

Senate District 26 Candidate Responses to Safe Skies Questions
(Currently held by Fred Risser)

1 - Earlier this year, the Air Force selected Truax Field in Madison to receive a squadron of F-35 fighter jets by 2023. How were you involved in the local response to the proposal to bring these jets to Madison?

Brian Benford - I served to heighten the level of awareness around these insidious weapons of mass destruction amongst my social networks and the larger public; I lobbied policy makers, I wrote published op-eds, spoke to news outlets, spoke at public forums, attended protests and will use this campaign for the Wisconsin state senate- to continue my fight against the military-congressional- industrial complex.

Amani Latimer Burris – No response.

William Henry Davis III – No response.

Nada Elmikashfi – I was dismayed when I first learned about the F-35s placement earlier this year. This is a blatant example of the militarization of our communities, all with devastating environmental injustices for Madison’s working class. As an activist and organizer, I was a vocal advocate for rejecting the F-35s. In my role on the Sustainable Madison Committee, I actively fought against the F-35s and am currently working on noise and ecological mitigation policies in case the attempts to block the F-35s are unsuccessful.

John Imes - I have followed the local response to this issue closely in my role as a locally elected official, environmental nonprofit leader, and small business owner rooted in the community for over two decades.

Aisha Moe – No response.

Kelda Roys - I opposed the selection of Truax field, signed the Safe Skies petitions against the jets, and posted about it on social media. I also communicated directly with elected officials at the state, county, and municipal levels to share my opposition, including speaking with Rep. Chris Taylor to learn more about her research into F-35s.

2 - This fall, the Air National Guard will begin construction at Truax Field to accommodate their new F-35 fighter jets. Do you support the state and Wisconsin DNR stopping all construction at Truax Field until there is a complete investigation and approved cleanup plan for the PFAS contamination in groundwater, Starkweather Creek and Lake Monona caused by airport and Truax Field operations? If you support stopping construction, how would you achieve this goal?

Brian Benford - YES! We must continue to organize and build capacity to demand that our elected policy makers on all levels mandate that there is a thorough investigation and clean-up before any construction starts-or better yet-demand that the military cleans up and places these horrendous weapons somewhere else! Truax has a long history here in Madison-but not as long as there was once clean waters, soil and land.

Amani Latimer Burris – No response.

William Henry Davis III – No response.

Nada Elmikashfi – I will stand up to the military-industrial complex and say no to F-35s in Madison by using my platform to create barriers to their introduction. As State Senator, I will work to strengthen environmental protections, making it difficult to seize land and relocate PFAS-contaminated soil. I will also pursue litigation, and complicate the process by which construction and importation of F-35s will arrive. Additionally, the DNR needs to be empowered and given proper independence to conduct investigations into environmental issues without the threat of its funding being pulled. Outside of the Capitol, I will work with activists in the community to continue to build grassroots power so that we can sway other elected officials. I will fight to stop construction and get rid of the F-35s like my life depends on it, because for many in my community, our lives do depend on it.

John Imes - Yes, there should be a complete investigation to determine the extent of PFAS contamination and an approved cleanup plan before any construction that could lead to further PFAS contamination. To achieve this, leverage the building permit and DNR environmental permit approval process, including 30-day public comment periods, to require an investigation and approved clean-up plan as permit provisions.

Aisha Moe – No response.

Kelda Roys - Yes. Preliminary DNR reports are, and PFAS contamination of surface and groundwater is extremely serious and must be addressed immediately. I would support legislation and litigation (perhaps in conjunction with the DOJ/DNR or impact litigants such as the River Alliance) to halt construction, and call for a thorough investigation into PFAS contamination prior to allowing construction to move forward. I serve on the board of the Clean Lakes Alliance and chair their Economic Impact and Policy Committee. In that capacity, I drafted the organization's statement opposing PFAS and urging testing and cleanup of existing PFAS in our water. We are deeply concerned about PFAS and their impact on our lakes, the Yahara watershed, and our groundwater, and also on the disproportionate impact PFAS contamination will have on marginalized communities and people of color. When wells are closed and fish can't be eaten because our water is polluted with these "forever chemicals," drastic action must be taken.

3 - The current mission of the Wisconsin Air National Guard at Truax Field is training fighter jet pilots. There are 43 other missions available to Truax Field including engineering, scientific and medical missions which are more compatible with the surrounding populated urban area. Will you push for the Wisconsin National Guard and Governor Evers to obtain a new mission for Truax Field? If you support a new mission, how would you achieve this goal?

Brian Benford - YES! With Covid-19 tearing apart the fabric of our worlds, if there was ever a time to reevaluate the mission at Truax-now is the time. It goes without saying that the vast majority of state policy makers had recklessly supported placing these horrific weapons in Madison. I will continue to place a spotlight on the negative impacts of these killing machines and the insidious racial disparities that is enhanced by the military-congressional industrial complex-with these weapons as a prime example.

Amani Latimer Burris – No response.

William Henry Davis III – No response.

Nada Elmikashfi – From my platform as State Senator, I will push Gov. Tony Evers to reconsider the mission of Truax Field as a fighter jet pilot training center. I will also apply pressure on other elected officials to support our community and take a stronger stance against F-35s. I will pursue legislation and work with activists to protect our environment from encroaching, federal attacks like the F-35s. By building a coalition of opposition to the F-35s, we can then use that grassroots power to advocate for a new research-based mission that is more compatible with the city of Madison and UW Madison.

John Imes - I support a revised mission and will work to encourage our Wisconsin congressional delegation in Washington D.C. to support cuts in military spending, including the F-35 and redirect those savings to other budget priorities, including recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, long-term resilience and putting people first!

Aisha Moe – No response.

Kelda Roys - Yes. I grew up on the north side. I bought my first house on the north side. My parents still live on the north side. We all know it's near the airport, but the new F-35s are much more problematic than commercial jets, or even the existing F-16s housed at Truax. The area surrounding Truax Field has some of the only affordable housing left in Madison -- many residents cannot afford to move somewhere else in the city, or to cover the costs of things like soundproofing their homes to minimize the noise pollution from jets. The potential impact on schools and children is also troubling -- even more so during a pandemic, where people are working and learning from home, and having open windows and outdoor play could subject children to unacceptably high levels of noise pollution. Truax is situated in the middle of a residential area, only a few miles from downtown. Training fighter jet pilots is not congruent such a high density residential and urban location, especially given how much noisier the F35s are reported to be than F16s, and how much more frequently sorties may be flown. I will work

with community leaders to urge Governor Evers to prioritize alternative uses for Truax Field that are less disruptive, create less pollution, and have fewer negative environmental and quality of life effects. Madison is already a global destination for research, engineering, and health care -- why not take advantage of this by centering Truax's mission on the existing strengths of our community and region? Achieving this will be very challenging, as the military is moving full speed ahead with its plans for Truax. There isn't one magic thing which will work; that's I support a broad effort to address this issue -- comprised of public education, earned media, local and state legislation, litigation, community action, and coalition building. This is not unlike successful work I've done to help pass the first pro-choice bill in a generation through an anti-choice legislature, or to convince Republicans to pass sweeping criminal justice reforms. Rep. Chris Taylor provided exceptional leadership on this issue, and her meticulous preparation and voice will be missed at the capitol. I will work with local leaders, organizations, advocates, and legislators on the legislative piece of the puzzle, and use my platform to support the other parts of this movement.

4 - The selection of Truax Field for the new F-35 fighter jets would not be possible without the support of Senator Tammy Baldwin. Will you demand that she reverse her support for stationing the new F-35 jets at Truax Field?

Brian Benford - I have written letters to Sen. Baldwin expressing my complete dismay in her support of these weapons of mass destruction that were designed to indiscriminately kill marginalized people who look like me around the world. As your next state senator-I will amplify your voices and demand that she reverses her support and explain why- on one hand - claim she is against unjust wars-yet -can lend support to this boondoggle.

Amani Latimer Burris – No response.

William Henry Davis III – No response.

Nada Elmikashfi – Yes. Tammy Baldwin was elected with a mandate to fight for progressive issues. She shouldn't have supported the introduction of F-35s to Truax and we shouldn't be afraid to criticize that position. I will demand that Sen. Baldwin reverse her support, and organize consistent pressure to get her to do so. I'm proud to have the endorsements of progressive climate action organizations like Sunrise Movement-Madison and the Youth Climate Action Team and local environmental activists like Raj Shukla. I will work with these climate organizations and activists, as well as those impacted stakeholders by the introduction of F-35s to Truax, to fight to get Sen. Baldwin to reverse her support. In the end, her constituents urgently need her to reconsider her position and make sure that our progressive values are being realized in our community.

