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September 10, 2008

The Honorable Michael B. Donley  
 Acting Secretary  
 U.S. Department of the Air Force  
 1160 Air Force Pentagon  
 Washington, DC 20330-1160

Dear Secretary Donley:

I applaud the Air Force for its successes in the search for domestic alternatives to petroleum-based fuels, and I urge you to continue the Air Force's emphasis on synthetic fuels derived from coal.

As Air Force officials have noted, the Air Force is the largest consumer of energy in the Federal government, burning 2.5 billion gallons of aviation fuel in the last fiscal year. The Air Force has recognized that its dependence on foreign oil threatens its ability to safeguard America. It has, therefore, committed to a schedule for certifying its fleet to use synthetic fuels by 2011, and for obtaining half of its fuel by 2016 from domestic, synthetic sources that are cleaner than the petroleum-based fuels the Air Force now uses.

As your Department is demonstrating, U.S.-made, coal-based synthetic fuels can help to ensure our national defense for the future. Coal is abundant, cheap, and available domestically. Further, coal-based synthetic fuels can be burned and – with technological advances – produced more cleanly than the fuels currently in use. Coal is a strategically logical choice for the Air Force's synthetic fuels program.

In order to facilitate private-sector investment and ensure the availability of coal-based synthetic fuels, I urge you to increase your advocacy for long-term contracting authority for the Department of Defense, and to request sufficient funding in future budgets that will enable the Air Force to meet its deadlines for transitioning to synthetic fuels.

With kind regards, I am

Sincerely yours,

  
 Robert C. Byrd

RCB:dm