

### **LANDGUTH: Air Force begins transition to the B-21 Raider bomber**

Recently, the Federal government released the Fiscal Year 2021 defense budget, which reconfirmed their commitment to the modernization of the Air Force bomber fleet. The budget includes the requested level of funding for the continued development of the B-21 Raider program, as well as a proposed cut of seventeen B-1 bombers from the existing fleet.

Both funding requests are part of the Air Force's plan to modernize and prepare for the changing needs of national security. Warfighting of the future focuses on the challenges and threats posed from peer competitors, such as China and Russia, while still providing the capabilities needed to deal with the ongoing terror organizations around the world.

Ellsworth Air Force Base is an integral part of these plans. On March 28, 2019, the Air Force announced that Ellsworth Air Force Base would be home to the first two B-21 Raider bomber squadrons. These squadrons consist of the first training squadron and the first operational squadron. With the first B-21's expected to arrive in the mid-2020's, Ellsworth will continue its heritage as the Home of the Raider.

The Air Force's plan to reduce the B-1's allows for the management of the bomber fleet in a cost effective way that maintains the capabilities of the B-1 to provide for the nation's current defense needs, while allowing for the continued, and on-time, development of B-21. The cuts to the B-1 fleet will occur at both Ellsworth and Dyess Air Force Base in Texas and will only apply to those aircraft deemed structurally deficient. The Air Force is committed to continued investment in the current B-1 fleet as a critical asset to the current fight. However, this does begin the retirement of the B-1 that has been planned for some time.

Fortunately, Ellsworth Air Force Base will not see a reduction in manning related to the B-1 cuts as all these skilled aircrew and maintainers will be needed throughout the bomber fleet, whether maintaining and flying the aging B-1's or transitioning to similar roles for the B-21. Our forces at Ellsworth Air Force Base will remain strong as we gear up to welcome the B-21.

The B-1 community within the Air Force has met and accomplished extraordinary tasks over the past twenty years. Their deployments and missions were the highest operational tempo in the Air Force. The Department of Defense has relied on the B-1 to send a message of superiority in conflicts from Iran to Libya. Through the excellence of the aircrew, maintainers, and munitions personnel, this was accomplished despite the aging aircraft and performing a mission for which the plane was not designed. The B-1 community deserves our thanks and admiration as it moves forward in this transition.

*Scott Landguth is the Executive Director of the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority. The Authority's mission is to ensure that South Dakota and the Black Hills are a great place for the Air Force to conduct its mission.*