

SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

WASHINGTON

The Honorable Edward M. Kennedy

AUG 22 2007

Chairman
Subcommittee on Seapower
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kennedy:

Thank you for your recent inquiry to the Secretary of Defense in which you expressed concerns about Air Force actions regarding future C-17 production. The Secretary asked me to reply directly to you.

When discussing our nation's strategic airlift capability, the predicate to any examination of force mix is our ability to effectively manage our fleet. The Air Force would like to reiterate our standing plea for removal of retirement restrictions on our aging fleets. We need the flexibility to retire aircraft when fixing them is no longer a viable or cost-effective option.

Department-level studies have concluded that the programmed strategic airlift fleet, which includes 190 C-17s and 111 modernized C-5s, has sufficient capability to support the defense strategy and is reflected in the 2008 President's Budget. To address evolving airlift missions and requirements, OSD plans to conduct another mobility study beginning in spring 2008. Recently, Air Mobility Command has been reviewing the practicality of replacing a portion of the C-5 fleet with C-17s. This review is preliminary only and my staff has not reached any conclusions regarding its suitability or affordability. However, the established requirements, acquisition, and budget processes will be followed to ensure that our defense investment priorities are fully vetted with OSD and Congress.

I am aware of no commitments that the Air Force or the Department has made to the prime contractor regarding future C-17 production, in fact, the contractor has publicly stated that the decision to extend certain long-lead suppliers was entirely their own.

Thank you for your continued support. I have sent similar responses to Senators McCain and Carper.

Sincerely,