

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2007

The Honorable Carl Levin
The Honorable John McCain
The Honorable Ike Skelton
The Honorable Duncan Hunter

Dear Chairmen Levin, Chairman Skelton, Ranking Member McCain, Ranking Member Hunter:

As work begins on the Fiscal Year 2008 Defense Authorization bill, we write to express our support for authorization of the 36th Rescue Flight unit based at Fairchild AFB, Spokane, Washington. It is our understanding that the United States Air Force has proposed eliminating this unit in its annual budget and we hope that you will consider authorizing this important mission.

The 36th Rescue Flight plays an integral role in assisting rural counties emergency rescue units in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana in search and rescue missions, especially in very remote areas of these States. Local sheriff offices rely heavily on the 36th Rescue Flight for everything from finding missing children to lost hunters. Without the assistance of the 36th Rescue Flight unit, local search and rescue efforts will be greatly reduced.

The assets that the 36th Rescue Flight brings offer local law enforcement include:

- Military helicopter that can reach remote locations
- Four personnel trained in advanced survival techniques
- Swift water rescue and technical rope rescue
- Enhanced communications equipment and capacity
- Night vision and infrared equipment for night searches
- Rescue hoist and forest penetrating equipment to allow flight rescue in dense forested areas.

There are no comparable local civilian or law enforcement resources in the Inland Northwest that can make up for the loss of the 36th Rescue Flight. We hope that you will consider this extremely important request as you work on the Defense Authorization legislation this year.

We have attached supporting letters from a North Idaho sheriff's office, the Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security, and the Office of Emergency Management in Kootenai County, ID.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

L E Craig
Larry E. Craig
United States Senator

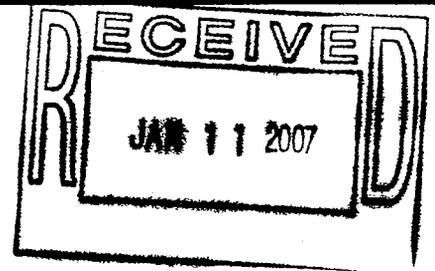
Mike Crapo
Mike Crapo
United States Senator

Bill Sali
Bill Sali
Member of Congress



ROCKY WATSON, SHERIFF
GARY CUFF, UNDERSHERIFF

KOOTENAI COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT



January 5, 2007

Senator Larry Craig
610 W. Hubbard
Suite 121
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83814

Dear Senator Craig;

We have recently learned that the U.S. Air Force will be transferring the Captain attached to the 36th Rescue Flight and 336 Training Group. We also understand that this is the first step in eliminating these groups based at Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington.

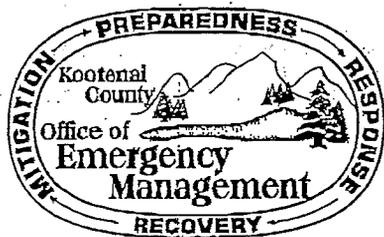
The 36th Rescue Flight has become instrumental in assisting rural Northern Idaho counties in search and rescue missions, particularly those missions in the rugged backcountry that is often inaccessible by equipment that the Sheriff's Offices can access. The 36th Rescue Flight has become a great ally with local Sheriffs as we have searched for everything from missing children to lost hunters. If this resource is eliminated from Fairchild Air Force Base, the potential for not finding missing persons, and worse, not being able to rescue them in a timely manner will increase many fold.

Please help keep the 36th Rescue Flight and 336 Training Group at Fairchild Air Force Base.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Rocky Watson in cursive script.
Rocky Watson, Sheriff

RW/bw



KOOTENAI COUNTY
OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
 P.O. BOX 9000 • COEUR D'ALENE, ID 83816-9000
 (208) 446-1775 • Fax (208) 446-1780
 E-mail: kcoem@kcgov.us

February 9, 2007

Dear Senator Craig:

Our state and local communities are facing the loss of a resource that will immediately and devastatingly impact the quality and level of emergency services that are currently available. The military is considering moving the 36th Rescue Flight (36 RQF) from the Inland Northwest. The 36th RQF supports the USAF Survival School and conducts Search and Rescue (SAR) operations and medical evacuations in conjunction with civilian SAR and law enforcement. To lose the 36th as a resource and an asset would truly be a tragedy for our community and our community members.

The 36th serves the entire Inland Northwest (WA, ID, MT, OR) and provides many specialized skills and equipment that civilian SAR or civilian law enforcement do not have available. The assets they bring to civilian law enforcement and search and rescue include:

- Military helicopter (Bell UH-1N "Twin Huey" able to fly in some austere conditions)
- Four personnel trained in advanced survival techniques (2 pilots, flight engineer, paramedic)
- Advanced skills in swift water rescue & technical rope rescue
- Ability to communicate with on ground SAR or civilian law enforcement
- Night vision goggles & FLIR monitor (forward looking infra red)
- Rescue Hoist/Forest penetrator (250ft hoist) to allow a medic to descend in an area where landing is impossible and to allow extraction of a patient where no other resource could assist

There is absolutely no comparable civilian or law enforcement resource in the entire Inland Northwest. Nor does any resource even come close to providing the level of emergency services that the 36th can. As our active members of search and rescue and law enforcement on the front line know that this resource is absolutely indispensable to save lives.

Just one recent example of the need to have the 36th respond was a search for a father and son lost while out snowmobiling and trapped in a mountainous ravine. They had a cell phone and were able to call in their general location. The weather was brutally cold, and searchers were unable to access the area quickly due to their distant location and extremely hazardous terrain. The 36th responded and was able to extricate both the father and son from their location by using their forest penetrator (no civilian or law enforcement helicopter could have landed anywhere near the subjects) and sending down a medic to assess and treat the subjects. The team then hoisted the father and the son out to safety—without the 36th they may not have lived.

Another recent example is a search for a missing woman who was riding her ATV. The professional volunteer ground search teams spent hours searching but were unable to locate her. The 36th got the call and was above the area quickly where they located her pinned under her ATV in a gully where she might have gone unnoticed for much longer. They were able to direct the ground search teams to her location and save her life.

These are only two of the multiple examples of search and rescue missions in the Inland Northwest that without the 36th many families would be devastated. Our community needs these military professionals and their resources in our area. Without them tragedies will happen and lives will be lost. With the recent spotlight on search and rescue missions it is timely to recognize the extremely valuable resource the 36th RQF is to the entire Inland Northwest by keeping them here in our communities. Please urge the military not to move this resource from our area as lives will be lost. Please take action today!

Sincerely,

Sandy Von Behren
 Director

Senator Craig,

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Sincerely,



Darrell Wasson

North Idaho Regional Homeland Security Exercise Coordinator
Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security