



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Air Force: “No plans” to Remove Rescue Helicopters from FAFB**

(Washington, D.C.) Today, Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers announced the U.S. Air Force has no plans to remove the rescue helicopters currently based at Fairchild Air Force Base (FAFB). The 36th RQF provides vital training for the survival school based at FAFB and plays a vital role in search and rescue operations in the Pacific Northwest.

“I am very pleased the Air Force recognizes the important training and life saving resource the 36th RQF provides,” McMorris Rodgers said. “Now, the trainers and students at the Air Force survival school and first responders across the Pacific Northwest can be certain the helicopters will be available.”

Today’s announcement is the result of several years of work for McMorris Rodgers and other members of Washington State’s Congressional delegation.

- In 2006, the Air Force made a decision to stop funding the helicopter unit, beginning in Fiscal Year 2008 (FY08) and remove them from Fairchild to save about \$4 million a year.
- In May of 2007, recognizing the invaluable contributions the 36<sup>th</sup> RQF makes to the training at the survival school and to the local region, McMorris Rodgers led the fight to successfully add funding to the Air Force’s budget to sustain the unit in FY08 and FY09. This funding would allow additional time to evaluate the impacts of the Air Force’s decision.
- In December 2007, McMorris Rodgers and other members of the Washington State Congressional delegation asked the Air Force to provide a report on the 36th RQF’s search and rescue (SAR) capabilities in the Northwest.
- In May of 2008, the Air Force provided that report, but it lacked a clear explanation of the impact to military training and SAR capabilities in the region should the Air Force remove the 36th RQF from Fairchild AFB.
- In June of 2008, McMorris Rodgers asked the Air Force for additional information and clarification on the issue, keeping pressure on the Air Force to reevaluate the overall impacts of its decision. ([Click here to read the May 2008 report](#) and [McMorris Rodgers’ follow-up letter by clicking here.](#))

- In September of 2008, the Air Force provided a written response to the additional request. Included in this response, the Air Force announced it restored funding to sustain the 36 RQF (currently through FY11) and has no current or future plans to remove the 36 RQF from Fairchild AFB. ([You can read that report by clicking here.](#))

“The need for the Air Force to make tough decisions on where to save money is understandable,” said McMorris Rodgers. “However, in this case I knew we needed to look at the bigger picture.”

“I am glad the Air Force realizes the important role the 36<sup>th</sup> RQF plays in ensuring the men and women of the Armed Forces receive the very best survival training, but also the critical part the helicopters play in search and rescue missions across the Northwest,” said Rich Hadley, President and CEO of Greater Spokane Incorporated. “I applaud the efforts of Forward Fairchild, Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers and other members of the Washington State Congressional delegation for working together to protect and expand the role of Fairchild Air Force Base.”

McMorris Rodgers is a member of the House Armed Services Committee, where she is working to protect and expand the role of Fairchild Air Force Base, the largest employer in the Spokane area. In addition to protecting the 36th RQF at FAFB, she is working to ensure the next generation of air refueling tankers is based at Fairchild AFB.

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TRT: :41

These helicopters are important to the Survival School and they have capabilities that other helicopters in our region don't have. But, also, I'm not sure when they first made these recommendations that they took into consideration the important role these helicopters play in other areas, like the search and rescue, and just how many people have been rescued and how many times these helicopters are used. As these stories came forward and as we collected more data, I think they were making a more informed decision.