

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 10, 2023

The Honorable Frank Kendall  
Secretary  
U.S. Air Force  
1670 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20330

Dear Secretary Kendall:

Since its founding, the United States Air Force has been one of the most versatile and flexible elements of our national security. Every day, our Air Force executes combat sorties in the deserts of the Middle East, conducts intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance patrols to provide critical information to national security officials, and flies the most advanced aircraft anywhere in the world.

Our national security capacity is directly tied to the depth of our Joint Force, including National Guard and Reserve elements. Flexibility to respond to the full suite of national security challenges requires strong cooperation between the Active Duty, Reserves, and Air National Guard to ensure the right assets are best placed to ensure Air Force readiness. For this reason, we strongly encourage you to consider the 161st Air Refueling Wing (ARW) as the future home of the KC-46. Important partners like the City of Phoenix are fully supportive of our efforts to acquire the KC-46 aircraft, recognizing its vital significance to our state.

As representatives from Arizona, we are proud that our state is home to premier installations for combat air power. These include the 56th Fighter Wing's F-35 Joint Strike Fighter training mission at Luke Air Force Base (AFB), the 162nd Wing's F-16 Fighting Falcon training mission at Morris ANGB, the 55th Electronic Combat Group's Compass Call mission, 563rd Rescue Group, and the future Power Projection Wing at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base (AFB). The leaders of each of these installations have recognized that the availability of air refueling is a key element in the effort to train the best pilots in the world and that additional refueling aircraft would be a mission readiness multiplier that allows pilots to be sent to combat more prepared, more ready, and more lethal.

As you know, the 161st ARW currently has the highest demand for air refueling of any tanker Wing in the Air Force, with an average of 32 aircraft within a 30-minute flight, about 20 more average aircraft than the next closest Wing. Arizona is at the center of the largest area of unmet air refueling demand – demand that will soon grow. Scores of additional aircraft are slotted for delivery at Luke AFB, Davis-Monthan AFB, Morris ANGB, and Marine Corps Air Station Yuma. This coming increase of in-state aircraft does not include out-of-state units that use Barry M. Goldwater Range Complex for their essential training needs, including live-fire missions.

As air refueling demand increases, the 161st ARW is the prime candidate to host the KC-46 aircraft. Over the last four years, the 161st ARW has flown 568 sorties in support of federal Title 10 missions, showcasing its relevance to not only the Guard and State missions, but the federal mission as well. Additionally, the Wing has the infrastructure and manning to support the requirements of receiving new aircraft. In fact, the base is 105 percent manned with a 97 percent retention rate. We are in support of basing decisions that ensure the Air Force is capable of meeting the Department of Defense's requirements for national security missions. The 161st ARW is an important piece of that strategy, its advantageous location in a large and growing area should not be overlooked.

The security of our nation depends on the combat readiness of our Air Force. The delivery of new assets to the 161st ARW would have immediate benefits across the Air Force enterprise including Air Education and Training Command, Air Mobility Command, Air Combat Command, Air Force Global Strike Command, and United States Strategic Command. Located in the western United States, in close proximity to the United States Indo-Pacific Command AOR, Goldwater ANGB's geographic advantage not only underscores its significance but also highlights its pivotal role in enhancing operational efficiency and readiness for critical missions in the Indo-Pacific theater.

We respectfully request you consider how the Air Force plans to address unmet and future air refueling demand for units across the western United States. Additionally, we urge a focus on Air Force and Joint Force assets making use of the Barry M. Goldwater Range complex, out-of-state use of Arizona refueling facilities, and how an expanded Goldwater ANGB would be best utilized to support our National Defense Strategy. As you continue the basing decision process, we respectfully request you give your full and fair consideration to basing the ANG KC-46A MOB 7 at the 161st ARW in Phoenix, Arizona.

Sincerely,



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress



Andy Biggs  
Member of Congress



Greg Stanton  
Member of Congress



Debbie Lesko  
Member of Congress



Eli Crane  
Member of Congress



Juan Ciscomani  
Member of Congress



Paul Gosar  
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