

United States Air Force Reserve



Testimony

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Guard and Reserve Hearing

Statement of
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OVERVIEW

Chairman McConnell, Ranking Member Coons, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, it is my privilege to testify on behalf of the United States Air Force Reserve (AFR). The AFR is a combat-ready force of 67,000 Airmen committed to defending the Nation, deterring aggression and – should deterrence fail – defeating our adversaries. We are an efficient, accessible, experienced, and above all, lethal force. Our trained and qualified personnel provide surge capacity and strategic depth to the Joint Force and Active Component (AC) when our Nation calls. We will restore peace through strength by reviving our warrior ethos, rebuilding our military and reestablishing deterrence against the threats posed by China and our adversaries.

The AFR is reviving the warrior ethos through assured access, force management and readiness. We have a proven 72-hour response time and are exceeding our current global force management allocation plan commitments by 245 percent. We recruit, train and retain the best our Nation has to offer and hold our Airmen accountable to uncompromising standards. Sustaining a force ready to prevail against any adversary, anytime and anywhere, means retaining our Airmen and their families with resources such as the Yellow Ribbon Program, access to childcare and spouse employment support.

We are rebuilding our military through organizational reform while maintaining focus on the mission. Reserve experience, depth and surge capacity provides lethality at one-third the cost of our AC counterparts when not mobilized to augment the AC. We operate our installations 28 days a month with just 25 percent of our force. Our force structure prioritizes every dollar spent, freeing up resources to invest in Next Generation Air Dominance while modernizing capabilities across the Department of the Air Force (DAF). Our special missions in aerial spray, weather reconnaissance and aerial firefighting, or “Earth, Wind and Fire,” expand DAF capacity that supports multiple Federal, State and local agencies and directly impacts the health and well-being of our Nation’s civilian population.

Furthermore, we are reestablishing deterrence through deliberate international Reserve partnerships. Through these partnerships we are maximizing training opportunities to exercise Agile Combat Employment to increase the survivability of aircraft and personnel to outpace the targeting cycles of our adversaries. Growing our Reserve-led joint and international exercises such as Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) and NEXUS FORGE are examples of our international capability to fight tonight and defeat our adversaries in any domain.

Timely, consistent authorizations and appropriations for defense spending are necessary to organize, train and equip the most lethal force in the world. We are deliberately integrating our force design to meet future Air Force needs in the fast-paced race for technological, geopolitical and economic superiority against our adversaries but are losing valuable time. Your continued advocacy for concurrent and proportional fielding of the AFR will give us the time we need to recapitalize our fleet and build a force that can win any fight. Without time and resources, China, a well-resourced strategic adversary, will close the gap or even surpass us.

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Support of Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance

The AFR is a proven part of the Total Force. We deliver capability across the full spectrum of DAF missions through a framework that provides strategic depth and operational surge capacity at a fraction of the cost. The AFR continues to be a combat-ready force-multiplier, available to meet the demands of rotational requirements and Combatant Commanders in any theater at any time.

Air Superiority and Global Precision Attack

The AFR delivers the most experienced fighter pilots to the DAF. Reserve fighter pilots have flown an average of 1,200 flight hours in the F-22 compared to our AC counterparts' 400 hours. Additionally, every AFR F-22 pilot is a qualified mission commander and instructor pilot – they are the most lethal and experienced F-22 cadre in the world. In just the past two years the AC lost just under 200 pilots that we were unable to retain in the AFR due to a lack of modern aircraft.

Divestment without recapitalization to modern platforms such as the F-15EX, F-35 and post-block F-16 is creating mission disconnects and hinders the DAF's ability to retain experienced pilots. For example, we are divesting the Reserve Aggressors at Nellis Air Force Base (AFB), who provide 60 percent of 4th Generation F-16 training assets and close to 50 percent of all instructor pilots in training the DAF on adversary tactics, techniques and procedures.

Space

In response to the Space Force Personnel Management Act, we are amid a multi-year effort to transfer space operations-related programming to the U.S. Space Force and divest from space operations activities. All theater mobilization support is expected to end in Calendar Year (CY) 2026. Part-time AFR support will continue into FY28.

