

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 14, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Troy Meink
Secretary of the Air Force
Department of the Air Force
1690 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330

Dear Secretary Hegseth and Secretary Meink:

We write today with alarm over the dangers to operational and national security presented by President Trump's desire to execute an unconstitutional and unseemly acceptance of a \$400 million gift from the Qatari royal family in the form of a luxury Boeing 747-8 aircraft. To serve as Air Force One during his administration, the U.S. Department of Defense would be required to accelerate a comprehensive upgrade to the aircraft, **with the direct cost to the American taxpayer likely exceeding \$1 billion**. We are especially concerned about the operational security and counterintelligence risks of potentially using this aircraft for sensitive Presidential travel—and the massive cost to American taxpayers to identify and close critical vulnerabilities.

This announcement alone could pose a threat to Presidential protection now and in the future. President Trump's public statement on May 12 that the U.S. would accept the Qatari aircraft—*before* the aircraft was in our Nation's custody—provides a dangerous opportunity to exploit for foreign intelligence agencies and adversaries seeking to do harm to the United States, who have a great incentive to gain access to the aircraft and individuals with sensitive knowledge and understanding of the Qatar royal family's "Palace in the Sky."

Importantly, protecting Air Force One from compromise, attack or disruption is a critical mission of the Air Force and the entire U.S. Department of Defense. A threat to an Air Force One aircraft would not only endanger the President, but also the Air Force pilots and servicemembers in the 89th Airlift Wing who serve on or maintain the aircraft.

We know that the Air Force One fleet has extensive technical requirements each aircraft must meet in order to protect the President from any threats during travel, ensure the aircraft can continue to operate at the ranges necessary (such as through refueling capabilities) and guarantee that the President can communicate continuously and securely, a capability that would prove essential in an unforeseen foreign or domestic crisis. One of the most consequential aspects of this mission is to ensure nuclear command and control remains intact even while the President travels—a cornerstone of our deterrent.

It is unclear whether and how, if President Trump proceeds with this plan to accept this aircraft, the Department plans to ensure the aircraft can meet the necessary high standards for operational security, counterintelligence and Presidential protection under the hastened timeframe arbitrarily set by President Trump to use it for travel before the end of his term in 2029.

An unsecure and unprotected Air Force One presents clear dangers to our national security. Having the President travel without the necessary security precautions or secure communications renders the aircraft an easy target for adversaries to gain access to sensitive Presidential-level discussions or classified information, impeding the success of ongoing military operations and endangering our servicemembers.

This potential move also presents concerning indications of waste, fraud and abuse. Experts estimate that upgrading this unvetted aircraft to meet essential security specifications could cost upwards of \$1 billion. President Trump is claiming that this “gift” of an aircraft worth \$400 million is saving taxpayers money, but in reality, his decision will force taxpayers to foot an unnecessary bill – potentially more than \$1 billion—to convert a foreign-provided aircraft into the fortress necessary to protect him and his communications—all while taxpayers are *already paying* at least \$3.9 billion for the contract for two aircraft currently being built by Boeing to add to the Air Force One fleet.

One expert speaking to Defense News said that, to achieve all the features of Air Force One with this unvetted plane, this option would “be a step backward.” Instead of *accelerating* delivery of a secure plane for Presidential travel, as the administration contends, “they’d have to start over again with what they’ve been working on with the other 747-8” under the existing Boeing program. “Starting over again with the same plane would take a lot longer.”

This administration has been vocal about its commitment to efficiency and cost-savings in the federal government. But spending taxpayer money on efforts to upgrade this Qatari jet – when the President currently travels securely – is unnecessary and wasteful.

We require answers to the following questions regarding the operational risks surrounding the President’s possible acceptance of this aircraft, either in writing or in a briefing to us no later than June 1, 2025. Please provide answers at whatever classification level necessary.

1. Please detail the mitigation steps and counterintelligence countermeasures that the U.S. Department of Defense and the Intelligence Community would take to prevent foreign intelligence services from exploiting the aircraft before it is safely in U.S. custody.
 - a. Which agencies will perform counterintelligence and technical surveillance countermeasures?
 - b. What resources will be required for these agencies to perform these countermeasures?


2. Please detail the certification procedures and standard technical requirements for Presidential protection, operational security, counterintelligence and secure communications required of Air Force One.
3. Please provide a detailed plan for how the Air Force will retrofit this aircraft to certify that it meets these standard requirements.
 - a. Which agencies will be responsible for certifying that there are no physical or cyber vulnerabilities?
 - b. What resources will be required for these agencies to perform these certifications?
4. Please provide a cost estimate and required timeline for retrofitting this aircraft, including certifying against vulnerabilities, installing secure communications and installing other protective or other equipment necessary to meet the security and counterintelligence requirements for the Air Force One fleet.
5. What timeline has been directed for clearing the aircraft for Presidential use, and can the required certifications and preparations be conducted in such timeline?
 - a. What risks have you been directed to accept?
 - b. What vulnerabilities will remain as a result?
 - c. What mitigation steps will you take to address these remaining vulnerabilities?
 - d. How will these vulnerabilities impact the operations of the 89th Airlift Wing?
 - e. How will these vulnerabilities impact other core missions of the Department of Defense, such Presidential command and control during crises and contingencies?
6. Please provide a risk assessment, in coordination with the Intelligence Community, regarding if and how increased public scrutiny of Air Force One capabilities has affected threats to our Presidential protection procedures and capabilities.
7. Please provide details and documentation of what analysis of alternative aircraft or options the U.S. Department of Defense undertook before settling on the proposal for the Qatari aircraft.
8. Please provide copies of any communications between the Department of Defense and the Qatari government or its representatives regarding this proposal.
9. Reports indicate that the U.S. Department of Defense may be considering “loosening” requirements of the contract with Boeing to deliver 747-8 aircraft to serve in the Air Force One fleet in order to accelerate delivery from 2029 to 2027. Please provide details


of any proposed or decided changes to these requirements and documentation of the Department of Defense's analysis of tradeoffs of this desired acceleration.

10. Please provide the assessed impacts of the Department's plans vis a vis this aircraft on the planned delivery timelines for the existing contract for the other Boeing 747-8 aircraft currently in development, including the potential diversion of specialized DoD personnel to conduct or oversee these upgrades as opposed to work on the existing contract.


The American people deserve to understand this administration's plans for securing this aircraft, the vulnerabilities its use will present to our national security and the price tag they will be asked to pay for President Trump's decision to integrate this aircraft into our most sensitive fleet.


Sincerely,

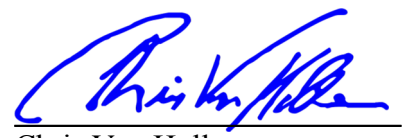

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Mazie K. Hirono
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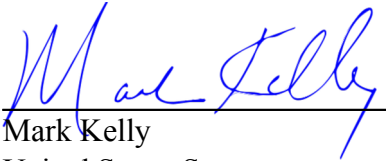

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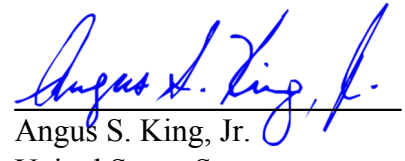

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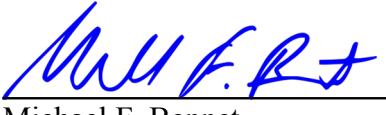

Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator



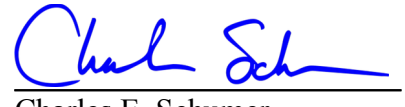
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