

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

September 21, 2026

The Honorable Troy Meink
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Meink,

As Members of the South Carolina Congressional Delegation, we write to express our strong support for selecting the South Carolina Air National Guard's 169th Fighter Wing (FW) as an F-35A basing location in the upcoming Ops 16 & 17 decision process. The 169th FW has repeatedly demonstrated the operational excellence, combat readiness, and strategic value required in the future fighter force.

As you consider future basing locations for the F-35A, a key criterion should be infrastructure to support such a decision. For more than a decade, South Carolina Air National Guard (SCANG) leadership deliberately positioned McEntire Joint National Guard Base for the F-35 mission. McEntire's stand-alone military airfield and mature support infrastructure were recently lauded by the National Guard Bureau (NGB) as the "poster for NGB" and "decades ahead" of most bases. Additionally, the quantity, quality, and size of local training ranges and airspaces have been rated by Air Combat Command as a top national priority and asset for fighter training. These features, combined with strong community support, allow the SCANG to provide the most cost-effective and operationally ready location for F-35s.

While the 169th Fighter Wing is a strong candidate due to infrastructure capabilities, it also excels in personnel and mission tasking. The 169th FW was selected for immediate deployment in support of Operation Epic Fury because of its proven combat capability and readiness. Flying legacy F-16s, the "Swamp Foxes" were the first U.S. fighter aircraft to enter Iranian airspace on the opening day of combat operations and have remained at the forefront of the mission while generating the highest number of combat hours per aircraft in the deployed F-16 fleet. This combat performance validates decades of top-notch inspection results and documented Maintenance accomplishments. Upgrading 169th FW aircraft to F-35s will maintain this culture, critical experience, and skill pool in the U.S. Air Force. Additionally, the SCANG has for many years been manned above 100% and has been objectively identified in a military doctrinal report as the nation's top candidate for mission expansion due to South Carolina's population growth and the highest propensity to serve in the nation.

The infrastructure and personnel at the 169th FW are F-35 ready today. This is the result of a decade of deliberate preparation, as the Governor, congressional delegation, and state leadership have worked in lockstep to position the SCANG for this exact moment. The U.S. Air Force should place the F-35A where it will generate the greatest immediate return on investment, and no organization has demonstrated that return more convincingly than the 169th FW.

The 169th FW represents a rare convergence of ready infrastructure, proven combat performance, and unwavering state support. Selecting McEntire Joint National Guard Base as an F-35A basing location is the logical next step. We respectfully urge the Department to recognize this readiness and select the 169th Fighter Wing in the Ops 16 & 17 basing decision.

Thank you for your bold and decisive leadership of our Air Force. South Carolina stands ready to support you.

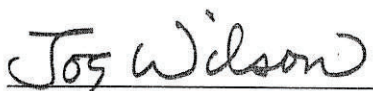
Sincerely,



Darline Graham
United States Senator



Sheri Biggs
Member of Congress



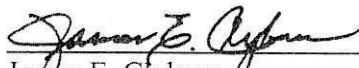
Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



Nancy Mace
Member of Congress



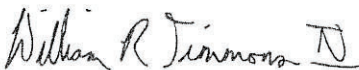
Ralph Norman
Member of Congress



James E. Clyburn
Member of Congress



Russell Fry
Member of Congress



William R. Timmons, IV
Member of Congress



Tim Scott
United States Senator