

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE**  
**SENATE STATE AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE**

February 4, 2014

10:04 a.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Senator Fred Dyson, Chair  
Senator Cathy Giessel, Vice Chair  
Senator John Coghill  
Senator Bill Wielechowski

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Senator Bert Stedman

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 14

Urging the Secretary of the United States Air Force, the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, and the Commander of the Pacific Air Forces to base F-35 aircraft assigned to the Pacific Air Forces at Eielson Air Force Base.

- MOVED SJR 14 OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION**

BILL: SJR 14

SHORT TITLE: BASE F-35 AIRCRAFT AT EIELSON AFB

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) COGHILL

01/22/14	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/22/14	(S)	STA
02/04/14	(S)	STA AT 10:15 AM BUTROVICH 205

**WITNESS REGISTER**

CHAD HUTCHINSON, Staff for Senator Coghill  
Alaska State Legislature  
Juneau, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Reviewed SJR 14 that requests basing for the F-35 at Eielson AFB in Fairbanks.

LUKE HOPKINS, Mayor  
Fairbanks North Star Borough  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Supports F-35 Lightning II deployment at Eielson Air Force Base in Fairbanks.

BARBARAH JOHNSON, Assistant to the Mayor's Office  
Fairbanks North Star Borough  
Fairbanks, Alaska

**POSITION STATEMENT:** Provided supportive information for F-35 Lightning II deployment at Eielson Air Force Base in Fairbanks.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

[10:04:11 AM](#)

**CHAIR FRED DYSON** called the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Coghill, Wielechowski, Vice-Chair Giessel, and Chair Dyson.

**SJR 14-BASE F-35 AIRCRAFT AT EIELSON AFB**

CHAIR DYSON announced that the consideration of SJR 14 by Senator Coghill is before the committee. He said SJR 14 addresses the basing of F-35 aircraft at Eielson Air Force Base (AFB). He announced his intention with the committee members' concurrence that SJR 14 be passed out of committee today.

SENATOR COGHILL, bill sponsor, provided a brief opening for SJR 14. He noted that discussions recently occurred with the Arctic Policy that Alaska is obviously an international and Pacific Rim state. He detailed that with the Asia Pacific comes some very interesting dynamic and specified North Korea as the main one. He asserted that Alaska becomes one of the posts that the U.S. will us to become the monitor of the northern Asian Pacific and beyond. He set forth that SJR 14 recommends the F-35s, which are one of the new "fifth generation" fighter jets, to be stationed in Fairbanks' Eielson AFB. He noted a list of reasons to station the F-35s at Eielson AFB and highlighted Alaska's reach to the Asia Pacific in addition to the training capacity. He extended his deepest gratitude for those in the Anchorage area that have supported the Eielson issue. He said SJR 14 is one other way of saying Eielson AFB can be a partner with the base in the Anchorage area with the F-22 Raptors. He said basing the F-35 at Eielson AFB will put Alaska on the map as one of the best defense stations for the U.S. in the northern Arctic, the northern Pacific and beyond. He noted that Eielson AFB was on the shortlist for F-35 basing consideration.

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CHAD HUTCHINSON, Staff for Senator John Coghill, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska; addressed SJR 14 and the reasons for basing the F-35 at Eielson AFB. He noted in addition to Senator Coghill's overview, there is increased influence from China due to their intent in aggressively developing their own fifth generation fighter and the reason why there is a pivot by the Obama Administration to make sure China's regional influence is counteracted.

MR. HUTCHINSON set forth that it is not a secret that Fairbanks and North Pole is definitely a military town. He noted that out of the 50,000 jobs in Alaska's interior, 20,749 jobs are directly or indirectly related to the military.

He revealed that the Pacific Air Command is going to place one to two F-35 fighter squadrons in one of the Pacific bases. He noted that a fighter squadron consists of 12 to 24 aircraft. He revealed that the Pacific Air Force bases that qualify include Yokota Air Base in Japan, Osan Air Base in Korea, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) in Anchorage, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam in Hawaii (JBPHH), Kadena Air Base in Japan, Kunsan Air Base in Korea, Andersen Air Base in Guam, and Misawa Air Base in Japan. He said bases being considered have both positives and negatives. He revealed elements that the Air Force will be looking at as follows:

There's a probability that they don't necessarily want to base F-22s and F-35s together, so some of those bases you can be eliminated immediately and that includes JBPHH and JBER. The expected procedure is that Eielson AFB will be in competition with bases in Korea and Japan; they are aggressively trying to court the aircraft too. Why is that important? If you look at Luke AFB, which is in Arizona and recently got 144 F-35s; it was a statewide effort and the accumulative effect on the economy for Glendale was an additional \$2.2 billion infused into the economy and 96,000 jobs. That is 144 aircraft, the expectation is that the max we would receive is 48 aircraft if we topped out, but it still creates a stable economy for the surrounding Interior region and creates jobs for a lot of the folks living in Fairbanks and North Pole.

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MR. HUTCHINSON updated the committee as to what the Interior has been doing up to this point. He noted the Tiger Team which is a

meeting of the minds that consists of the local mayors, prominent business men, and government officials, are actively looking to entice the F-35 placement that includes: tax exemptions, military facility zones, and expanding Eielson's mission parameters. He detailed that Eielson's mission expansion parameters is currently occurring with the expectation that there is going to be a Gray Eagle Drone Squadron that is operated by the Army but placed on Eielson AFB. There is also the expectation that there is going to be increase unmanned aerial vehicle activity sounding the area because of the recent FAA decision on drone test sites. He said there are a lot of efforts to make sure that Eielson AFB is as enticing as possible to place the F-35s, which will essentially replace the A-10s that left the base a few years ago. He noted that the F-35 and A-10 are both air-to-ground support aircraft, but the F-35's mission is changing.

