

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1007

August 31, 2011

The Honorable Leon Panetta  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta,

As the Defense Department conducts one of its most important strategic reviews and formulates its fiscal year 2013 budget request under some of the most dire financial circumstances and budgetary limitations ever faced by an Administration, I believe it is more important than ever that your program investment decisions reflect actual threat-based warfighting requirements and real economies that can be achieved through modernization of selected assets.

This is particularly true in the case of tactical airpower modernization. This nation has long enjoyed a decisive advantage against its adversaries in this mission area. Air superiority is and always will be the necessary foundation for any successful large scale military operation. As you know, the F-35 will replace the legacy air fleets of AV-8s, A-10s, F-16s, and F-18s. The F-35 will incorporate unique "5<sup>th</sup> generation" fighter technologies that will ensure tactical air superiority for U.S. forces for decades to come. Without it we run the certain risk of ceding tactical air superiority in future conflicts to foes who are developing and fielding 5<sup>th</sup> generation aircraft and defensive systems.

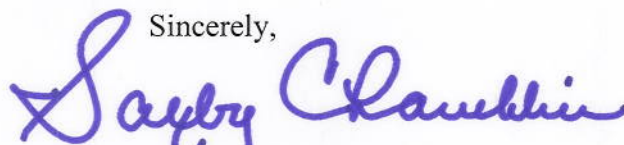
I fear that in order to meet arithmetic targets mandated by a draconian budget cutting exercise, this long held precept is being forgotten. I am dismayed to see an apparent lack of commitment by some in the Department to the success of this cornerstone program, which will ensure tactical air superiority for U.S. forces for decades to come.

I have long questioned the wisdom of acquiring additional legacy 4<sup>th</sup> generation aircraft such as the F-18 E/F, yet that is exactly what the Department seems to be doing. In fact it is my understanding that the Department of the Navy is considering options to acquire even more F-18 E/Fs at the expense of the F-35, which is central to the continued relevancy of aircraft carrier operations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. An acquisition process that acquires and delivers obsolete aircraft is difficult to fathom.

In closing I would urge that as you build a Defense budget that shapes the capabilities of our forces for years to come, that you fully commit to the expeditious fielding of the F-35 and forego procuring any additional 4<sup>th</sup> generation fighter aircraft such as the F-18 E/F which will be of limited to no value in any future threat scenario, and will only drain scarce budgetary resources from systems designed to keep us ahead of our adversaries.

I look forward to continuing our dialogue on this issue, as well as with Dr. Carter during his upcoming confirmation process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sakby Chambliss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sakby Chambliss  
United States Senate

cc: The Honorable Ashton Carter