

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 3, 2017

COMMITTEES:
ARMED SERVICES
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
INTELLIGENCE
JOINT ECONOMIC

Lieutenant General Gwen Bingham
Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management
600 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Lieutenant General Bingham:

Congratulations on your appointment to the rank of Lieutenant General and your ascension to be the 14th U.S. Army assistant chief of staff for installation management. As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I look forward to working with you again.

I write to urge you to request additional funding for a critical and necessary Army Test and Evaluation Command (ATEC) Military Construction (MILCON) project in the fiscal year 2018 budget request, or to define this project a top Army Unfunded Requirement.

Specifically, a 55-year-old communications center, building 123 at White Sands Missile Range (WSMR), was built in 1962 and caught fire two years ago. The Network Enterprise Center (known as the Information Systems Facility (ISF) for MILCON purposes) is the gateway for all communications and data to the outside world, and houses critical equipment providing support for administrative command and control and testing and evaluation users. The facility is relied upon to provide critical support for modern missile testing ranging from the Standard Missile-2 (SM2) and Patriot Missile system-3 (PAC3), to JASSM and CALCM, and other next generation weapon systems. The near meltdown and fire on July 2, 2015, that nearly cascaded into a full electrical fire is symptomatic of the stress on the aging facility and its shortfalls in meeting today's needs and basic building codes. While emergency repairs, work arounds, portable electrical generators and other mitigations have sufficed for over a year now, there is no doubt that replacement needs to be the course of action to provide a long-term fix.

Current usage remains above 80 percent of the electrical breaker capacity and the building is at risk of critical failure, which would result in the loss of the entire communications system for WSMR, as well as the emergency 911 service for Southern New Mexico. Furthermore, given the need for increased testing of new weapon systems under the Third Offset, it is necessary that the nation's premier testing range have a real-time data network and be able to fully simulate the articles under test across distributed environments.

The new ISF would also centralize WSMR's communication support staff by allowing people spread out across four inadequate buildings to move into one building. By building the new ISF, the Army will achieve cost savings in man power, building maintenance, and utility cost.

As a former commander of WSMR, you know that our nation's test ranges have been neglected for years. In the last six years, only seven MILCON projects nationwide have been requested by the Department of Defense in direct support of test and evaluation missions at Major Range and Test Facility Bases (MRTFB). In some cases, like WSMR, MRTFBs have not received a MILCON project in support of test and evaluation missions in over a decade.

This alarming trend was noted in the Strategic Plan for Department of Defense Test & Evaluation (T&E) Resources from March 2013, which stated:

Due to age and outmoded technology, many test facilities are increasingly difficult to sustain and/or maintain. Obsolescence and deterioration contribute significantly to increased levels of maintenance, reductions in reliability, and an overall increase in operating costs. Services are under pressure to keep existing ground test facilities viable and relevant to meet immediate and forecasted needs. Across all services, there has been a downward trend in T&E MILCON appropriations to address ongoing maintenance, sustainment, and modernization needs of our T&E facilities.

WSMR is a national treasure for our military with its 2.2 million acres of terrain, zero-to-infinity airspace, and expertise that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the country. Unfortunately, some of the underlying infrastructure that enables this testing and evaluation is outdated and in urgent need of repair or replacement. I urge your immediate attention and advocacy to reverse the neglect of our nation's test ranges, and I respectfully ask that you take action to move this specific project forward.

Thank you for your service and leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Heinrich', written over a horizontal line.

MARTIN HEINRICH
U.S. Senator

Cc: Major General Charlton, Commanding General
Army Test and Evaluation Command