

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 19, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

I write to you today in strong support of establishing Cannon Air Force Base (AFB) as a location for the Department of Defense Science and Technology Academies Reinforcing Basic Aviation and Space Exploration (STARBASE) program. STARBASE has benefited more than 1.6 million students from 36 states and territories and serves as a learning experience where fourth and fifth graders solve scientific challenges via a hands-on curriculum.

As chair of the Joint Economic Committee, I am cognizant of the critical role that the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) field of study plays in exposing students to the possibility of working in careers that foster economic growth, drive innovation, and ensure America's global competitiveness. According to the National Science Foundation, the size of the STEM workforce grew by nearly 6 million between 2011 and 2021¹. While the growing prevalence that the STEM workforce plays in driving the economy is promising, it makes engaging New Mexico's students, specifically those who have been historically under-represented in STEM through educational programs, increasingly more important. Establishing a STARBASE program at Cannon AFB will make significant progress towards achieving this goal.

The STARBASE program plays a critical role in providing New Mexico's young talent access to opportunities that allow them to enter the STEM workforce. With locations at Kirtland AFB and Holloman AFB, the STARBASE program stands out as a highly effective program that creates strong bonds between the military, communities, and local school districts. Additionally, STARBASE places New Mexico's young talent on a trajectory to become the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs through hands-on experiences, customized curriculums, and exposure to world-class academics.

The Clovis, New Mexico community and Cannon AFB have long shared a close and warm relationship. The dedicated teachers and staff of the surrounding schools and our military families work tirelessly so that our students have as many opportunities afforded to them as possible. STARBASE would play a pivotal role in providing our Title I students hands-on exposure to a field that at-risk students often never have access to.

¹ <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf23315/report/the-stem-workforce#:~:text=The%20size%20of%20the%20STEM,2011%20to%2024%25%20in%202021.>

I firmly believe that Cannon AFB and the Clovis community will benefit greatly from having a STARBASE program. The breadth of opportunities that will come from this program for our most at-risk students cannot be understated, and I look forward to supporting efforts geared towards creating a STARBASE program at Cannon AFB.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Martin Heinrich', with a stylized, cursive script.

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator