

United States Senate

February 13, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

I write in strong opposition to the Administration's decision to raid an additional \$3.831 billion from the Department of Defense (DoD) to construct barriers along the Southwest border. This reckless decision is nothing more than an end-run around Congress that seeks to fulfill a campaign promise at the expense of our troops, particularly those in the National Guard – putting the long-term mission of the Montana Air National Guard at risk and degrading the ability of Guard units across the country to respond to emergencies at home and abroad.

Last week, you touted the Department of Defense's commitment to supporting the National Defense Strategy (NDS) through transparency in budgeting decisions. The current NDS makes it very clear that our military needs to maintain agility in both logistics and employment of forces to win a great power competition. Nowhere does it mention a need to divert additional military assets or resources to address potential national security threats from the southern border.

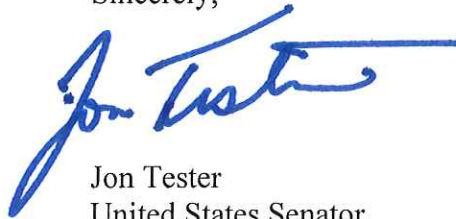
That is why Congress worked in a bipartisan manner to appropriate \$392 million above the President's Fiscal Year 2020 request for the procurement of additional C-130J aircraft. These critical funds are intended to support the increased air capabilities of Air National Guard units like the 120th Airlift Wing in Great Falls, Montana. The 120th recently returned from a deployment to the Middle East, where they flew the oldest C-130Hs in the U.S. inventory. Instead of scrambling each year to provide funding for C-130H maintenance and modernization, we must procure new C-130Js for units like the 120th. This is not only in our fiscal and national security interests, but it is also the right thing to do for the men and women who serve our country. Investing in newer aircraft would ensure that they carry out their missions—whether domestic or abroad—safely and effectively for decades to come. Undermining Congressional intent and robbing these units of their air capabilities to fulfill a campaign promise by the President is absolutely unacceptable and puts the safety of our military personnel in jeopardy by not providing them with the most modern equipment available.

I am also deeply troubled by the Administration's decision to raid as much as \$1.3 billion from the National Guard and Reserve Equipment (NGRE) account. Each year, Congress appropriates funding for this account to ensure National Guard units have the resources they need to carry out their missions. Most recently in Montana, after the 2017 wildfires burned more than one million acres of land, the NGRE account helped ensure our National Guard was

properly prepared for the subsequent fire season by securing needed firefighting buckets for its helicopters. Across the country, it has also helped secure critical equipment such as fire trucks, high frequency radios, snow plows and rescue equipment that have been used by Guard units to respond to emergencies and help save American lives. Yet critical funding for this account is now being diverted to build a border wall the President told us would be paid for by Mexico.

I appreciate your attention to this letter, and I look forward to your prompt response. For many Americans like myself, it is unconscionable to prioritize an unrealistic political campaign promise over our nation's solemn obligation to ensure the safety, readiness, and effectiveness of our men and women in uniform. I hope you agree and will rescind this reprogramming decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jon Tester". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the name.

Jon Tester
United States Senator