

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 7, 2025

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Wicker, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Reed, and Ranking Member Smith:

We write to respectfully urge that the military construction projects from the Senate passed version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (S. 2296) under SEC. 4601 (MILITARY CONSTRUCTION) at Sioux Gateway Airport, home to the Iowa Air National Guard's 185th Air Refueling Wing (185 ARW), be retained in the final conference agreement of the Fiscal Year 2026 NDAA. We also want to convey our appreciation that these critical projects were included in the Senate-passed version of the NDAA and the recognition that they are essential to maintaining the operational readiness, safety, and long-term viability of one of the nation's most accomplished Air National Guard units.

Since fully transitioning to the KC-135 Stratotanker mission in 2003, the 185 ARW has been indispensable to our national defense by providing aerial refueling support to all Combatant Commands, NATO, and domestic disaster response operations. In taking on the Stratotanker mission, the Iowa Air National Guard was promised by the Department of Defense that the runway would be replaced with one capable of handling much heavier weights.

However, despite more than two decades of service as a heavy aircraft refueling unit, the 185th continues to operate from a runway designed for 40,000-pound F-16s. The KC-135's 322,500-pound takeoff weight far exceeds the original design parameters of the current runway, resulting in persistent repairs and constraints.

The 185th continues operating under weight restrictions, has relied on more than 225 takeoff waivers in the past six years, and can currently meet only 64% of its mission requirements. These limitations force refueling missions to make additional stops or reduce their offload, drastically limiting global readiness and operational efficiency. The FAA's most recent refresh of the runway in 2022 temporarily extended the runway's service life for only five years. In 2027, the runway will begin to fail, ultimately rendering it unusable for tanker operations. This underscores the urgent need to begin construction for these projects this coming fiscal year.

Despite these challenges, the 185 ARW remains a model of excellence. The Wing has earned the Air & Space Outstanding Unit Award 12 times since adopting the KC-135 mission and was most recently honored in 2024 for executing over 800 sorties and offloading more than 5.4 million pounds of fuel. The 185th Maintenance Group was recognized as the top-performing maintenance organization in the Air National Guard that same year. These achievements speak to the professionalism and dedication of its nearly 900 Airmen, 94% of whom are proud residents of Iowa, South Dakota, and Nebraska.

The Senate's inclusion of the *ADAL Aircraft Parking Apron, Extend Runway 13/31, Repair Runway 13/31*, and the *Warm-Up/Holding Pad* projects represent a long-overdue recognition of the 185th's vital mission and the Department of Defense's longstanding commitment to modernize this strategic infrastructure. We urge the conferees to preserve these projects in the final NDAA conference agreement to ensure that this world-class unit can continue executing its mission safely and effectively for decades to come.

Thank you for your leadership and your steadfast commitment to our service members.

Sincerely,



Randy Feenstra
Member of Congress



Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



Ashley Hinson
Member of Congress



Mariannette Miller-Meeks, M.D.
Member of Congress



Zach Nunn
Member of Congress