Global Strike

Nuclear Deterrence is a no-fail mission that allows the United States to project military power rapidly around the world. The AFR currently supports Global Strike with the B-52, B-1 and MH-139, encompassing over 1,700 positions across three states, flying 3,200 hours annually. The AFR operates the only DAF B-52 Flying Training Unit (FTU), training all Total Force (TF) B-52 aviators which provides a foundational training node and enabling continuity of strategic deterrence. Our experienced cadre of instructors train and certify an average of 24 pilots annually to man the backbone of the U.S. nuclear triad. B-52s and B-1s are the preponderance of the strategic bomber fleet and are the only strategic heavy bombers among allied nations. In FY24, AFR B-1s and B-52s from the 307th Bomb Wing at Dyess AFB, TX executed agile combat employment in conventional and nuclear exercises as well as bomber task forces and show of force missions around the world.

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As the AC divests the B-1, the AFR remains committed to sustaining this mission at Dyess AFB, TX. We provide 78 percent of B-1 aircrews, 54 percent of instructor pilots and 85 percent of evaluators for the DAF at 20 percent of the cost of our AC counterparts.

The MH-139 nuclear security operations mission is critical to supporting other Global Strike capabilities. As directed by the Secretary of the Air Force, the AFR stood up an MH-139 FTU to train AC and AFR aircrews in FY24. All MH-139 aircraft assigned to the AC at Maxwell AFB, AL will be transferred to Air Force Reserve Command (AFRC) in FY26. The AFR will accept sole flight training responsibility for the MH-139, equipping TF aircrews to execute standing nuclear security requirements.

Rapid Global Mobility

Power projection through Rapid Global Mobility hinges on a robust airlift enterprise and the extended range provided by a modern aerial refueling fleet. The AFR enables combat delivery through our Strategic and Tactical Airlift fleets. The AFR C-17 fleet provides 13 percent of the DAF Strategic Airlift capacity with 35 percent of the TF C-17 aircrews. Additionally, the AFR C-5M fleet provides 21 percent of the DAF Strategic Airlift capacity and 65 percent of the TF C-5 aircrews. The AFR's C-5 and C-130H fleets continue to face sustainment challenges due to aging aircraft, diminishing vendors and increased parts costs. Each of our mobility platforms requires continued investments in modernization to ensure survivability in contested environments.

In addition to mobility platforms, the AFR provides critical global capabilities with Aeromedical Evacuation (AE) and Aerial Port functions. The AFR supports over 60 percent of the DAF's AE requirements through 18 Squadrons and approximately 1,900 Reserve Airmen. AFR AE units deploy in every deployment cycle. Similarly, AFR Aerial Port squadrons account for 45 percent of the DAF's overall air transportation capability and fill 42 percent of Combatant Command (CCMD) rotational requirements. These functions underscore DAF's Global Power Projection and readiness.

Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance

Our AFR Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) support is critical to Joint and CCMD decision advantage against pacing threats. The AFR ISR and Targeting focused transformation effort is driven by current and future CCMD operations. We are realigning resources to stand up a Classic Association with the 17th Intelligence Squadron at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA. This restructure will increase Reserve targeting in support of U.S. European Command by 100 percent. AFR 5th Generation aircraft and advanced ISR operations require access to secure intranet systems requiring Secure Compartmentalized Information Facilities (SCIFs). The AFR is currently in the planning and execution phases to create four additional SCIFs in direct support of 5th Generation aircraft operations.

DAF demand is growing in several critical ISR missions including Over-the-Horizon Targeting (OTH-T). Increased AFR ISR manning would enable support to DAF OTH-T including the

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closure of Long-Range Kill Chains at speed. We appreciate continued support and appropriation of the Military Intelligence Program.

Command and Control

The AFR is the sole airborne Tactical Command and Control (C2) surge capability for CCMDs, utilizing the E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS). Current Air Operations Center (AOC) requirements drive the need to consolidate resources to prepare for strategic competition and support multiple theaters. The AFR is committed to providing targeted and specific capabilities for Battle Management C2. AFR re-organization of the C2 portfolio enables optimization of the remaining AWACS mission and future Battle Management Command and Control capability. Additionally, the AFR is upgrading tactical data link systems to support the transmission of critical data for real-time decision making and response.

