



TO: US Senators Bennet & Hickenlooper
US Representatives DeGette, Neguse, Hurd, Boebert, Crank, Evans, Pettersen & Crow
RE: Air Force Reserve Command Support
DATE: 4/28/25

We are reaching out on behalf of the Colorado Chamber of Commerce members and our business partners across the state to request your support for additional aerial firefighting aircrafts in Colorado. Wildland fires are growing in intensity, size, and frequency in Colorado, and continue to pose a significant threat to communities, infrastructure, lives, property, environment, and overall domestic security. In the last decade, 7.5 million acres burned on average per year at an average suppression cost of over \$2 billion.

Background: The Air Force Reserve Command's (AFRC) 302nd Airlift Wing (AW) at Peterson Space Force Base, CO, trains, equips and employs approximately 1,300 assigned mission-ready Reserve Airmen, of which roughly 200 are full-time, dual-status Air Reserve Technician employees in support of Air Force global operations. The primary operational mission of the 302 AW is tactical airlift and airdrop utilizing the wing's eight C-130H assigned aircraft. Additionally, since 1993, the 302 AW has been the only AFRC wing, along with three Air National Guard (ANG) wings, supporting the Department of Defense's (DoD) C-130 special mission of aerial firefighting, employing the U.S. Forest Service's Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System (MAFFS).

The U.S. Air Force recently announced that the 153rd Airlift Wing, the ANG unit located in Cheyenne, Wyo., another DoD firefighting unit, will upgrade its C-130H fleet with the C-130Js. The ANG is on track to eventually convert all of its remaining C-130H units to C-130Js, leaving the 302nd AW as the only remaining DoD aerial firefighting wing still flying older C-130Hs.

Appropriating eight C-130Js for the 302nd AW would ensure seamless integration with the total and joint force, both at home and abroad. Operating both C-130H and C-130J models at home and in overseas combat theaters presents Combatant Commanders with an onerous, non-interoperable, and costly logistics quandary, which can be mitigated with a common C-130J fleet.

As execution of the National Defense Strategy pivots to peer adversaries in the Indo-Pacific region and elsewhere, tactical airlift will play a decisive and high-demand role. The current inventory of C-130s, the age of the aircraft, and the uncertainty of a complete conversion are major risks to this strategy. However, overhauling the C-130H fleet entirely with C-130Js will reduce these risks by increasing airlift capacity, capability and mission effectiveness. Extending the C-130J production line by continuing to modernize the Total Force's C-130H fleet, including AFRC and ANG units, will ensure successful execution of our federal mission while preventing the significant loss of domestic airlift in times of national emergency.

To ensure the 302nd AW maintains its mission relevance with the most advanced airframe to support not only its aerial firefighting mission, but also global combat support missions alongside the completely upgraded C-130J active-duty Air Force component, we strongly urge Congress to add eight C-130Js for AFRC and encourage the Air Force to designate the 302nd AW to receive the upgraded planes.

The DoD simply cannot execute the National Defense Strategy without the tactical airlift capacity currently residing in the AFRC and ANG. The 2014 National Commission on the Structure of the Air Force recommended that new aircraft and equipment be fielded "proportionally and concurrently" across the active duty, AFRC and ANG. Consistent with this recommendation, the 302nd AW must fly the same aircraft, be adequately resourced, and operate in the same arena as their active-duty and ANG counterparts to remain an effective part of the operational reserve of the Air Force,

As the wildland wildfire risk increases, we are urging Congress support efforts to designate the 302nd AW in Colorado Springs to receive the next tranche of upgraded C-130Js. This will ensure the Colorado based unit maintains its mission relevance, with the most advanced airframe to support not only its aerial firefighting mission, but also interoperability in supporting global combat support missions.

We thank you for your consideration and please contact us with any questions.