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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0602
August 22, 2008

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The Honorable Michael B. Donley
Acting Secretary
Department of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon, Room 4E540
Washington DC 20330-1670

Dear Acting Secretary Donley:

I write to inquire about news reports that Air Force Cyber Command has been ordered to stop all activities, just weeks before it was scheduled to become operational.

This is especially disappointing news to the Colorado Congressional delegation, which has strongly supported basing the new AFCYBER headquarters at Peterson AFB in Colorado Springs. AFCYBER's mission – to protect the nation's and military's cyber networks and communications – is closely tied to the missions of Air Force Space Command (AFSPC) and U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), both headquartered at Peterson AFB. Locating AFCYBER in Colorado Springs would also strengthen the partnership between Cyber Command and NORTHCOM, resulting in better protection against cyber attacks on the homeland.

While I understand that changes in Air Force leadership might be the impetus for this pause and "reevaluation" in AFCYBER activities, I am concerned that there might be more to the story. There are reports that a lack of clarity about AFCYBER's mission and its relationship to other services and departments, as well as infighting among the services contributed to the decision to halt AFCYBER transfers of manpower and resources.

It makes sense for incoming Air Force leadership to look carefully at major new initiatives before proceeding, but I sincerely hope the suspension of AFCYBER activities is only temporary. As you know, there are about three million attempted penetrations of Defense Department networks every day, and a recent intelligence report released by the Department of Homeland Security concludes that there are no effective means to prevent attacks on U.S. Internet sites. Especially given the cyber attacks on Georgia earlier this month, allegedly perpetrated by Russian forces or surrogates, this is not the time to send a signal that the United States is ceding the cyber domain.

With Peterson AFB as the headquarters and Cheyenne Mountain AFS, Schriever AFB, and Buckley AFB in support, Colorado's military installations can provide the capabilities necessary to carry out this critical cyberspace mission. Coloradans are optimistic about the state's chances to be selected as the home of the new Air Force Cyber Command, and we had all hoped to be celebrating an announcement to this effect next year. Instead, we are uncertain as to the fate of the new Command.

I would greatly appreciate a prompt response regarding the reasons for and implications of AFCYBER's suspension, as well as some clarity about its future.

Sincerely,

Mark Udall

Cc: Gen. Norton Schwartz,
Air Force Chief of Staff