John Imes - Given the military's decision to locate the new F-35 fighter jets at Truax Field, I'll focus my energies on encouraging both Senator Baldwin and Senator Johnson, and the entire

Wisconsin delegation to support further cuts in military spending, including the F-35 and redirect those savings to other budget priorities.

Aisha Moe – No response.

Kelda Roys - I greatly respect Senator Baldwin and everything she has done and continues to do for Wisconsin. She has been a progressive champion for our state on so many issues, for many years. In this case, however, I disagree with her position. Even so, having known her for many years, “demanding” she reverse her position will not be effective. Rather, inviting her into a conversation among colleagues whom she respects, where we can share our concerns and listen and respond to her position is much more likely to yield a positive result. I would also like to facilitate conversations among Sen. Baldwin, her staff, and our constituents who will be directly affected by the F-35 jets, and work with groups like Safe Skies Clean Water on the most effective strategies to achieve the reversal we all seek.

5 - Truax Field was selected for the new F-35 fighter jets despite the greatest impacts falling on low-income and families of color living adjacent to the base. Will you promote the creation of an environmental justice office at the Wisconsin DNR to help protect residents from environmental injustice and environmental racism?

Brian Benford - I love this idea- and will advocate for it with more guidance from this group. What I can say- is that we need to restore the DNR to its past ability to be free from partisanship forces that tend to only serve corporations, fossil fuels and others that have total disregard in environmental justice and racial justice issues. As the only candidate in this race that has met with the Midwest Environmental Justice Organization and youth from East Madison Community Center to understand their efforts to have Starkweather Creek properly tested; and other advocacy actions- I will continue this fight as your next senator.

Amani Latimer Burris – No response.

William Henry Davis III – No response.

Nada Elmikashfi – Absolutely. The climate crisis is an environmental racism crisis. Climate justice is the answer. I am the only candidate in this race who has a Climate Justice platform, which centers those who will be impacted the most by the climate crisis. We all will suffer from climate change, but BIPOC and marginalized communities such as working class Madisonians will bear the brunt. My platform calls for heightened environmental protections, targeted investments into communities that suffer disproportionately from climate change, and increases accessibility of our beautiful outdoor spaces. The creation of an Office of Environmental Justice at the Wisconsin DNR is a necessary step in our mission to protect residents from environmental injustice and environmental racism. We often think about conservation and ecological contamination to be a rural issue. But here we see that this issue affects the second largest urban population center in Wisconsin.

John Imes - I support the creation of an environmental justice office at the Wisconsin DNR and in order to help protect Madison neighborhoods, schools and businesses impacted by current aircraft operations and potentially the F-35, I support creating a Clean Energy Jobs District that includes good paying union jobs and apprenticeships to install green roofs and green infrastructure, perform deep energy efficiency retrofits of homes and businesses to improve sound insulation, reduce carbon emissions, and reduce urban runoff and flooding. As State Senator, my advocacy for Green New Deal strategies like this will be stronger than my opponents and the opposition lobbying against it because of my background as a locally elected official, environmental manager, environmental nonprofit leader and small business owner that make me a highly credible messenger on the health and socio-economic case for the Green New Deal.

Aisha Moe – No response.

Kelda Roys - Yes, this is a great idea. I support increased funding and independence for DNR overall, and an environmental justice focus is long overdue, given Wisconsin's shameful racial disparities. Simply creating an office or division won't be sufficient, however, unless the agency overall builds an environmental justice into its mission and culture, and unless that division has clear regulatory and enforcement powers. Beyond creating an office and integrating environmental justice into DNR's mission, however, I would like to see a racial justice focus in referrals to the DOJ for prosecuting polluters, and a racial justice lens applied during the permitting and regulatory process. If a disparate impact is found on communities of color, that should be a basis for denial/regulatory action. We should also restore the Public Intervenor, the state's top environmental watchdog -- an attorney housed at DOJ to go after environmental law-breakers.