

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4704

July 20, 2010

The Honorable Michael Donley
Secretary of U.S. Air Force
1670 Air Force
Pentagon, Virginia 20330

Dear Secretary Michael Donley:

We have been following the developments with regard to the initiative to privatize of food services on six U.S. Air Force bases around the country including Elmendorf AFB, AL., Patrick AFB, FL., Little Rock AFB, AR., MacDill AFB, FL., Travis AFB, CA., and the Fairchild AFB, WA. We find the developments of this initiative to be troubling.

We are concerned that the Food Transformation Initiative (FTI) proposed by the Air Force Service Agency is incongruent with the Presidential Memorandum issued March 4, 2009 regarding federal contracting reform. Instead of striving for an "open and competitive process," as directed by the Presidential Memo, the FTI will exclude small, local food service businesses from contracting with the Air Force. The President also noted the "[e]xcessive reliance by executive agencies on sole-source (or contracts with a limited number of sources) and cost-reimbursement contracts..." The Air Force Service Agency's FTI is a clear continuation of a wasteful and inefficient federal contracting system. The exclusion of small businesses from contracting with the Air Force bases not only defies the Presidential Memorandum, but it threatens family-supporting wages and benefits as well.

Additionally, we are concerned that the FTI threatens contracts currently held by Ability One, a non-profit organization that has provided the Department of Defense and the federal government with high quality food service for over 30 years. Ability One's food service program serves over 25 million meals a year through over 100 food service contracts. Members of this successful program deserve to be included in initiatives to transform food service operations on Air Force bases around the country.

The Senate Armed Services Committee included language in Report 111-201 which will accompany the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2011, urging the Air Force to limit the initiative to the initial six bases until the General Accountability Office undertakes a comprehensive review and reports its findings of the initiative as implemented at the first six bases. Similarly, on May 21, 2010, members of the House of Representatives' Committee on Armed Services released House Report 111-491 to highlight their apprehension to the proposed FTI. Specifically, the committee voiced concern over the privatization of the food without an A-76 study being conducted to assess public-private competition. The committee goes further in saying, "the committee does not believe that the Air Force has provided an adequate rationale for its food transformation strategy, which is expected to result in an increase in food service fees to military personnel." It is our understanding that our colleagues in the House of Representatives have directed you to restrict the FTI to the six aforementioned bases and conduct a

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review of the initiative – we would ask to see the results of this review once it has been completed. Taken together these reports demonstrate Congress' concern over the proposed Food Transformation Initiative.

Air Force bases around the country are responsible for meeting the dining needs of Airmen and their families year-round. And though times have changed, and with them, the needs of Airmen, we must not forget to protect the workers who serve our Airmen and their families. Service members who dedicate their lives to protect our country deserve the best this nation can provide. From providing the most sophisticated defense systems and protective equipment; quality health care at our VA facilities to a nutritious and affordable meal – We understand the value of all of these commitments and we will continue to fight for them.

We would ask that our staff be briefed on the developments of this matter by an appropriate Air Force representative.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
U.S. Senator
Chair,
Subcommittee on Employment
and Workplace Safety



Mark Begich
U.S. Senator
Member,
Armed Services Committee

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