

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 21, 2011

The Honorable Michael B. Donley
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

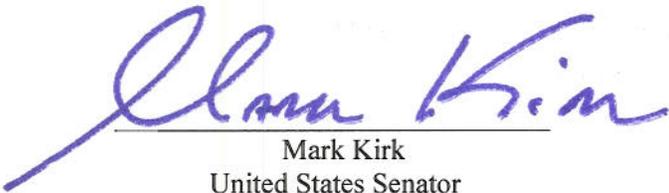
Dear Secretary Donley:

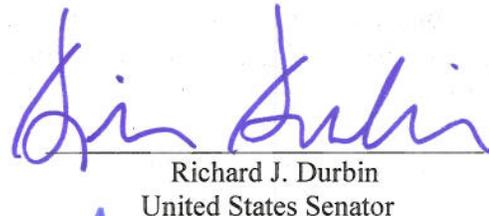
Since 2005, the Congressional delegation from Illinois has worked relentlessly with the Secretary of Defense, the Air Force and the Air National Guard to ensure a flying mission for the 183rd Fighter Wing, which would also allow for continuation of the firefighting mission at Springfield. We once again ask for your support to identify a flying mission for the 183rd and request an additional extension of the unit's firefighting capabilities beyond September 30, 2011.

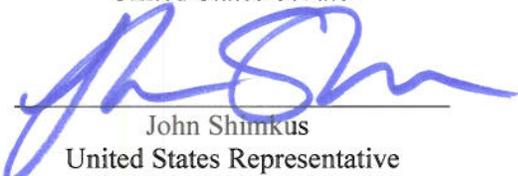
The 183rd Fighter Wing operated a flying mission in Springfield for over sixty years until the final aircraft departed in 2008. Since then, the unit has performed critical maintenance and repair on the Air National Guard's F-16 engines at a rate three times more efficient than military depots. As a result, the 183rd maintains a unique set of skills and expertise that are vital to the Springfield region. Moreover, the 183rd is well equipped to assume a new flying mission with its access to airport facilities and is critically positioned for rapid response to emergencies in the New Madrid Fault Line and across the nation.

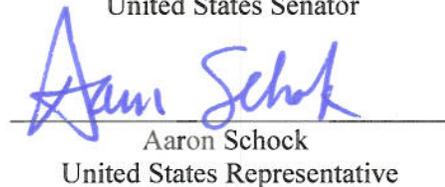
In addition, eliminating the current firefighting capabilities at Springfield would harm disaster response capabilities in Springfield, the rest of Illinois, and the region. A future flying mission would greatly enhance the 183rd's ability to rapidly support such disaster response in Illinois and the region.

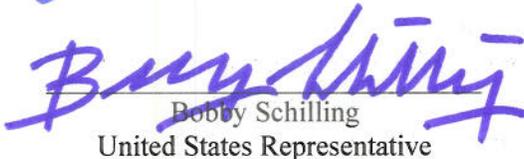
As the Air Force and Air National Guard continue to explore flying missions for the 183rd, we request that you delay the planned closure of the 183rd's fire fighting capability. We look forward to your response and look forward to working closely with you to identify a suitable flying mission for the 183rd Fighter Wing.

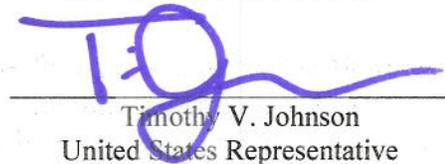

Mark Kirk
United States Senator


Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator


John Shimkus
United States Representative


Aaron Schock
United States Representative


Bobby Schilling
United States Representative


Timothy V. Johnson
United States Representative