The AFR provides 20 percent of the DAF Initiative Airbase Opening Force Element Packages and 50 percent of the AFR for each Air Force Force Generation (AFFORGEN) cycle. By re-aligning existing resources and streamlining processes within the AOC portfolio, the AFR can provide consistent rotational forces to CCMDs without an increase in manpower.

Role in Reviving Warrior Ethos

Recruiting and Retention

The AFR remains focused on recruiting and retaining Airmen to ensure the right skills are available at the right time. Despite a challenging environment, the AFR successfully employed TF recruiting strategies and implemented a deliberate, multi-year Human Capital Management strategy to align recruiting and retention efforts against targeted manning shortfalls.

To retain trained and qualified Airmen in DAF service, the AFR received an additional \$13 million from Congress in FY24 to incentivize the affiliation of fully qualified Airmen from the AC through the Reserve Component Affiliation Incentive Bonus (RCAIB). RCAIB offers the capability to retain low-density, high-demand skills while avoiding formal training costs and spin-up time. In FY24, the expanded RCAIB program affiliated 933 trained and ready Airmen into the AFR. While RCAIB is just one initiative, historical data show that members who affiliate into the AFR are likely to remain in DAF service for up to 28 years, reducing pension costs to the taxpayer by 37 percent. This is a cost-effective value as an operational Reservist costs 32 cents on the dollar while a strategic Reservist only costs 28 cents on the dollar compared to our AC counterparts.

FY24 ended with an overall retention rate of 88.5 percent, which remains in line with our 10-year historical average of 88.2 percent. A barrier to service for many Airmen is the potential out-of-pocket cost for travelling 150 or more miles to attend drill weekends. In late FY24, an amendment to the Joint Travel Regulation authorized the AFR to increase the Inactive Duty for Training Travel Reimbursement maximum from \$500 to \$750 per trip. Continued support for

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Reserve programs such as this is necessary to achieve our targeted retention rate of at least 89.5 percent, essential to support sustained end strength attainment.

Formal Training

Our Airmen provide a key competitive advantage over our adversaries. Initial skills and formal training programs serve as the foundation of our warrior ethos – our shared purpose and mission. Timely and consistent appropriations and funding are essential to keep the pipeline flowing for AFR recruits to attend Basic Military Training and Centrally Funded Schools (CFS). CFS includes flying and initial skills training courses as well as those required for functional and professional development.

Flying Hour Program

The flying hour program forms the bedrock of AFR's mission readiness and weapons system platform proficiency. Through this program we train agile and combat-ready aircrews, enabling them to operate in contested environments. However, aircraft availability continues to hamper the program. These limitations include depot throughput capacity, available parts, supply chain constraints and delayed aircraft delivery recapitalization for the F-35 at Carswell AFB, TX; KC-46 at Travis AFB, CA; HH-60W at Patrick SFB, FL and MH-139 at Maxwell AFB, AL. These limitations impact AFR's ability to reach combat mission ready status when required and has led to program under-execution in previous years. As the AFR recapitalizes its fleet and as aircraft availability improves, we are now faced with an underfunded flying hour program degrading both aircrew and maintenance proficiency and readiness.

In FY24, the AFR faced a different challenge to the Flying Hour Program with an excess of approximately 6,300 peacetime flying hours due to the C-5 overprogramming and transfer of KC-46 squadron at McGuire AFB, NJ to the Air National Guard (ANG). Further, aircraft availability and new weapon system delivery delays combined with real world CCMD requirements in the first half of FY24 prevented the execution of approximately 9,000 additional peacetime flying hours. While the AFR did not fully execute its 88,475 congressionally reportable peacetime hours, we flew a total of 92,770 hours including peacetime Operations & Maintenance, Transportation Working Capital Fund and CCMD requirements despite these challenges.

