Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 15, 2008

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates,

As you are well aware the Pentagon's pursuit of a replacement aerial re-fueling tanker was derailed when the GAO upheld Boeing's protest of the $35 billion contract awarded to Northrop Grumman Corp. and the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Co., parent to Airbus. The GAO found a number of significant errors that could have affected the outcome. We applauded your decisive action in ordering Pentagon officials to postpone action on initial award and issue a revised RFP.

We continue to place the highest priority on the support of the men and women of the Air Force and their continued service in guarding the security of our nation. We are keenly aware of the need to replace the KC-135 fleet with a capability that is commensurate with the nation's defense and security needs, both for today and for the decades to come. Our paramount goal in the KC-X competition is to help ensure that the right capability is provided to the warfighter and that the Department of Defense and the taxpayer receive the best value for their investment. However, only through a thorough understanding of the warfighter's requirements and the evaluation criteria to be used, can a full and fair competition be held and ultimately provide a superior product for the warfighter.

We remain very concerned about the overly aggressive timeline to arrive at a revised RFP. Air Force and OSD officials have already missed two opportunities to meet Air Force and DoD requirements for a replacement tanker and we believe that the current rush to come to agreement on a revised RFP is putting at risk the third opportunity for a successful decision. Why rush the process on such a critical program that has obviously been challenged by a bureaucratic process that is in need of dire reform?

Congressional staff were briefed just last week on components of the revised RFP yet many questions remain unanswered, such as Military Construction Costs, especially for Air National Guard units and the states that support the aerial refueling mission. In the Pentagon's rush to initiate an aggressive timeline the most critical component --- a clearly defined and understood revised RFP has not yet been fully achieved --- which is why we ask that you allow more time for the revised RFP, including the metrics involved, to be vetted by the competitors and briefed to members of Congress. This procurement is far too important to the warfighter, to the taxpayer, and to the credibility of the Department to rush to failure again.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Bond
US Senator

Patty Murray
US Senator

Norm Dicks
US Representative

Sam Brownback
US Senator

Todd Akin
US Representative

Jo Ann Emerson
US Representative

Pat Roberts
US Senator

Todd Tiahrt
US Representative

Nancy Boyda
US Representative

Claire McCaskill
US Senator

John Shimkus
US Representative