

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 23, 2009

The Honorable Robert Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

We are greatly concerned by reports that the Airborne Laser (ABL) program is facing severe budget cuts or even termination in the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget proposal. The ABL is America's premier directed energy effort and represents not only a tremendous potential for our nation's warfighters, but also for maintaining America's technological edge. It is critical to the future of our national security capabilities. For these reasons, we urgently request the ABL remain a robustly funded program.

According to the Missile Defense Agency, the ABL provides a unique capability *"to detect, track, target, and destroy ballistic missiles shortly after launch during the boost-phase. Its revolutionary use of directed energy makes it unique among the United States' airborne weapon systems, with a potential to attack multiple targets at the speed of light with a range of hundreds of kilometers."*

Our military warfighters agree that the ABL is essential for addressing many of the challenges facing our nation. General B.B. Bell, the former Commander of the United States Forces Korea, wrote in 2007, *"...from a warfighter's perspective, the ABL will be an important ingredient in our much needed and required layered missile defense capability for the Korean Peninsula."* This is a legitimate capability our nation needs.

As you know, the Airborne Laser began during the Clinton administration in the face of an increasing ballistic missile threat. Since that time, the proliferation of ballistic missiles has only grown. Today, outside of Russia, China and our Western allies, there are 3,000 ballistic missiles around the world. That number is continuing to grow every year. As threats proliferate around the globe, the relevance and importance of the ABL as the nation's only fully designed boost-phase missile defense system will continue to increase.

The ABL is performing well and is scheduled to shoot down a boosting ballistic missile by the end of the year. Should the ABL be severely under-funded or canceled, the promise of speed-of-light and extreme precision in the hands of the warfighter will disappear, as will the fragile industrial base that supports it. In short, we will have wasted the resources that have been well invested since the Clinton administration.

Again, we respectfully request your support for the Airborne Laser program.

Sincerely,



Norm Dicks
Member of Congress



Todd Tiahrt
Member of Congress



Trent Franks
Member of Congress



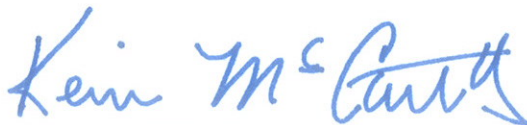
Martin Heinrich
Member of Congress



Todd Akin
Member of Congress



Buck McKeon
Member of Congress



Kevin McCarthy
Member of Congress