

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4502

July 27, 2018

Lieutenant Colonel Roger Bourassa, USAFR (Ret)
Save Our Skies VT
60 Lake Street 1C
Burlington, Vermont 05401

Dear Lt. Col. Bourassa,



Thank you for your request.

As Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders and Congressman Welch have said repeatedly, the Vermont delegation believes the Air Force made the correct decision after a lengthy process five years ago, which throughout that time has been validated by both State and Federal courts. With F-35s scheduled to arrive in just 16 months, the Delegation believes it is long past time to sharpen the focus on how to help make this basing successful for the communities and the Vermont Air National Guard. Congressman Welch, Senator Sanders, and Senator Leahy have devoted their entire time in public service to improving life for Vermonters and our communities, including those close to the airport, and they strongly believe this basing is an asset to Vermont, the local community, and of course our national defense.

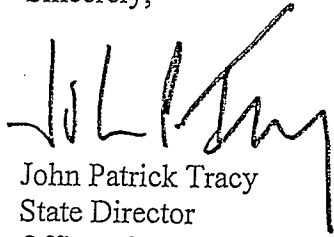
I want to assure you that your viewpoints have been well known and included throughout this entire process. From 2009 to 2013, while the Air Force considered basing, the delegation encouraged the Secretary to provide an open dialogue with the community. During 2012 alone, while the Environmental Impact Study was being conducted, eight public meetings or forums were held across Vermont, each extensively covered by the media and with participation by members of Save Our Skies VT. Each member of the delegation received extensive communications from Vermonters by phone, letter, postcard, and email, including several letter writing campaigns by members of Save Our Skies VT, and a staff meeting was held with individuals who are members of the group. Op-Eds, press conferences, and events were held surrounding the basing, including numerous by members of Save Our Skies VT, and all were well-covered in the media. The Environmental Impact Study process itself received more than 10,000 comments, which were answered by the Air Force, including those of Vermonters associated with members of Save Our Skies VT. After the Environmental Impact Study was finalized there were two court cases challenging its validity, and members of Save Our Skies VT played a key role in those cases and the coverage of the cases. Since the beginning of 2018, a series of articles in local forums and by news organizations have run, including assertions directed at the delegation by members of Save Our Skies VT, as well as additional opinion pieces expressing your group's positions.

The bottom line is that some opponents of this new mission for the Vermont National Guard continue to insist that there is an alternative flying mission for VTANG, and the Air Force has

repeatedly made clear that there is no such alternative mission. In fact, knowing of this assertion, Senator Leahy specifically asked the Air Force Secretary this question in live testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, and she affirmed that it is highly unlikely there is another flying mission for the Vermont Guard. Further, in a letter dated June 15, the Air Force explicitly stated that "there is no alternative to the F-35 being considered for basing in Burlington." On this fundamental fact, you and the delegation continue to disagree, and ever-ongoing discussion about it can serve no constructive purpose at a time when the community needs to be looking forward, and not backward.

As always, the entire delegation welcomes further written comments, especially thoughts about how to improve the transition for residents of local communities. But there can be little benefit to continuing to rehash past assertions which have been answered and with which the delegation respectfully disagree.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Patrick Tracy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

John Patrick Tracy
State Director
Office of U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy