



## Air Force Association

1501 Lee Highway, Arlington, Virginia 22209-1198 (703) 247-5800  
An Independent Nonprofit Aerospace Organization

*Robert E. (Bob) Largent*  
*Chairman of the Board*

April 24, 2007

The Honorable Robert Gates  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates,

On behalf of the Air Force Association, I want to extend my thanks for the superb job you're doing as Secretary of Defense. While you're facing many challenges during this critical time, I know your concern for a strong National Defense remains paramount.

That said, our brave men and women serving in the Armed Forces are facing increasingly dangerous challenges every day as they represent our Nation's interests around the world and we must ensure that they have the materiel resources and support needed to successfully accomplish their mission -- now and in the future.

The Air Force went to war sixteen years ago and has yet to return home. And the Air Force and the other services engagement in the Global War on Terrorism is wearing out their equipment much earlier than its planned lifespan. Modernization programs have been extended or cancelled due to resource constraints. Couple that with the fact that all of the military services face serious budget shortfalls and it leaves the Services at great risk. Let me highlight these four specific Air Force concerns:

1. The average age of Air Force aircraft is now over 24 years old...in some cases, aircraft are over 50 years old...making it the oldest fleet the Air force has flown in its 60-plus year history. *We must increase the rate of replacement weapon systems and retire those older, more costly systems in order to maintain current operations tempo and to meet our national security commitments.*
2. Demonstrating how serious the overall resource shortfalls are -- just in order to maintain current operations with today's funding levels -- the Air Force has been forced to reduce 40,000 personnel over the next four years...while continuing to provide over 5,000 Airmen to execute tasks normally performed by Army and Marine Corps personnel on the battlefield. The reductions taken to date are already adding more pressures on ops tempo. *Growing our Army and Marine Corps by 92,000 personnel will require significant Air Force resource plus-ups to support this increase.*

3. We're very alarmed about the potential \$1.6B reprogramming request that proposes to shift \$800M from both the Air Force and Navy military personnel accounts to the Army operations and maintenance account as they await the outcome of the Defense Supplemental Bill. *We urge you to not 'rob Peter to pay Paul' now to avoid more adverse impacts on the Services.*

4. Today the Air Force unfunded priority list totals over \$16B -- which clearly impacts the Air Force's ability to meet the challenges ahead. These needs must be given a high degree of priority within the Department *now to ensure the Air Force can sustain its current combat capabilities while building toward future defense needs.*

With these immediate needs, and considering the significant challenges that our military services face today, the Air Force Association believes our nation is not allocating a sufficient percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to support our military. We're currently committing the smallest percentage of GDP to Defense needs since the end of the Vietnam War. In fact, our Nation's commitment of approximately 3.8% of GDP ranked us no better than 29<sup>th</sup> among world nations. Our Nation can -- *and must* -- do more to support our Defense requirements. Only then will we be able provide the future security that our Nation demands and deserves.

That said, clearly, the Defense topline will have to be increased substantially to accommodate the current shortfalls and to support the force growth dictated by an uncertain, yet threat-driven future.

We strongly urge you to focus on the four immediate Air Force issues noted above and continue to work closely with the Services and Congress in increasing the needed resources for the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen who so gallantly protect our Nation. *It is their duty...and so it is for you to adequately provide for their needs.*

Sincerely,



Robert E. 'Bob' Largent

cc: The Honorable Michael Wynne  
General T. Michael Moseley, USAF