



*Always Ready
Always There*

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Secretary of the Air Force visits Idaho, Gowen Field

Senior Idaho officials including Gov. Butch Otter urged secretary of the Air Force, Deborah Lee James on Feb. 19 to consider the importance of a flying mission at Gowen Field, in light of plans to retire the A-10.

The Air Force seeks to implement cost-cutting measures to help accommodate its shrinking budget, and one of those measures includes divesting the single-role A-10 aircraft from its inventory; the Idaho Air National Guard's only aircraft here on Gowen Field.

There is an inevitable mission change looming for the Idaho Air National Guard, which could possibly mean receiving the new F-35 or the older F-15. Either way, this provides serious challenges to the Idaho Air Guard, considering the A-10 divestiture could come as early as 2016 well before the F-35 would be ready for service in Idaho.

An F-15 mission could result in the Idaho Air Guard vacating Gowen Field and relocating to Mountain Home Air Force Base; a move that has guard leaders and personnel concerned.

A worst-case scenario could see the Idaho National Guard without a manned fighter mission at all. However, after the secretary's visit, state leaders felt encouraged.

"She sees the commitment we have, she sees the strength of Gowen Field ... I'm confident that we'll continue to make the case to the Air Force, that Idaho must continue to be a strong part of the Air Force mission and that means a flying mission here at Gowen Field," Sen. Mike Crapo said during the press conference.



The A-10, the aircraft piloted by the Idaho Air National Guard's 190th Fighter Squadron is set to be fully retired by 2019, potentially leaving the Idaho Air National Guard without a manned fighter mission. Twenty-two of the aircraft are stationed at Gowen Field and six are currently conducting coalition training in the Persian Gulf. Photo courtesy Utah National Guard

While the future is uncertain, Gov. Otter wanted to make it clear to James that the Idaho National Guard should continue to maintain a flying mission. During Thursday's press conference, he restated, "We have the facilities, we have the assets and we have the infrastructure that [the Air Force] can't find anyplace else."

The Idaho delegation explained the challenges of maintaining readiness if the A-10 is retired before receiving a new aircraft and mission, and the impact that would have on the skills of the personnel who fly and maintain aircraft. They also stressed the importance of allowing the Idaho Air National Guard to remain at Gowen Field. The Idaho Air Guard is concerned over recruiting and retention efforts should its personnel—most of whom reside in Boise and to the west—be forced to commute to Mountain Home.

As part of the secretary's visit to Idaho, James visited Mountain Home Air Force Base and took time to visit with Idaho National Guard senior leadership. Overall, the visit left leaders with optimism and a promising outlook for the future of Idaho's National Guard.

"One of the things I was really encouraged at today was the recognition by the secretary of the tremendous infrastructure assets and personnel assets that we have here in Idaho that are attractive for the Air Force and for future missions," Sen. Jim Risch said.

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