

Safe Skies Clean Water Wisconsin – TALKING POINTS

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COVID-19 requires re-examining our priorities

Our country was ill prepared for the coronavirus epidemic. The enormous funds spent on the F-35 fighter jet program could have been used to prepare for the epidemic and save lives, rather than wage war with a first strike, nuclear-equipped offensive weapon like the F-35. It costs \$44,000 to fly an F-35 jet for one hour, money better spent on essential medical staff. The \$110.3 million cost of a single fighter jet would provide much-needed medical resources that could have prevented and minimized the spread of the pandemic. The \$2.21 billion dollar cost for the proposed squadron at Truax Field would pay for 61.4 million coronavirus tests or nearly 650 million N95 respirator masks, sorely needed to prevent deaths from the coronavirus. **F-35 jets cannot fight pandemics.**

In the midst of COVID, four days after the President declared a State of Emergency, the U.S. Congress had the audacity to request more taxpayer dollars to purchase 98 F-35 fighter bombers, 19 more fighter planes than the Pentagon's actual request.

The scope of a pandemic shows that the biggest threats to our security can come through inattention to public health. Pandemics, climate change, inadequate infrastructure and education, and lack of affordable housing are some of the biggest threats to our collective well-being. We urgently need investment in health care, the environment, education and other sectors that help us thrive. In order to do this, our leaders need to start investing money where it matters—not in weapons of war but in programs that build truly resilient communities.

Environmental Racism

For over 80 years the military has been dumping and burning toxic chemicals at Truax Field. PFAS “forever chemicals” cause a number of health issues from cancer to immune system deficiency to endocrine disruption (a process where the chemicals mimic hormones and interfere with development). They also make people more susceptible to COVID. The people most directly affected—those who live around the base—were not aware of the toxins for many years. Even when the government acknowledged, the people living in these neighborhoods are provided no alternative options than to drink the available water, nurse their children, and bathe in these toxins. There are people in our community who continue to rely on the polluted fish they catch in area lakes and creeks as a food source.

The extreme noise pollution from these aircraft causes hearing damage. Said Dr. Elizabeth Neary: “The Air Force concluded in its draft Environmental Impact Statement that locating the F-35s at the Truax Air National Guard Base would have a disparate negative impact on children, people of color and low-income individuals who live in dense populations in and around the

Dane County Regional Airport... Health impacts of noise pollution include overproduction of stress hormones, interruption of sleep, ringing in the ear, negative effects on mental health, increased blood pressure and impacts on cardiovascular disease... which can lead to delayed speech development, reduced attention, impaired concentration, long-term memory issues and decreased math and reading comprehension.”

We should not be compounding already unacceptable stress and trauma levels by deliberately targeting low-income communities with the introduction of these fighter jets into their daily lives.

The PFAS Connection

About 650 U.S. military bases are contaminated with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, commonly called PFAS. These man-made chemical compounds—about 6,000 in all—are highly persistent in the environment and the human body. That means they don’t break down and can accumulate over time. Exposure to these compounds has been linked to cancer, thyroid disease, high cholesterol, ulcerative colitis, pregnancy-induced hypertension and other health risks.

Chemical companies like 3M and DuPont started manufacturing PFAS chemicals back in the 1940s. Military bases across the country, including Truax, started using PFAS in fire-fighting foam in the 1970s or earlier. Bases like Truax used the foam to put out fires and train fire fighters. Fires were purposefully set in burn pits and then sprayed with the toxic foam. From there it seeped into groundwater, surface water and eventually drinking water.

Truax had two burn pits. One was constructed in the 1950s by the Department of Defense on Dane County Airport property right next to Starkweather Creek. In 1990, the DNR asked the Air National Guard who was responsible for investigating and cleaning it up. Over 30 years later, no action has been taken.

Some limited testing done a few years ago found PFAS levels up to 46,000 parts per trillion (ppt) in airbase soils and groundwater. (Wisconsin recently proposed a 20 ppt groundwater standard). In late 2019, the DNR found that water in Starkweather Creek had 400 ppt of the PFOS compound and foam collected near the Olbrich Park boat launch had between 80,000 and 90,000 ppt. In January, 2020, fish tested in Lake Monona had PFAS concentrations of 110,000 ppt and fish in Starkweather Creek had up to 180,000 ppt.

