

United States Senate

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION,
AND FORESTRY
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

May 18, 2022

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman, Senate Committee on the Armed Services
Senate Russell Office Building Rm. 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on the Armed Services
Senate Russell Office Building Rm. 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman Reed and Ranking Member Inhofe:

It is time for the Senate to fully support the Air Force's basing decision for U.S. Space Command (SPACECOM). The 11th Unified Combatant Command was established on August 29, 2019, with the vital mission to secure the high ground of space. After 15 months of delay, Congress just received reports from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Department of Defense Inspector General (DoD IG). Both reports confirmed that the Air Force basing process was thorough, legal, and comprehensive; both confirmed Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama ranked highest at every stage of the process.

To date, I and others from Alabama have largely declined to engage in a public back and forth on this issue because doing so would not have been helpful to national security. Instead, we have sought to allow the facts and the integrity of the process to speak for themselves. Given the recent DoD IG and GAO findings, as well as the grave threats we face from China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, we must move forward.

For the sake of national security and military readiness, I will strongly oppose further efforts to unnecessarily delay this critical move.

The following is a summary of developments over the last 24 months relating to the Air Force's decision to base SPACECOM headquarters at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. As you will see, the process has been robust and objective, the investigations extensive, and the conclusion the same throughout: Redstone Arsenal is the best place for SPACECOM.

Air Force Used an Objective Selection Process

In 2019, the Air Force identified six suitable locationsⁱ—including Redstone—for SPACECOM headquarters, which when fully established will house approximately 1,400 military and civilian personnel. That decision was protested, and in response, the Secretary of Defense testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2020 that he would instruct the Air Force to examine the selection process and allow communities to self-nominate to host the permanent headquarters.ⁱⁱ Subsequently, the Air Force considered 66 communities from across 26 states.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the time, lawmakers from all corners praised the revised process for its openness and fairness, with remarks such as “The Secretary and the Chief have been excellent partners throughout the process, and are working to ensure that no one can challenge their final decision.”^{iv}

An exhaustive selection methodology followed—one that weighed 21 different factors and involved site visits, interviews, and input up and down the chain of command. This objective evaluation lasted more than eight months.^v

In the end, the Air Force determined that Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville was its preferred location for SPACECOM headquarters. In its January 13, 2021 news release announcing that finding, the Air Force stated that it had “conducted ... visits to assess which of six ... locations would be best suited to host the U.S. Space Command Headquarters based on factors related to mission, infrastructure capacity, community support, and costs to the Department of Defense. Huntsville compared favorably across more of these factors than any other community...”^{vi} In fact, Huntsville ranked in the top- or middle-third of the criteria over 85 percent of the time.^{vii}

The Air Force followed a process that concluded that SPACECOM headquarters at Redstone best served the national security interest of the country. Rather than embrace this decision, politicians representing military installations which were not selected raised unsubstantiated claims that the selection was a politically-motivated decision by the previous administration.

Biden Administration Defends Prior Administration’s Decision

Biden administration officials pushed back on assertions that the prior administration’s selection of Redstone was politically motivated. For example:

- On February 22, 2021, Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby said in a statement that “Secretary Austin has communicated to Air Force leaders that he supports their decision-making process about the preferred location of Space Command headquarters.”^{viii}
- On June 16, 2021, John Roth, President Biden’s Acting Secretary of the Air Force at the time, said that “[t]he selection of Huntsville as the preferred location by my predecessor was the result of our strategic basing process, and that process is an analytically based process.”^{ix}

Independent Reviews Support Air Force’s Selection Process and Conclusion

Unfortunately, at a time when Congress should have been providing robust support to the Air Force’s efforts to grow our critical space capabilities, politicians once fulsome with praise of the process suddenly enlisted GAO* and the DoD IG to castigate the Air Force’s selection as “fundamentally flawed,” howling that the selection must be based^{xi} upon “sound methodology and good, objective data.”

Sound methodology and objective data are exactly what the DoD IG found. On May 11, 2022—almost 16 months after the Air Force made its initial decision—the DoD IG released its highly anticipated report, concluding that:

We found that the process Air Force officials used to select Huntsville, Alabama, as the preferred permanent location for the U.S. Space Command headquarters (USSPACECOM HQ) complied with law and policy, and was reasonable in identifying Huntsville as the preferred permanent location^{xii}. . . Basing Office personnel developed relevant and objective criteria to assess candidate locations in

the Self-Nomination Phase, score candidate locations in the Evaluation Phase, and rank the six candidate locations in the Selection Phase. The 4 evaluation factors and 21 associated criteria, which the SECDEF approved, were a reasonable and objective means of assessing, scoring, and ranking the candidate locations for hosting the USSPACECOM HQ.^{xiii}

On May 13, 2022, GAO provided Senate staff with a briefing on its report. GAO confirmed that during the Air Force's comprehensive process, "Redstone Arsenal was the highest-scoring location in the Evaluation Phase, the highest-ranked location in the Selection Phase, and the location with the most advantages in the final decision matrix. That is why the U.S. Secretary of the Air Force ultimately selected Redstone as the preferred location for SPACECOM HQ." GAO was critical of eleventh-hour attempts to elevate a much lower-ranked installation into the number two position. That artificial action gave the appearance of bias.

