

I have been a teacher in the South Burlington school district for over thirty years. I have taught in all three of the elementary schools, and have been here at Chamberlin for twenty years. I have also lived in the Chamberlin neighborhood since 1980. I have, therefore, had a considerable amount of time to witness the changing dynamics of the airport and military aircraft during both my work day and at home.

When I first moved into the Chamberlin neighborhood, the sounds of the airport were a slight nuisance to which one could adjust. Over time, however, the growth of the airport and the introduction of the F-16s has created a significant intrusion into the lives of those in the neighborhood. The level of disturbance has become a reality that no one could have predicted when we bought our homes or built our school.

The possibility of the F-35 entering this landscape is truly troubling. As a teacher of young children, I am concerned about the impact of the noise of military jets on young children's hearing. I cannot count the number of times I have been on the playground when the military jets have gone overhead, only to have children cover their ears in distress. I have experienced over the years a few children who were upset to the point of tears by the noise. We not only hear the noise, but often feel the vibration caused by the sound.

In the classroom, it is now a daily reality that at least twice a day our learning is interrupted by the noise of aircraft that causes us to stop what we are doing until the noise subsides.

There are those who would claim these are minor disturbances and that even the increased noise of the F-35 should not be a problem. I disagree. It used to be that those in this part of town simply “lived near the airport”. It has come to the point where it almost defines us, as it would for people who live under the shadow of a volcano, or along a seismic fault line. It is a constant presence that we only notice when we go somewhere else, and recognize the absence of the disturbance to our peace of mind.

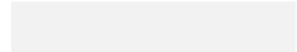
I am concerned that doctors will soon discover that it does indeed create a harmful level of stress in the psyche of a young child.

Too often we give the least consideration to those with the softest voice. In this instance, the young, the poor, the immigrant families in our neighborhood perhaps have the least say about this decision, and yet will be impacted the most.

Every week another group of local businesspeople who stand to gain financially take out another ad in the Free Press to convince us that it is everyone’s best interest for the F-35’s to come to OUR neighborhoods, not theirs

We might regretfully accept this state of affairs in the interest of national security, were there not other possible locations that are not in the middle of a city neighborhood, and a block away from an elementary school.

Given that there are other alternatives, I sincerely hope that the Air Guard can be persuaded to consider the needs of all of our residents in making a decision with possibly devastating effects on the health and safety of the most vulnerable among us.

  
Kathryn Buley,  