Last year, we introduced a flying hour program management tool that saves days of workload by providing our leadership with near real-time information to make data-driven decisions. This tool improves our efficiency and execution of the program by providing insight and transparency into our current flying hour execution. The AFR must make every dollar count towards readiness due to the tight margins in the flying hour program.

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

The AFR Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) program provides victim response services to Airmen who have experienced sexual assault or harassment. Our experts are focused

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on developing proactive, informed preventative action plans that address sexual assault and harassment concerns while also providing responsive victim support services. SAPR support enhances workplace safety, ultimately improving Airmen readiness, recruiting and retention.

Suicide Prevention

Through March 2025, there have been three confirmed suicides in the AFR. In CY24 there were nine confirmed deaths by suicide, an increase from seven in CY23. We are taking proactive measures to eliminate suicide across our workforce. As part of ongoing Reserve efforts to support the health and well-being of our Airmen, our expanded Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW) initiatives incorporate suicide prevention as a core component of its mission. The IPPW is standardized, evidence-based training supported by the Center for Disease Control and proven to effectively address community risk factors.

Mental Health

The AFR promotes good mental health and well-being through the Director of Psychological Health (DPH) program which provides non-clinical services to Reservists and their families through early intervention, support programs and crisis response. In CY24, DPHs offered 50,006 consultations, hospital coordination, medical interventions for referral and supportive counseling sessions ensured our Airmen and their families got the care they needed in a timely manner. All efforts to identify and support members with mental illness and the promotion of early intervention will minimize disruption to the mission and promote retention of a skilled and trained workforce.

Spiritual Health

Comprehensive Airman fitness includes spiritual health. The AFR Chaplain Corps contributes to the spiritual fitness and readiness of Reserve Airmen through the Chaplains and Religious Affairs team. In FY24, the Chaplain Corps conducted 27,498 counseling sessions and 52,358 unit ministry activities. Despite the AFR's part-time nature, Reserve Airmen can access on-duty chaplains 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The AFR Chaplain Corps also provides significant support to the AC. In FY24, our Chaplains volunteered for and served almost 28,000 man-days – support equivalent to 72 full-time members – to provide spiritual support to TF Airmen and their families.

Role in Rebuilding Our Military

Force Presentation

Our Reserve Airmen, their families and employers deserve deployment predictability. The AFR uses the established Reserve Component Period structure to seamlessly adapt to the DAF's AFFORGEN model of deployment timelines and cycles. AFFORGEN enables the AFR to posture forces in a cyclical, predictable manner providing stability for 67,000 Reserve Airmen and continued support to achieve National Security Objectives. Additionally, the AFR has fully

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leaned into DAF's target of restructuring into Units of Action and Deployable Combat Wings (DCW). The AFR is committed to producing one DCW per AFFORGEN cycle beginning in October 2026. Providing the requested resourcing for training, Military Construction (MILCON) and Reserve pay will allow the AFR to continue supporting DAF's target objectives while preparing our Reserve Airmen for deployments and mobilization in defense of our Nation.

Full-Time Manning

The AFR's full-time military support force structure prioritizes strategic depth while supporting cost-effective capability to sustain operational readiness. Our full-time force, consisting of Air Reserve Technicians (ART) and Active Guard Reserve (AGR) members, provides the necessary support for the training and readiness of the part-time force. With continued support from Congress the AFR can achieve requested ART and AGR end strength across the Future Years Defense Program (FYDP).

Pilot Manning

In FY24, the AFR retained 91 percent of its pilots to at least 20 years of service. A factor in this healthy retention was increased Experienced Aviation Retention Incentives for ART and AGR pilots to close the pay gap with the commercial aviation sector. Additionally, the AFR has created a Pilot Concierge Cell (PCC) to simplify the affiliation process for those AC pilots desiring continuation of service. The PCC provides a bridge between the transitioning AC pilot and the AFR flying squadron, creating a seamless process for both the rated aviator and the hiring unit. The PCC began operations in January 2025 and has already assisted approximately 50 AC pilots with the affiliation process.

