

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 14, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Meink:

We write to express great concern about reports that the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA) is considering proposals to drastically restructure USAFA's faculty—cutting staff, lowering the ratio of civilian faculty, and reducing the number of faculty with doctorates—to the detriment of preparing future leaders for the Air and Space Forces. We urge you to carefully consider efforts to restructure USAFA's teaching faculty and reject any proposals which would undermine the future lethality, readiness, or strategic deterrence capability of the Air Force and Space Force.

USAFA consistently ranks as one of the nation's best undergraduate colleges, drawing many of the best and the brightest future Airmen and Guardians. The combination of a top-tier academic curriculum, cutting-edge research capabilities, rigorous military training opportunities, and competitive NCAA athletic programs are critical for attracting the top talent needed to deter and prevail in the future fight. Significant and deliberate investment of resources, in concert with Congressional oversight, have contributed to the world-class educational system that exists today, including specific focus on faculty composition to ensure breadth, depth, expertise, and continuity across critical fields and domains, at the lowest cost to the taxpayer. Civilian faculty, in particular, contribute deep expertise and a long-term presence that uniformed members needed for operational positions, cannot provide.

Recently circulated proposals by USAFA leadership would require deep cuts in both civilian faculty and PhD expertise. As Secretary, Congress granted you authority to set and oversee the composition of the Academy faculty. While we recognize that some reductions in the civilian workforce may be required, we urge you to ensure faculty do not bear the brunt of those cuts, to assess the impact of any potential reductions before they occur, and to explore all avenues to preserve the current composition of civilian faculty. While military replacements may reduce some of the impact, the expertise, continuity, and leadership lost with such cuts would take decades for the Academy, and hence the Air Force and Space Force, to recover from.

A drastic and swift reduction in civilian faculty without appropriate replacements would force the Air Force Academy to make major curriculum changes, to include reductions in core courses and the removal of a wide variety of majors, minors, and other academic opportunities, such as critical language and STEM programs. At worst, these changes could violate processes and requirements for both institutional and Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accreditations. Both institutional and ABET accreditations are globally recognized

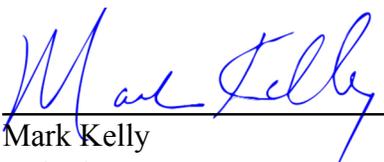
standards for educational excellence, and disruption to or loss of either would be catastrophic for the Academy’s recruitment pool and ability to train future officers in critical skills needed for a variety of career fields in the Air Force and Space Force.¹

We know that, as a PhD in aeronautical and astronautical engineering, you understand and appreciate the critical skills and knowledge acquired through formal education in STEM fields. The lethality and readiness of our Air Force depends on the Department’s future leaders’ ability to solve complex, real-world problems in tomorrow’s contested environments to ensure our battlefield advantage. In the Advance Policy Questions you submitted to the Senate Committee on Armed Services, you highlighted the that the “key to developing and retaining our personnel lies in fielding a continuum of training, education, and experiential development that fosters Air Force leaders.”²

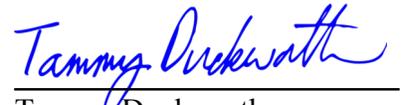
As you begin your service as the Secretary of the Air Force, we urge you to weigh the impact of any and all faculty and staffing proposals on USAFA’s mission—“To forge leaders of character, motivated to a lifetime of service, and developed to lead our Air Force and Space Force as we fight and win our Nation’s wars.” Therefore, we urge you to weigh the impacts that proposed changes would have on USAFA’s academic programs, and USAFA’s capacity to produce graduates in STEM career fields. Additionally, we urge you to honor the commitments made to current and future cadets by ensuring any changes made to faculty do not disrupt the educational experience provided by the Air Force Academy. The Academy’s ability to provide a world-class education must remain a top priority so the Air and Space Forces can meet the demands of the future operational environment and continue to recruit and retain the best and brightest of America.

We trust that as these decisions are being made you will consider the USAFA’s core mission and protect its ability to prepare the nation’s future leaders. We look forward to hearing from you by May 30, 2025.

Sincerely,



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

¹ <https://nces.org/licensure/#:~:text=Engineering-,Education>

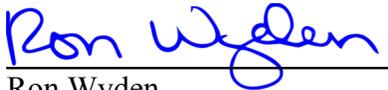
² https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/meink_apq_responses.pdf



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