

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 1, 2014

The Honorable Deborah Lee James
Secretary of the Air Force
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Madam Secretary:

I write to express my strong support for continuing the Operationally Responsive Space (ORS) program and request that Air Force include funding in the fiscal year 2016 budget request for ORS.

I commend your efforts in finding savings within the Air Force through the “Making Every Dollar Count” campaign and strongly believe ORS is consistent and complimentary to that approach. Quickly designing, building, and launching satellites at a fraction of the cost of traditional, multibillion-dollar satellites makes perfect sense when considering our nation’s debt and the increasingly competitive environment of outer space.

As you know, prior to your confirmation, Air Force proposed terminating the ORS program for three consecutive years—a decision directly at odds with existing statute. In a demonstration of support for the program and the responsive space concept, bipartisan leaders in Congress rejected termination of the program each year and provided marginal funding to keep the program alive.

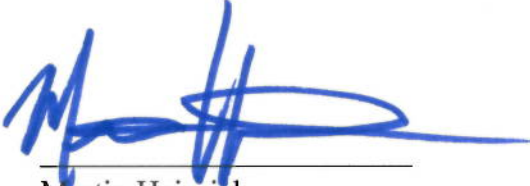
Under your leadership, there has been a renewed support of ORS from the Executive Committee for Space, especially in the selection of a new mission for ORS-5. Given that Air Force now embraces ORS concepts and announced it will maintain both the office and mission, it is critical that funding for ORS be included in the fiscal year 2016 Air Force budget request. An official budget request will reflect Air Force’s support for continued operations of the office and reinforce the Department of Defense’s entity dedicated to responsive space capabilities.

While funding for the ORS office and the ORS-5 mission remain available through the use of previously appropriated funds for ORS in fiscal years 2013 and 2014, including a recent reprogramming of funds, funding will be needed in fiscal year 2016 for the ORS office, the execution of ORS-5, and the selection of ORS’s next mission. The ORS-5 satellite will serve as a pathfinder for the critically important space situational awareness mission while the next mission, to be determined, can potentially meet integrated priority list needs for our combatant commands.

I look forward to the release of the fiscal year 2016 budget request and I am hopeful that Air Force's renewed support for ORS this year will be reflected in its next budget request. I will continue working with my colleagues to ensure ORS continues to receive the support it deserves.

Thank you for your leadership and your service to our country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Heinrich', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator