

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

November 7, 2013

Brig Gen Steven M. Shepro  
1480 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330-1480

Dear General Shepro:

We write to follow up on the meeting that one of the undersigned, Rep. Pierluisi, held with you on October 29<sup>th</sup> regarding (1) the possibility of the Air Force modifying its plan to restructure Operation Coronet Oak, which provides theater airlift support for U.S. Southern Command, so that Puerto Rico can retain a meaningful role in the Operation, and (2) the importance of assigning a new flying mission—and combat-coded aircraft to conduct that mission—to the 156<sup>th</sup> Air Wing of the Puerto Rico Air National Guard as soon as feasible.

Regarding Operation Coronet Oak, we reiterate the request—made by Rep. Pierluisi in his meeting with you—that every reasonable effort be made to keep Puerto Rico relevant to this mission. Puerto Rico has been the base of operations for Coronet Oak since 1999. Of the four aircraft assigned to the mission, two of the planes and associated crews were from the 156<sup>th</sup> AW and the other two were from stateside units forward deployed to Puerto Rico on temporary duty assignments.

We understand that the 156<sup>th</sup> AW can no longer support Coronet Oak because the combat-coded C-130Es that it previously used to conduct this mission have been retired and replaced by the non-combat-coded WC-130s. We also understand that the Air Force, in an effort to reduce costs, particularly in light of sequestration, has decided to no longer forward deploy units to Puerto Rico, but rather to authorize units to bid on Coronet Oak missions and to conduct them directly from their home stations.

We urge you to reconsider this decision. At the very least, we ask that you look for ways to keep Puerto Rico involved in this mission to the greatest degree possible. For example, if stateside units have to rest or refuel, it would make sense that they do so in Puerto Rico, which is an American jurisdiction and whose economy is part of the U.S. economy.

Regarding the future of the 156<sup>th</sup> AW, we were heartened to hear you describe the non-combat-coded WC-130s that are currently assigned to the unit as “bridge” aircraft—that is, a temporary airframe that will be replaced by a more suitable airframe, whether it be KC-135s, KC-46s, C-130Hs, C-130Js or another appropriate model. Your statement is consistent with what we have

heard from other Air Force and Air National Guard officials. We hope that the bridge will be as short as possible, and we pledge to work with you and the relevant congressional committees to facilitate a swift and smooth transition.

In the interim, we were pleased to learn that, once the 156<sup>th</sup> AW is transferred from Air Combat Command to Air Mobility Command in the coming weeks or months, the unit will become eligible to conduct a variety of airlift missions within the United States (which do not require combat-coded aircraft) at the request of Transportation Command. We hope that the 156<sup>th</sup> AW will be called upon frequently for this purpose.

Puerto Rico is deeply proud of the contributions that its residents have made to our national defense in all branches of the military, and wants its citizen-soldiers and citizen-airmen of the Puerto Rico National Guard to continue making such contributions. From the U.S. perspective, the Puerto Rico National Guard is a valuable asset, given the territory's strategic location, its bilingual force, and its proven track record. Accordingly, we respectfully urge you to be creative in your efforts to keep Puerto Rico relevant to Operation Coronet Oak, and to assign the 156<sup>th</sup> AW a new mission and associated aircraft.

Sincerely,



Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz  
Member of Congress