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February 2, 2010

The Honorable Michael B. Donley
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force, Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330.1670

General Norton A. Schwartz
Chief of Staff of the Air Force
1670 Air Force, Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330.1670

Dear Secretary Donley and Chief Schwartz:

In less than a month, Southern Arizonans will have the opportunity to participate in a series of public hearings on the potential impacts of bringing the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) to Tucson. Before these hearings begin, I want to reiterate my confidence in the 162nd Fighter Wing at Tucson International Airport as a base for the F-35. I also want to bring to your attention a concern that has been raised by my constituents – the noise issue.

There are many reasons why Tucson would be an excellent location for the F-35. Our unprecedented access to airspace and the Barry M. Goldwater Range make both Davis-Monthan and the 162nd Fighter Wing at Tucson ideal basing options. A decision to base the F-35 in Tucson would create additional opportunities for collaboration with our Allies and permit persistent and continuous operations that will greatly benefit the Air Force's overall readiness posture.

Many of my constituents, however, have contacted me regarding the level of noise that they believe will accompany the Joint Strike Fighter. Because some media reports have indicated that the JSF is very loud, they are concerned that the noise could affect their quality of life. Other noise data indicates that the Joint Strike Fighter is no louder than an F-15, F-16 or F/A-18 aircraft.

In an effort to respond to these questions, I understand that the Air Force has performed a series of tests to determine the actual noise output of the F-35 under numerous environmental conditions. I have been advised that these noise data collection tests are the most thorough ever performed for any fighter aircraft to date. I request that, prior to the beginning of the public hearings in March, you release the data from those studies. My goal is to ensure the greatest possible transparency and accountability in the environmental assessment process.

I believe the Air Force also should take the following steps before it makes its JSF basing decision:

- A full noise assessment and overlay for Tucson Airport and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base;
- An assessment of potential noise impacts in Tucson;
- Real time fly-over measurements in Tucson;
- An evaluation of all potential flight paths;

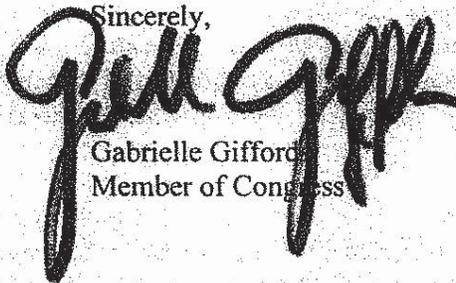
- An assessment of departure corridor noise impacts;
- A plan for mitigation of noise through flight path design, departure altitudes, flight restrictions and day/night operational considerations;
- An assessment of the actual and perceived noise differences between the F-35A and all other 4th and 5th Generation fighter aircraft, and;
- A plan for preservation of departure corridors or mitigation of noise in developed areas under or around departure corridors.

These actions will ensure that there is a full examination of the impact on any community that is being considered for basing of the F-35 and will provide factual data to address questions that will arise.

Make no mistake, I fully support basing the JSF in Tucson. There is also widespread support in the community for basing this state-of-the-art aircraft at both Tucson International Airport and Davis-Monthan Air Force Base as part of training and operational squadrons.

Since the establishment of an airfield in 1927, Tucson has proudly served our nation's air forces and our national security missions. We stand ready to continue serving by welcoming a large JSF presence to Southern Arizona.

Sincerely,



Gabrielle Gifford
Member of Congress