Maintenance Manning

The AFR's funded maintenance ART authorizations have decreased by 606 positions over the last 10 years, an 11 percent reduction of the AFR's ART maintenance force. Adding to this, recruitment and retention of AFR ART maintainers continues to be negatively impacted by competitive private sector recruitment. This is evidenced by a steady decline in ART manning from 80.4 percent in FY14 to 73.3 percent in FY24, accounting for a cumulative loss of 826 full-time technicians over this timeframe. These long-term, on-going ART maintenance manning challenges have been directly tied to a 14.5 percent reduction in mission-capable and 12.5 percent reduction in aircraft availability rates. The AFR has been able to utilize Special Salary Rates, provide paid relocations and offer Recruitment, Retention and Relocation incentives to retain nearly 94 percent of its current ART maintenance personnel. Continued congressional support of these hiring and retention programs is necessary to rebuild AFR maintenance capability.

Equipment Parity

Credible strategic depth requires fielding of systems for the AFR alongside the AC. Effective support to the joint force demands continuous upgrades of communications equipment, support

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systems and weapons to build and sustain long-range kill webs capable of delivering effects within the most contested environments. Currently, the AFR fleet consists of 88.5 percent legacy aircraft that have an average age of 39 years old. As the DAF continues to reoptimize its force structure, recapitalization of legacy AFR aircraft is essential to providing strategic depth and surge capacity. Without equivalent modernization pathways, AFR units risk capability and experience shortfalls which will continue to degrade overall combat effectiveness.

Strategic competition has rapidly advanced with our adversaries' technological capabilities. To counter this, the AFR depends on a stable budget to work towards equipment parity and platform interoperability alongside the AC and our Joint partners. The Reserve currently provides 20 percent of the TF capability to open airbases in austere locations.

Infrastructure and Facilities

Maintaining and modernizing our infrastructure is necessary for readiness, force protection and ensuring a safe work environment. MILCON appropriations enable construction and recapitalization of critical mission facilities. We have used Facility Sustainment, Repair and Modernization (FSRM) funds to repair and modernize facilities and extend the service life of existing infrastructure. Inflation and rises in labor and material costs also continue to reduce our purchasing power across validated MILCON projects.

Weapon System Sustainment

Concurrent and proportional fielding in Weapon System Sustainment (WSS) is vital for wartime readiness as aircraft modernization and system upgrades, repairs and component replacement ensure survivability in contested environments. We thank Congress for your continued support of this critical program, which allows us to modify our aging legacy fleet to maintain lethality against our peer competitors.

Modular Aerial Spray System

As one of the AFR's three special mission areas, aerial spray is colloquially referred to as "Earth" in the collection of Earth, Wind and Fire. The 757th Airlift Squadron (AS) from Youngstown Air Reserve Station (ARS), OH operates the Department of Defense's (DoD) only aerial spray capability. In FY24, the 757 AS conducted 15 Modular Aerial Spray System (MASS) and Electronic MASS (EMASS) operational training missions, accounting for a combined total of 131 operational, positioning and support sorties, treating 170,041 acres and applying 125,275 gallons of product. These missions control insect populations, eliminate undesired and invasive vegetation and disperse oil spills in large bodies of water. Through the Strategic Basing Process, two C-130Js have been delivered to Youngstown ARS, with eight total planned for delivery by March 2026. The C-130J's projected aircraft capabilities expansion will enable AFRC to meet increased sensor requirements. EMASS certification on the C-130J model is scheduled for completion in FY27, ensuring no gap in Aerial Spray capabilities as the C-130H divestment completes in late FY26.

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Weather Reconnaissance

The AFR maintains the only operational military weather reconnaissance unit in the United States. The 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron (WRS) from Keesler AFB, MS, often referred to as the Hurricane Hunters, conducts aircraft reconnaissance missions into severe tropical weather during hurricane season and flies winter storm missions off both coasts of the United States. The 53 WRS C-130Js missions improve forecast accuracy by up to 30 percent, enabling commanders and civil authorities to make informed, fiscally responsible decisions to protect personnel and assets during extreme weather events year-round.

Over the last three years, the Hurricane Hunters flew nearly three times more hours than their historic average. In FY24, they flew in 16 tropical systems for 167 requirements and 50 winter season missions for 84 requirements, an increase over the past two years. These missions totaled 1,854 operational hours with continuous collection in regions void of other data collecting means, 574 of which were flown for Atmospheric Rivers.

