

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 26, 2019

The Honorable Heather Wilson
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force, Pentagon
Washington, DC
20330-1670

Dear Secretary Wilson:

As members representing Air National Guard (ANG) C-130H units, we are writing to express grave concern at the perceived lack of urgency from your office in upgrading the legacy propeller system of the C-130H. The safety of our servicemembers should always be a national priority, and the readiness of our C-130H fleet is a matter of national security. We urge you to expedite the approval for the new NP-2000 propeller system to rectify this serious safety and readiness issue.

The inherent danger associated with the legacy propeller system came to light in the recently published mishap report from the KC-130T Hercules aircraft of the United States Marine Corps Reserve, which crashed in Leflore County, Mississippi, killing 15 U.S. Marines and 1 Sailor on July 10, 2017. The findings—published in the Marine Corps' Command Investigation into the Class A Aviation Mishap within Marine Aerial Refueler Transport Squadron 452—indicate systemic problems in propeller blade depot level maintenance at Warner-Robins Air Logistics Complex, located at Robins Air Force Base in Georgia. In the wake of that tragedy, the Marine Corps stopped using any propeller blades that were sent to Warner-Robins Air Logistics Complex due to actions and procedures deemed unsafe and a causal factor in the tragic C-130T crash in Mississippi. The Marine Corps is pursuing recapitalization of their legacy C-130T fleet, and the Navy has decided to procure the all-new, 8-bladed NP-2000 propeller system for its entire legacy C-130 fleet.

While the Navy and Marine Corps have moved quickly to address the systemic potential safety of flight issues associated with the 54H60 blades and the depot process at Warner Robins, the Air Force has moved slowly in addressing the issue. The Air National Guard is still flying C-130Hs with blades serviced at Warner Robins that are potentially compromised by poor maintenance practices and inadequate supervision at the maintenance depot. All propellers manufactured before 1971 were removed from service, but this safety control measure appears arbitrary, particularly given the failed blade on the Marine Corps C-130T that crashed was

manufactured in 1983. While recent process improvements at the Warner Robins depot are important, the only way to eliminate the risk posed by the 54H60 propeller blades is to replace the legacy system with a proven, modern propeller system.

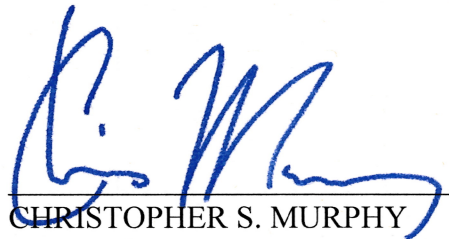
U.S. Air Force procurement of the NP-2000 eight-bladed propeller is the obvious solution. The new system drastically decreases maintenance time and improves logistics support –increasing readiness—and increases performance and improves thrust. Recent testing of the NP-2000 has demonstrated at least a 20 percent increase in takeoff performance over legacy propellers, and the 109th ANG LC-130H squadron has already validated the NP-2000 blade system is a safe, suitable replacement system. Perhaps more significantly, procurement of the NP-2000 propeller will completely eliminate the safety risks inherent in continued operation with the legacy 54H60 propeller that was causal in the Marine Corps KC-130T accident. Congress has already allocated funds to upgrade 50 ANG C-130Hs, but the Air National Guard has been unable to gain approval necessary from your office to allow a contract to be signed.

Delays from your office on this matter are unacceptable considering the inherent safety and readiness risks surrounding this issue. We urge your office to expedite the administrative approval process for the NP-2000 propeller system for the C-130H Air National Guard fleet. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate



TINA SMITH
United States Senate



AMY KLOBUCHAR
United States Senate



KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND
United States Senate



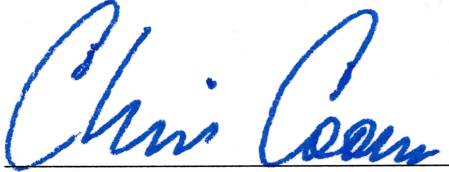
TOM COTTON
United States Senate



STEVE DAINES
United States Senate



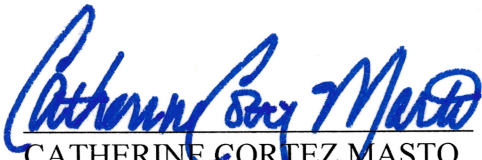
ROB PORTMAN
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CHRISTOPHER A. COONS
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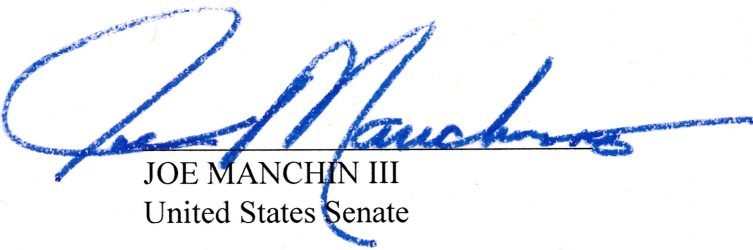
THOMAS R. CARPER
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CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO
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JON TESTER
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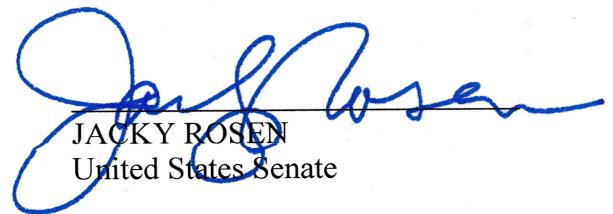
JOE MANCHIN III
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