[10:10:57 AM](#)

He presented a video presentation on the F-35 to the committee. The video specified the advantages of the fifth generation aircraft.

[10:20:35 AM](#)

MR. HUTCHINSON asked if the committee had any questions.

SENATOR COGHILL remarked that the committee now knows more about the F-35.

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CHAIR DYSON added that the F-35 is a very expensive aircraft. He noted that Alaska could build all of the schools the state has dreamed of building for one F-35. He revealed that the F-35 is very high maintenance.

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MR. HUTCHINSON stated that Lockheed Martin has notified Alaska that they expect the comparative margin for each F-35 to come down as more aircraft are produced.

SENATOR COGHILL noted the timeliness of SJR 14 in that a site-survey is coming to Alaska pretty soon. He asserted that it is important for the legislature to speak up and noted it as being one of those things where if you do not say anything, they assume you are not interested.

CHAIR DYSON welcomed representatives from Fairbanks to testify about SJR 14.

LUKE HOPKINS, Mayor, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks, Alaska, supports F-35 Lightning II deployment at Eielson AFB in Fairbanks. He revealed that he has ended up building a very strong relationship with Pacific Air Force over the past year. He asserted that Eielson AFB and is probably the premier Outside Continental United States (OCONUS) base for being able to have F-35s at it along with the training spaces that are really needed. He revealed that he had joined a group that traveled to Lockheed Martin's to tour their F-35 facility. He added that the group also toured Luke AFB in Arizona and how the local has supported the F-35 basing. He reported that the tour was impressive and informed the committee that Fairbanks is stepping out from the previously noted Tiger Team efforts to a potential statewide program to support F-35s coming to Eielson AFB. He said the Air Force is expected to make an F-35 announcement in the second half of February. He cited the Secretary of the Air Force had said that Eielson AFB is in the short-list for an environmental impact process to commence for basing F-35s.

MAYOR HOPKINS said SJR 14 is extremely important and noted the economic value of having one or two F-35 squadrons at Eielson AFB is huge. He pointed out that Fairbanks support for Eielson AFB can match Arizona's support for Luke AFB. He reiterated that the F-35 operational basing is OCONUS targeted. He detailed that an F-35 basing at Eielson AFB will allow for global defense in the Northern Hemisphere from Alaska. He stated that the Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly, Mayor's office, community members, and Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce are all marching forward in support of F-35s being based at Eielson AFB.

BARBARAH JOHNSON, Assistant to the Mayor's Office, Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fairbanks, Alaska; provided supportive information to support F-35 Lightning II deployment in Fairbanks. She pointed out that the Luke AFB F-35 deployment meant \$2.2 billion is going into their local economy. She noted that Luke AFB has eight squadrons where Eielson AFB has the potential to have two squadrons. She reiterated that an F-35 basing has a significant economic impact.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked if there has been any analysis as to whether or not F-35s can be based at JBER. He noted that JBER is located in his district.

MR. HUTCHINSON replied that there has been an analysis and the general consensus of the Air Force is that they do not like to put their "eggs in one basket." JBER and JBPHH have F-22s and

that is why the Air Force will not place F-35s at the same military installation. He said the Air Force's top three candidates are likely out of Japan, Korea, and Eielson AFB. He added that the Air Force's analysis is complex with training space, asset allocation, and he noted that international politics come into play. He cited Pacific Air Forces' Commander General Carlisle saying Eielson AFB is likely one of the top candidates.

SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI stated that he would note no recommendation on SJR 14's form today and he asked for additional documentation prior to voting on the Senate Floor so that he can at least explain to his constituents why he is voting the way he is voting.

SENATOR GIESSEL commented that it is breathtaking what humans have been able to construct with mined minerals out of the earth, which exist in Alaska: copper, gold, silver, molybdenum, zinc, as well as rare earth elements.

CHAIR DYSON recommended that the presentation include the mention of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and the U.S.'s cooperation with Canada through Alaska. He noted that Alaska based Air Force flyers top-cover for the North American continent and that mission has come back to being more important. He remarked that the Russians have returned over the past four and a half years with sending Bear Bombers on the edges of Alaska's airspace. He said most of the Canadian Air Force officers are in Alaska and live in his district. He added that Eielson Air Force Base has been a place the Air Force has gone to test aircraft operating in Arctic conditions.

He remarked that basing decisions should be made by the Air Force only on a strategic placement basis for the U.S.'s defense efforts. He conceded that the basing process ends up being a political process because everybody weighs in and wants the economic benefit in their jurisdiction. He set forth that other places who would want the F-35s in their jurisdiction are playing public-policy political games as well and it is very valid for the legislature to at least meet those political processes trying to influence it. He said when he was at hearings with Senator Coghill in Fairbanks, the military officers said "Yes, but remember that community support for the military is very important." He added that he and Senator Wielechowski represent the districts in Anchorage that are closest to JBER and probably the most welcoming of the military of anywhere in the world and certainly Fairbanks mirrors that.

He mentioned that the other comment made is the economics of operating and the energy supplies that are available to the military in the Fairbanks area are very competitive with anywhere in the world and it is just a significant part of the process.

CHAIR DYSON announced that the Chair will entertain a motion.

SENATOR GIESSEL moved to report Senate Joint Resolution No. 14, version 28-LS1050\N from committee with individual recommendations.

CHAIR DYSON announced that without objection, SJR 14 passes committee.

10:31:08 AM

There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Dyson adjourned the Senate State Affairs Committee at 10:31 a.m.