

Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers Statement for the Record
House Armed Services Committee NDAA Member Day Hearing
April 28, 2022

Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Rogers, I appreciate the opportunity to submit a statement for the record on a topic that is of utmost important to my district and others, the RC-26B aircraft. I appreciate your consideration of my statement as you work to craft the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The RC-26B is a fixed-wing Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) aircraft operated by several Air National Guard units. The plane is often flown on missions in support of Special Operations. It is fitted with a comprehensive suite of special operations-specific surveillance gear, including infrared imaging systems, TV spotter scopes, digital moving map displays, as well as digital and wet-film cameras. It is also fitted with secure radio communications.

In the last NDAA, the Air Force was given the go-ahead to divest from the RC-26B, despite having no plan in place to replace the aircraft's critical capabilities. Divesting the aircraft, without such a plan for replacing the plane's capabilities, would leave districts across the country without the tools they need to adequately maintain safety, combat foreign terrorists, and deter criminals from coming across our borders for nefarious purposes.

In my district, the RC-26B is stationed at Fairchild Airforce Base and is critical to combating international criminal activity. Organized criminals from abroad routinely cross our borders to facilitate drug and weapons smuggling, human trafficking, and other illicit activities. The profits from these illegal activities are in turn used to gain power, facilitate further criminal activity, and inflict terror both here and abroad.

The Air Force argued in the last NDAA that the RC-26B does not have a clear Title 10 footprint to justify them keeping it operational. This is simply not true, as the Department of Defense serves as the single lead agency of the Federal Government for the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States (10 USC 124). The Secretary of Defense is also authorized to support the detection, monitoring, and communication of the

movement of air and sea traffic within 25 miles of and outside the geographic boundaries of the United States (10 USC 284).

In recent years, smuggling of drugs across the U.S. southern border had wreaked havoc on our communities. Spokane, Washington in my district was recently designated by federal law enforcement as a fentanyl crisis spot, with illicit fentanyl seizures increasing by more than 1,000 percent in the last year.

Across the country, teen overdose deaths have doubled in three years, with fentanyl analogues responsible for the sharp increase. Our country is in crisis, and we cannot afford to lose any resources in this fight.

There is a clear Title 10 footprint for the aircraft, and it's one that needs to be filled by the RC-26B or a newer and equally capable aircraft.

I urge my colleagues in Congress to reverse the divestment of the RC-26B until the Air Force formulates a plan to replace the plane on a one-for-one basis with aircraft of equal or better capabilities. Without such a replacement, the U.S. would be leaving critical sections of the country and border unmonitored, giving free reign to criminals who are using the profits of their illegal activity to reign terror and suffering across the world.

Thank you for your commitment to our national defense. I appreciate the work you and your staff do each year on the National Defense Authorization Act.