

**MONDAY MORNING GROUP OF WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY
ANNUAL ADVOCACY TRIP – WASHINGTON, DC
APRIL 25 – 27, 2023**

RECAPITALIZATION OF THE 40-YEAR-OLD F-15C FLEET

ISSUE: California is home to the Air National Guard’s 144th Fighter Wing, based in Fresno and Riverside, CA. The Wing’s mission is to protect the West Coast of the United States by defending the homeland and deterring strategic attack and aggression from the Pacific by China, Russia, and North Korea. There are five National Guard Aerospace Control Alert (ACA) missions protecting the corners of the United States in: California, Florida, Louisiana, Oregon, and Massachusetts. Their mission is of great consequence. In fact, it was National Guard F-15’s who directly assisted in the operation to detect and bring down China’s latest intelligence “balloon.” The 144th also has a unique 30-year partnership with Ukraine, training their fighter pilots.

To minimize any gap in our homeland defense capability, the 144th Fighter Wing, and all National Guard fighter wings, must be equipped with at least a 21 Primary Aircraft Authorization of either F-35A or F-15EX. We believe a failure to do so in a timely manner may result in unacceptable risk to the American People.

ACTION: Ensure the Air Force presents a plan to recapitalize the National Guard’s F-15C fleet with new aircraft and notifies Congress with a clear timeline.

BACKGROUND: The National Guard’s F-15C operations are particularly important for California because it is a 24/7/365 active alert mission, responsible for two-thirds of the total NORAD ACA mission. All day, every day, our Guardsmen stand ready to scramble at a moment's notice to intercept anything from foreign intelligence aircraft, to inbound enemy cruise missiles. However, a decision has not yet been made as to when the F-15C’s follow-on aircraft at the 144th Fighter Wing in Fresno, and its detachment at March Air Reserve Base in Riverside, will be fully recapitalized to deter and meet China’s aggressive posture. As we hesitate, China continues to scale its fleet of fifth generation aircraft.

The F-15C model aircraft has reached an astonishingly advanced age, a staggering 37+ years on average, and 4 of the Cal Guard’s aircraft have already been decommissioned due to age and safety concerns. Losing an ACA due to aging aircraft would present an untenable risk to the American People. We believe replacing these aircraft is essential, particularly given that there are four times the number of ACA units based on the East Coast versus the West Coast, which may not be balanced to meet today’s National Security Strategy toward our only near peer challenge: China. The Air Force recognizes this risk. According to Air Force testimony, “of those four weapons systems that we need to fly into the 2030s, as we build up the size of the F-35 fleet, one of them is not going to make it, and that’s the F-15C...We’ve got to refresh the F-15C fleet because [we] can’t afford to not have that capacity to do the job and the missions.”¹ Further, it should be noted that we are most concerned with the timely recapitalization of this aircraft to continue this mission. We can complete our mission with either the F-35A or F-15EX.

¹ Gen. David Goldfein, 2019.