Modular Airborne Firefighting System

As the only Title 10 aerial firefighting asset available for direct tasking, the AFR's Modular Airborne Firefighting System (MAFFS) mission supports U.S. Northern Command's Defense Support to Civil Authorities and represents 25 percent of MAFFS assets in the DoD. In FY24, AFR's MAFFS capability mobilized and flew 81 sorties and delivered over 216.3K gallons of retardant during the northern and southern California wildfires. In January 2025, these assets supported the National Interagency Fire Center delivery of 8,157 gallons of retardant in response to the southern California wildfires. AFR and Air Mobility Command have re-aligned DAF procedures with the National Wildfire Coordinating Group interagency aerial firefighting procedures to afford more safe and up-to-date integration with all participating firefighting aircraft.

Mission modernization and resourcing is essential for the increased demand of these three mission sets – Earth, Wind and Fire - that support multiple federal, state and local agencies and directly impact the health and well-being of our Nation's civilian population. The AFR has historically used a combination of WSS and National Guard & Reserve Equipment Account funds to sustain and provide for hardware and software upgrades.

Role in Establishing Deterrence

Teamwork begins within the DAF, where the AFR is an indispensable part of the TF. We provide an experienced and accessible Title 10 surge capacity to the AC of the United States Air Force and Space Force. We maintain readiness to support every core function. We also play a critical role as the DAF builds ties with partners and allies through training and military-to-military engagements.

Close collaboration with allies and partners is foundational for U.S. National Security interests. In summer 2024, the AFR launched the Reserve Allies and Partners Program (RAPP) to build

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strategic depth. RAPP is a deliberate development of enduring relationships amongst international reserve forces, leading to improved interoperability, readiness and education. Through the RAPP initiative, the AFR has provided educational resources and best practices to support reserve force development and combat capability integration with our allies.

Security cooperation and expansion of international reserve forces is an efficient way to increase combined lethality, provide depth of force and deter aggression. Within its first year of existence, RAPP has facilitated 28 bilateral engagements with leadership from 19 countries, including Australia, France, Netherlands, the Philippines, Singapore and the United Kingdom.

Training with Allies and Partners

The AFR is focused on being ready now, which requires us to train alongside the AC, joint partners and international allies. During Exercise RIMPAC in summer 2024, 563 AFR Airmen participated with 25,000 U.S. Sailors, Soldiers and Marines along with 29 partner nations to evaluate joint and multinational responses to scenarios including disaster relief, maritime security, sea control and complex warfighting around the Hawaiian Islands. The AFR played a key role in this unique training opportunity. During this exercise, the AFR demonstrated its resolve to allies and partners by proving our ability to use specialized munitions to target and sink ships. RIMPAC is an example of how the AFR, in conjunction with partners and allies, fosters and sustains cooperative relationships critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the world's oceans.

In February 2025, the Reserve developed and led Exercise NEXUS FORGE, a multi-theater, multi-domain, Joint event in the Indo-Pacific Command Area of Responsibility. More than 850 Servicemembers including U.S. Soldiers and Marines participated in this event, demonstrating successful joint and international interoperability while evaluating seven warfighting functions of the Expeditionary Air Base training and certification requirements. Our goal is for NEXUS FORGE and similar certification exercises to nest within larger DAF and DoD events such as Exercise BAMBOO EAGLE and RESOLUTE FORCES PACIFIC. The AFR's relationships with allies and partners play a critical role in our contributions to national security and defense of the Nation. Training events such as RIMPAC and NEXUS FORGE educate and support our allies and partners as they create and maintain their own Reserve forces within their spheres of influence.

CONCLUSION

The AFR is efficient, accessible, experienced, and lethal. We are the cost-effective solution for more Air Force in defending the homeland, deterring aggression, and if deterrence fails, defeating our adversaries. Thanks to your continued support, we can deliver effects anytime, anywhere to fly, fight and win in air, space and cyberspace. We are a can do force. We are the Air Force Reserve.