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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 3, 2023

The Honorable Frank Kendall III
Secretary of the Air Force
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Kendall:

I write to urge you to consider the 186th Air Refueling Wing (ARW), located at Key Field Air National Guard Base, in Meridian, Mississippi, as the next home for the KC-46A "Pegasus" multirole air-to-air refueling tanker. The State of Mississippi, the people of Meridian, and the Mississippi National Guard believe the strategic advantages of the 186th ARW, coupled with outstanding support from the surrounding communities, make Key Field the best possible location for the first KC-46 eight-aircraft Main Operating Base. I am confident that Meridian and the 186th ARW will compete favorably, meeting or exceeding all strategic basing criteria.

The 186th ARW is currently equipped with eight KC-135Rs and has seen worldwide duty since 1992. The wing is critically important to national security and expeditionary missions, with a 30-year history of operational tasking, including Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Most recently, the 186th played a pivotal role in the February 4, 2023, takedown of the high-altitude, Chinese surveillance balloon over United States territorial waters. The aviators provided mid-air refueling for the F-22 fighter aircraft that performed the engagement.

Key Field is ready to accept the KC-46, with infrastructure and support services in place to immediately host the desired eight aircraft to ensure efficiency and operational readiness for the Air Force. The airfield is in a prime location in the vicinity of refueling tracks over the Southeastern United States and the Gulf of Mexico, enabling rapid servicing of Air Force and joint service aircraft fleets, including strategic communications aircraft. The upgraded refueling capabilities of the KC-46 will provide enhanced support for aircraft from other military branches and partner nations operating in Key Field's area of responsibility.

When called upon, Key Field and the State of Mississippi stand ready to support the KC-46 beddown. The Meridian community is heavily engaged for the continued success of Key Field and committed to supporting the Airmen and Guardians of the Department of the Air Force. Thank you for your full consideration of the 186th ARW.

Best regards and thank you for your service to the Nation.

Sincerely yours,


Roger F. Wicker