



Office of Mayor Miro Weinberger

April 9, 2018

Dr. Heather Wilson
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Wilson,

I write to share my views with you about a resolution regarding the planned basing of F-35s at the Burlington International Airport that our City Council recently passed after voter approval of an advisory ballot question. As Mayor, I am the only official elected by all City voters, and I am the elected official most directly responsible for the management of the Burlington International Airport.

After carefully reviewing and considering the Council's action, the advisory public vote, and current public concerns, I remain a strong supporter of basing F-35s at Burlington International Airport. I appreciate the time, effort, and resources that the Air Force and the Vermont Air National Guard have dedicated to preparing to safely execute this mission since the Air Force decision was made in 2013 to base the planes at the Burlington International Airport, and fully support your continuation of this work. Based on my respect for the Council and the public vote, I transmit to you the attached resolution for your consideration. I will not sign the resolution because I neither agree with nor support its request. This is the first time I have chosen not to sign a resolution in my six years as Mayor.

I respectfully request that the Air Force respond to the questions listed in the resolution, as I believe that definitive, official responses will be beneficial to the public's understanding and acceptance of the Air Force's basing decision. It will be particularly helpful if you can fully address the safety questions about whether the F-35s will have had sufficient flight time before they are deployed to Burlington.

Background

During our March 6, 2018 Town Meeting Day election – a proud tradition in Vermont – in response to a non-binding, advisory question that local activists successfully petitioned to put on the ballot, 55 percent of Burlington voters expressed a desire to replace the planned basing of the F-35s with low noise level equipment with a proven high safety record appropriate for a densely populated area.

The vote signals community concerns about the planned basing. I believe that some of these concerns stem from conflicting and inaccurate information that the public has heard about the F-35s. Your responses to the questions in the resolution will help clarify the information being considered by our community.

The vote also is an indication of some local opposition to the basing. The extent of the opposition demonstrated by the vote is difficult to measure, however, as the ballot item wording was confusing, and premised on the existence of a less impactful alternative mission. Also attached is an analysis of the ballot item performed by a respected local professor that expands on these concerns about the ballot question.

Local support for the Vermont Air National Guard

Finally, I commend to you the men and women of the Vermont Air National Guard. They and their senior leaders have conducted themselves with honor and dignity during a contentious debate, and, further, have spoken articulately and passionately in defense of their mission and their love for our City, State, and country. We are grateful for the many contributions they make to our community, appreciative of the services they provide to our airport that otherwise would be borne by taxpayers, and mindful of the storied history of the "Green Mountain Boys." Please know that, although we are engaged in a spirited local debate about the F-35 basing, the greater Burlington community has significant gratitude and appreciation for the men and women of the Vermont Air National Guard.

Thank you for your time and service to our country. We are ready to follow up on any additional questions you may have, and request that members of your team contact my Chief of Staff, Brian Lowe (brian@burlingtonvt.gov), with any further inquiries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Weinberger', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Miro Weinberger
Mayor of Burlington, Vermont

CC: Burlington City Council

Enclosures