United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 18, 2016

The Honorable Deborah Lee James
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Secretary James:

We write to request your urgent attention to replacing the UH-1N helicopters that provide security for America's intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) fleet. On February 10, 2016 you told the Senate Appropriations Committee Subcommittee on Defense that the Air Force will decide its course of action for replacement of the helicopters in the coming months, and just this week you confirmed to the House Armed Services Committee that the Air Force is still looking at multiple paths forward. We strongly believe that any further delay of a decision with such national security significance is unacceptable, and urge you to expedite this process as much as possible.

The nuclear security forces located at Malmstrom, Minot and F.E Warren Air Force Bases all depend on these antiquated Vietnam-era helicopters to provide quick reaction force protection and convoy security protection. The UH-1N, however, meets the requirements for neither - something the Air Force knew long before our nation heightened its attention to terrorist attacks following September 11, 2001. Additionally, the *Congressional Quarterly* reported last month that the Air Force failed to meet required standards in its most recent Mighty Guardian test exercise for ICBM security response capabilities. Due to public knowledge and reporting that the helicopter is not meeting security requirements, and the Air Force confirmation thereof, we feel that the risk posed to our national security is far too great to delay replacement of these severely outdated assets.

The Fiscal Year 2017 President's Budget Request, according to your testimony, puts the Air Force on track to replace these helicopters by roughly 2019. However, the Air Force has indicated that this schedule could be expedited. Knowing that Congress is set to embark upon the annual authorization and appropriations process, we request the Air Force identify and put forth for congressional consideration the fastest and most cost effective method to replace the UH-1N helicopters as soon as possible.

The Air Force has known the shortfalls of the UH-1N helicopter for too long; the cost of delaying action is far too great a risk for our nation to take. We thank you for your continued attention to this very important priority, and look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Steve Daines
United States Senator

Jon Tester
United States Senator

John Hoeven
United States Senator

Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senator

Mike Enzi
United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Deb Fischer
United States Senator

John Barrasso
United States Senator