

Representative Greg Walden – Statement for the Record, FY19 NDAA

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the FY19 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). I wish to raise an issue of importance for Kingsley Air National Guard Base in Klamath Falls, Oregon: the lack of sustainment for the F-15 platform, and the future of the base as a potential home to F-35s.

For the past several years, Kingsley Field has been the sole training facility in the nation for F-15Cs and F-15Ds. In 2015, Kingsley was given additional responsibilities as home to an active duty component to increase pilot production – a testament to the base’s performance and capacity to grow. They’re showing no signs of slowing down, either – the Air Force’s plan to add an Adversary Air contract to Kingsley’s mission next year will bring another six planes, eight pilots, and 39 maintenance workers to the base.

While this expansion is good news for Klamath Falls, it comes with a significant caveat: Kingsley’s fleet of F-15 Eagles is plagued by structural and maintenance issues that could result in grounded planes, wasted resources, or, worst of all, endangered pilots.

Twice in the past two weeks, significant portions of Kingsley’s fleet have been grounded due to safety and maintenance concerns. Expired parts for pilot ejection seats, lack of proper maintenance for longerons, and out-of-date maintenance manuals for electronic wiring systems are some of the main concerns that forced the base to ground their planes recently. But the overarching issue for Kingsley is the lack of a clear decision from the Air Force about whether to invest in the necessary sustainment for F-15s. Given the need to train pilots for the F-35, and the overall shift to that platform that must occur, it is time to begin Kingsley Field’s transition to become a home to the F-35.

There are many factors that make Kingsley Field an ideal home for F-35s. The continued growth and expansion of the Kingsley’s mission has been accompanied by overwhelming support from the local community. The base accounts for nearly \$90 million of economic activity in Oregon every year – they’re one of the largest employers in the area, and they continue to invest in the community. That explains why the city of Klamath Falls and Kingsley Field recently signed a lease-extension for the base, ensuring the Air Force and Air National Guard can have a home in Southern Oregon for the next 77 years.

The signing of this lease extension comes on the heels of another piece of great news for Kingsley – the Oregon Airspace Initiative, which was approved this past December, will increase the base’s airspace for training by 50%. This gives the base unrivaled capacity both in terms of airspace and availability of that space for training. Combine that with its over 50,000 square yards of ramp space, unwavering support from the community, and four decades of fighter training culture, and Kingsley Field is clearly a perfect home for the F-35.

Thank you again for the chance to submit this testimony. I look forward to working with you on the future of Kingsley Field and all other national defense priorities.