F-35A Pacific Operational Basing EIS Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments regarding the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the United States Air Force F-35A Operational Beddown – Pacific. The basing of two F-35 squadrons at Eielson AFB will benefit the people of Alaska, and give a must needed boost to an economy adversely affected by extraneous resource challenges. The importance of this benefit cannot be understated for Interior Alaska. However, the Alaska Congressional Delegation (CODEL) strongly supports the preferred alternative because it is in our nation's best interest as well as Alaska's. From our state's unparalleled training areas, its immense strategic value, and its steadfast support for our military, there is no other location in the Pacific that will provide as much value to the Air Force than Eielson AFB. The Alaska CODEL joins the majority of Alaskans in strongly supporting the Air Force's proposed action to base two squadrons of F-35A Joint Strike Fighters (JSF) at Eielson Air Force Base (AFB).

As the Air Force is aware, Alaska is one of the most strategically important locations in the world. This statement was true when General Billy Mitchell testified to that fact in 1933, and it is still true today. Due to Alaska's unique location perched on top of the world, aircraft deployed from our great state can reach anywhere in the Northern Hemisphere in less than nine hours. In fact, the location of Alaska's military forces puts them closer to more hotspots in Asia than Hickam AFB in Hawaii. This same location also places them closer to hotspots in Eastern Europe than any other location in the United States. The dual capability to quickly and effectively respond to crises in both the Asia-Pacific and in Europe – while simultaneously projecting stabilizing U.S. influence into an increasingly militarized Arctic – becomes more and more relevant as budgets become more and more fiscally constrained. Alaska is the ONLY place that allows our United States Air Force to project U.S. power into three increasingly significant geographic combatant commands for the price of a single, stable, and U.S. military-friendly location.

Eielson AFB lies at the gateway to Alaska's Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex (JPARC). The JPARC is unmatched by any other training area in the United States and is often referred to as the "crown jewel" or "gem" of Air Force training ranges. While ranges in the Lower 48 are parts of states, JPARC's training areas are the size of states, providing 65,000 square miles of unencumbered air space (Florida), 2,490 square miles of land space (Delaware), and 42,000 square nautical miles of surface, subsurface, and overlying airspace over the Gulf of Alaska (Virginia). In fact, not only is JPARC's airspace is nine times larger than the Nellis Air Force Base Range Complex and more than twenty times larger than the Barry M. Goldwater

Range near Luke Air Force Base, it also includes three bombing ranges containing more than 400 different types of targets and more than 30 threat simulators. Furthermore, JPARC's varying climate and topographically-diverse land training areas allow for unique joint training opportunities with the U.S. Army. This joint training replicates real-world combat scenarios and ensures that both the Air Force and the Army have the training they need to seamlessly conduct joint operations overseas.

Eielson AFB is also home to one of the Air Force's premier air training operations, RED FLAG-Alaska. The JPARC's expansive airspace allows participants in RED FLAG-Alaska to train joint offensive counter-air, interdiction, close air support, and large force employment training in a simulated combat environment. Since its inception, thousands of service members from all four branches of the U.S. Military, as well as the armed services of Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden, and the United Kingdom have taken advantage of unique training that occurs at RED FLAG-Alaska. These types of combined training events play a critical role in ensuring that we continue to seamlessly operate with our allies and partners. They are also critical to building important ally and partner capacity, in particular during Distant Frontier exercises. In 2015, Alaska hosted two RED FLAG-Alaska exercises, as well as the premier joint Air-Sea Battle exercise in the Pacific, Operation Northern Edge.

In an effort to support the U.S. Air Force's Strategic Basing of the OCONUS F-35A in Alaska, provisions were included in both the House and Senate-passed National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. These provisions expressed the Sense of Congress that Secretary of the Air Force should consider strategically significant criteria when basing the OCONUS F-35A. This criterion – found in abundance in Alaska – includes access to sufficient range capabilities and space for training, the ability to robustly train with our international partners, the presence of existing facilities to support operations, and limited encroachment. Ultimately, the Senate's version of the language was adopted in the FY 2016 NDAA Conference Report, which passed the U.S. House of Representatives by a strong bipartisan vote of 270-156 and the U.S. Senate by an equally bipartisan vote of 70-27.

Recent events have also reinforced Alaska's strategic importance. In Cold War-like fashion, Russia has dramatically increased its arctic-based military presence, creating a new Northern Command, reopening numerous former Soviet air and sea bases, building new ice breakers, and forming four new combat brigades in the Arctic. In fact, according to testimony given earlier this year by Admiral William Gortney, commander of U.S. Northern Command, "Russian heavy bombers flew more out-of-area patrols in 2014 than in any year since the Cold War." Further, Russia recently launched a massive, five-day Arctic training event, involving 38,000 servicemen, more than 50 ships and submarines, and 110 aircraft. Taken as a whole, we are greatly concerned about Russian show of military force and we believe that the United States must begin to rapidly bolster our arctic capabilities and force structure. Importantly, adding another 5th Generation airframe to Alaska's Command's F-22 fleet by basing two squadrons of F-35s at Eielson AFB will send a powerful message to the world that the United States remains committed to defending our interests – and the interests of our friends and allies – in the Arctic Region.

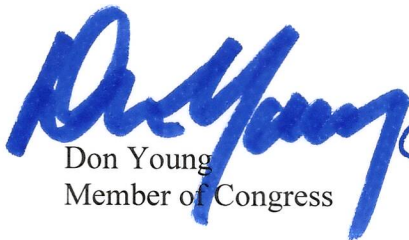
Although Alaska's strategic value and incredible joint and combined training opportunities make a compelling argument for basing two F-35 squadrons at Eielson AFB, these advantages are only part of the story. Support for our Airmen, their families, and all of our service members runs deep in Alaska's DNA. Alaskans take great pride in supporting the men and women of our Armed Forces and our military families. Some would argue that the support for the military in Alaska rivals, if not exceeds, that of any other location in the U.S. In fact, Alaska's active duty military personnel, combined with our Veteran population, equate to more than 15% of the state's entire population. Whether it is welcoming our Airmen into our communities with open arms, or our residents helping families through the many deployments our Airmen have endured, Alaskans deeply value the strong relationship we share with our Alaska-based military members.

Looking back, it was not so long ago that our Interior Alaska community came together to fight for the future of Eielson AFB. In those public hearings, Alaskans – service members, veterans, politicians, tradesmen, school teachers, realtors, homebuilders, small business owners, and ordinary citizens – came together. As a cohesive but diverse group, we argued that Alaska was, is, and will continue to be the most strategic place on the globe from which to project airpower into the Pacific. We argued that the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex is the best place for the Air Force to train for present and future conflicts. We argued that Alaskans take care of our military because our military takes care of us. This proposal by the Air Force to bed-down the first two squadrons of F-35As at Eielson AFB shows that the Air Force heard our arguments and finally understood them.

The decision to base two squadrons of F-35A JSFs at Eielson AFB is a win-win-win. A win for national security; a win for Interior Alaska. And it is a win for our airmen who will have the opportunity to work and train in the best military community in all of the United States. The Alaska delegation is united in support of the Air Force's proposed action and we are excited to begin receiving the first of these F-35A squadrons at Eielson AFB very soon.

We appreciate your consideration of our views.

Respectfully,



Don Young
Member of Congress



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Dan Sullivan
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Deborah James, Secretary of the Air Force

The Honorable Miranda Ballentine, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Installations,
Environment, and Energy

General Mark Welsh, Chief of Staff of the Air Force

General Lori Robinson, Commander, Pacific Air Forces

Lieutenant General Russell Handy, Commander, Alaska Command