

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 27, 2013

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary
Department of Defense
1300 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Hagel:

We write to once again urge you to finalize the transfer of the C-27 J aircraft to the U.S. Forest Service, which your Department has repeatedly indicated will occur by the end of the fiscal year.

On April 29 and July 26 of this year, we received letters from Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Technology and Logistics Frank Kendall indicating that the Department intends to declare the C-27s as excess to the needs of the Department of Defense by the end of the fiscal year. Yet with only days to go until October 1st, the transfer of these aircraft has yet to occur.

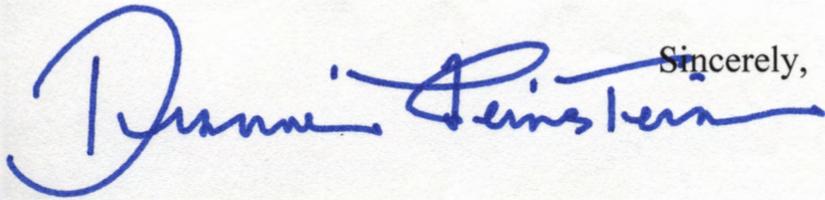
As you know, Section 1091 of the National Defense Authorization Act for 2013 would allow the U.S. Forest Service to obtain up to seven of these planes to help address the Agency's dire shortage of firefighting aircraft. Put simply, we believe the transfer of these planes is critical to the safety of our constituents and the health of our forests. Both of our States have experienced the tragic consequence of out of control wildfires this year:

- The Rim Fire in California destroyed more than 250,000 acres of pristine forestland, threatened major reservoirs which serve of much of Northern and Central California, and charred large swaths Yosemite National Park, of one of our nation's most iconic natural areas.
- The Yarnell Hill Fire in Arizona tragically claimed the lives of 19 highly trained professional 'Hotshot' firefighters in the largest wildland firefighter casualty incident in more than half a century.

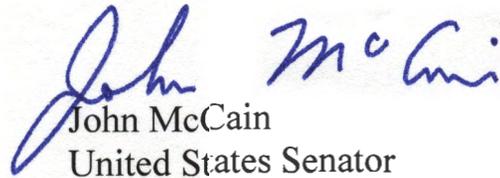
While we cannot say for certain that additional firefighting aircraft would have prevented these incidents from occurring, the new C-27Js will unquestionably help the Forest Service contain and extinguish future fires.

According to data from the National Interagency Fire Center, fuel moisture conditions across the Western United States remain near record lows, indicating that we still can expect significant fire activity in the coming years. Considering that these planes still need to be de-militarized and retrofit for the firefighting mission, further delays in the decision to excess these aircraft will jeopardize their use during the next fire season. Once again, we urge you to finalize your decision to declare these planes as excess to the needs of the Department of Defense so that we can begin the process of putting these planes to good use.

Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you to ensure that these planes can be used in the coming weeks.

 Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator


John McCain
United States Senator