Both the DoD IG and GAO reports are now available for you and your staff to review in full.

Readiness Impact

Some have claimed that a move to Redstone would negatively impact readiness at SPACECOM. This notion is unsupported by facts and has been refuted.

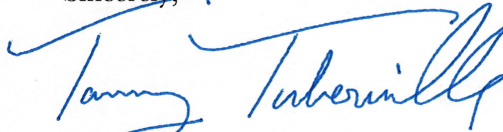
In response to a March 8, 2022 question from Senator Sheheen, SPACECOM Commander General James Dickinson testified before our committee that "we are in the process right now of building the infrastructure that we need to do the mission that I have been given . . . and we are moving in that direction. I would say we are a couple [to] three years away from full operational capability. . . *no matter where we are located.*"^{xiv} In short, there is no evidence that a transition of the headquarters would have a significant impact on readiness.^{xv}

Time to Move Forward

In the words of General Dickinson, "I need a decision." He, in fact, now has a decision that (1) resulted from a fair and objective process, (2) has been affirmed by senior officials in both parties, and (3) has withstood the scrutiny of two extensive government reviews.

At this point, the biggest thing standing in the way of SPACECOM is political inertia and sore loser syndrome, each a detriment to U.S. military effectiveness. It's time we embrace the Air Force's decision and move forward together.

Sincerely,



Tommy Tuberville
United States Senator

CC: Members of the Senate Committee on Armed Services

The Honorable Richard Shelby, United States Senator

The Honorable Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Frank Kendall, Secretary of the Air Force

ⁱ The locations were Buckley AFB, Aurora, Colorado; Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, Colorado Springs, Colorado; Peterson AFB, Colorado Springs, Colorado; Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Alabama; Schriever AFB, Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Vandenberg AFB, Lompoc, California.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Dept. of Defense, DODIG-2022-096, *Office of the Inspector General, Evaluation of the Air Force Selection Process for the Permanent Location of the U.S. Space Command Headquarters* (2022) at page 43. <https://media.defense.gov/2022/May/10/2002994298/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2022-096.PDF>.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Id.* at 9.

^{iv} GAO announces investigation into U.S. Space Command Basing Decision. Congressman Doug Lamborn. (2021, March 19). <https://lamborn.house.gov/media/press-releases/gao-announces-investigation-us-space-command-basing-decision>

^v U.S. Department of Defense, *supra* note ii, at 9.

^{vi} Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs. (2021, January 13). SECAF selects Huntsville, Alabama, as preferred location to host USSPACECOM. United States Space Force. <https://www.spaceforce.mil/News/Article/2471514/secaf-selects-huntsville-alabama-as-preferred-location-to-host-usspacecom/>

^{vii} U.S. Dept. of Defense, *supra* note ii at 18-21.

^{viii} Pentagon Press secretary John F. Kirby holds a press briefing. U.S. Department of Defense. (2022, April 4). <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/2988886/pentagon-press-secretary-john-f-kirby-holds-a-press-briefing/>

^{ix} Erwin, S. (2021, June 16). Air Force defends choice of Alabama's Redstone Arsenal to host U.S. Space Command. SpaceNews. <https://spacenews.com/air-force-defends-choice-of-alabamas-redstone-arsenal-to-host-u-s-space-command/>

^x Colorado Springs announced as the provisional home of U.S. Space Command. Congressman Doug Lamborn. (2020, May 15). <https://lamborn.house.gov/media/press-releases/colorado-springs-announced-provisional-home-us-space-command>

^{xi} Rep. Lamborn calls on Government Accountability Office to Review Basing Decision for U.S. space command. Congressman Doug Lamborn. (2021, February 2). <https://lamborn.house.gov/media/press-releases/rep-lamborn-calls-government-accountability-office-review-basing-decision-us>

^{xii} U.S. Dept. of Defense, *supra* note ii at III.

^{xiii} U.S. Dept. of Defense, *supra* note ii at 15.

^{xiv} *To receive testimony on United States Strategic Command and United States Space Command in review of the Defense Authorization Request for Fiscal Year 2023 and the Future Years Defense Program Before the S. Comm on Armed Services*, 117th Cong. (2022).

^{xv} U.S. Dept. of Defense, *supra* note ii at 64, footnote 81 states “We interviewed the USSPACECOM Commander, who reiterated [redacted]...could not provide Basing Office personnel evidence that the USSPACECOM HQ would achieve FOC sooner at one candidate location over another.”