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UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Ash Carter  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. President and Mr. Secretary,

As you finalize the Department of Defense's (DOD) budget request for fiscal year 2017, I ask that you fully fund the A-10 "Warthog" in a manner consistent with Congressional intent. It is imperative to maintain the current level of nine operational squadrons after mothballing the equivalent of four squadrons since 2012. The A-10 has unique capabilities for Close Air Support (CAS), Forward Air Control-Airborne (FAC-A) and Combat Search-And-Rescue (CSAR), and we need a legitimate next-generation weapon system designed for CAS, FAC-A and CSAR missions before retiring any further A-10s. Because there is no replacement for these unique and crucial capabilities, either currently available or in development, we must maintain and improve the A-10 fleet until a real A-10 replacement exists.

The A-10 was specifically designed to support ground forces, delivering unmatched CAS and FAC-A capability to save American lives when they are in danger close to enemy forces or civilians in complex circumstances. The redundant systems and titanium around the cockpit make the A-10 survivable from small arms fire and MANPADS direct hits, allowing the pilot to fly close enough to visually detect targets and friendlies if required. The A-10's efficient twin engines and fuel capacity provide the loiter time necessary to stay on station to deliver continuous support. The Warthog is equipped with the powerful 30 mm cannon gun which fires armor-piercing depleted uranium or high-explosive incendiary bullets. It can also carry a variety of other GPS and laser-guided or gravity bombs, missiles, and rockets. Additionally, the maneuverability of the A-10 has shown to be critical in CAS missions with terrain and/or poor weather. These capabilities allow the A-10 to provide true CAS, even while flying in bad weather and taking fire. These are unique and critical attributes that no other airplane in our inventory possesses to keep our troops alive when it matters most.

In addition to CAS and FAC-A missions, the A-10 is the U.S. military's best CSAR aircraft. The A-10's avionics and exceptional communications upgrades such as the LARS radio, helmet-mounted cuing, along with the lethality, loiter time, and maneuverability highlighted above, make it critical to the CSAR mission. Without the ability to quickly locate, communicate with, protect, and rescue a downed pilot, we risk an American airman meeting the same fate as the captured Jordanian pilot in 2015.

As a result of these distinctive capabilities and the airplane's proven success in combat, commanders continue to request and use the A-10 in the fight against ISIS, in Europe, and in South Korea. A-10s are currently deployed to the Middle East for CSAR and offensive operations against ISIS, a threat which did not exist when the Administration first decided to try to retire the A-10. The Warthog has been instrumental against ISIS, recently as part of Operation Tidal Wave II which destroyed 116 ISIS fuel trucks. They are also deployed to Europe to reassure and train our allies in CAS amid increased Russian aggression. They are permanently stationed in South Korea for deterrence and anti-armor capability against North Korean belligerence. In a HASC hearing in April 2015, the commander for U.S. Forces Korea admitted that the loss of the A-10s in Korea would result in a gap in anti-armor capabilities.

In addition to being the most capable weapon system in the Air Force for CAS, the A-10 is also the cheapest to fly. The A-10 costs \$11,500 per flight hour, much cheaper than the V-22 (\$70,000), the F-16 (\$22,500), the F-35 (\$32,000), the F-22 (\$44,000), and the B-2 (\$135,000). Under the current budgetary constraints faced by our nation, the A-10's cost effectiveness must also be taken into consideration.

As a former A-10 pilot and squadron commander, I consider it reckless to retire the A-10 ahead of schedule, without a next-generation A-10. There is no aircraft, either in the fleet or in development, that can replace the Warthog's unique capabilities. The Air Force has proposed that other aircraft, such as the F-35, could perform the CAS mission. However, in testimony last year, the DOD's Director of Operational Test and Evaluation Dr. Michael Gilmore admitted that the F-35 is less survivable from a direct hit and would perform 'standoff CAS.' There are times, and there will be future times, where you must provide very close air support to the troops on the ground who are often on the run or unable to provide coordinates. I have flown CAS missions in these conditions where the pilot must visually identify friendly forces and enemy combatants to hit the target and avoid fratricide. You cannot stand off in all CAS scenarios, even in the future. A report from the Government Accountability Office published on June 25, 2015 confirms the capability gaps that would be created by retiring the A-10.

The U.S. Air Force needs a next-generation A-10 before attempting to mothball any further A-10s. The specific mission set for CAS/FAC-A/CSAR requires a specific aircraft, not one that is a jack-of-all-trades but a master of none. In a March 17, 2015 HASC hearing, both the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Air Force confirmed that mothballing the A-10 was driven only by budget constraints and not by strategy. Secretary Carter reiterated that position in a HASC hearing the next day.

Due to budget-driven efforts to divest the A-10 since 2012, the equivalent of four squadrons has closed. We currently have nine operational squadrons left, many with less aircraft in them than before, and we cannot afford to go any lower in the current security environment. To meet our needs, this year's budget must ensure sufficient airframes, depot support, and experienced maintainers. The budget and long-term planning must also include proactive steps to extend the life cycle of the A-10, such as finishing the wing replacement. In addition, training must be available for the Joint Terminal Attack Controllers who direct the action of CAS aircraft.

I hope that the restrictive language in last year's National Defense Authorization Act and Omnibus Appropriations serves as an indication of Congress's support for the A-10. My amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, which passed committee and both chambers with large bipartisan support, clearly outlines Congress's intent to preserve the current A-10 fleet.

The Air Force cannot continue its duty to national defense without a dedicated CAS/FAC-A/CSAR weapon system. I look forward to working together to support the Air Force in maintaining the A-10 and beginning the process of developing a next-generation A-10 to support our national security and bring our brave troops home alive.

Sincerely,



Martha McSally  
Member of Congress