So far the Air Force has refused to clean up the water and soil contamination it has been causing for over half a century. We are concerned that the Air Force and Air National Guard may soon try to begin a multi-million dollar construction project at Truax to prepare for the F-35 jets, which will likely stir up more contamination. The DNR has said they need to do a full site investigation and remediate the contaminated soil and water.

Climate Change and Pollution

Jet fuel is used for propulsion of the aircraft with the aircraft holding up to 2,761 gallons, stealth mode, or two extra 600 gallon drop tanks for a full fuel load of 3,361 gallons of fuel for every flight. **The F-35 uses 60% more fuel** than the current F-16s and the emissions spewed by the jet's exhaust are fine particulates that are bad for children and everyone else to breathe. The F-35A can burn 4000 lbs./597 gallons of JP-8 jet fuel per hour.

The Air Force conducted no evaluation of air pollutant exposure to neighborhoods adjacent to Truax Field.

The fossil fuels used by the F-35s are diametrically at odds with the professed desire of local leaders to address climate change and create a sustainable community. The U.S. Department of Defense is the single largest producer of greenhouse gases in the world, with the largest portion of Pentagon fuel consumption being for military jets.

A Complete Boondoggle

As the F-35 enters its 20th year of development, program officials have delayed full production indefinitely because the program still can't complete the initial operational testing phase. The latest annual report by the Pentagon's Director of Operational Test & Evaluation admits that the failure to deliver a critical simulation facility makes it impossible to complete the initial and required operational tests. One version or another of the simulation facility has been in the works by Lockheed Martin or the Navy for 20 years and is still years from completion. (Truax is supposed to have a simulation facility.)

Program officials continue to struggle against a tide of F-35 design flaws, according to the Pentagon report. Nearly every time the engineers solve one problem, a new one is discovered. The modernization of the relatively new stealth fighter's software and hardware was initially to be delivered by 2024, but now will not be handed over until 2026, according to a report released by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on 12 May, 2020.

"There can be little doubt that, after 20 years, the F-35 is a complete boondoggle," the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) commented in a detailed analysis this February. "DOT&E warns that many of the F-35s that were delivered early in the cycle are not combat-ready. It remains to be seen if these aircraft, which happen to be the most expensive ones, will ever serve a purpose beyond being demonstration trainers or spare parts repositories." When the Acting Secretary of Defense left the Pentagon in January, he referred to the F-35 with an obscenity and said the United States had created a monster.

False promise of 'local jobs'

There will NOT be local jobs created from the forcing of F-35 bombers into our community.

The Air Force's EIS claimed that they bring 'up to 64 jobs'. Half of these jobs will go to the South Carolina fighter squadron at Truax and are not under the jurisdiction of the WI Air National Guard. The other half of these jobs, per the contract between Lockheed Martin and the U.S. military, are slated for Lockheed Martin's contractors for the flight simulators and maintenance of the jets. This means there will be zero jobs created for our WI National Guard. In fact, it may result in the WI National Guard losing maintenance jobs.

Our neighborhoods would be better served with increased funding for hard-working, local, community-based organizations in Madison designed to add value. The Northside Planning Council, via different programs during the last five years, has created more than 150 jobs. That's more than double the jobs the Air Force claims the F35s may bring.

Purpose of Fighter Jets

The purpose of fighter jets is to kill people. There is no declaration of war and no due process, but we use them anyway. Hosting such an offensive weapon seems ludicrous when our current security threats now come from pandemics, cyber-attacks and terrorism, none of which the F-35 can counter.

Air Force decision

By selecting Truax Field to receive a squadron of F-35 fighter jets, the Air Force ignored the comments and concerns of Madison residents. Over 6,400 comments were submitted on the EIS for all five sites, but nearly 90% of these addressed the selection of Truax Field. The Air Force selected the site with the worst environmental impacts and with the greatest impacts to low-income and minority families as well as children. It ignored the location of Truax Field within a dense urban city.

Alternative Mission for ANG

If we want the 115th Fighter Wing to be an asset to our community, we should find a new mission that is appropriate and compatible for our urban area. We could trade in fighter jets for a medical and/or disaster relief mission, which might well provide more jobs than the current combat aircraft mission and align more closely with Madison's progressive values.