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# Sioux City Council to lobby to keep Iowa Guard units

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By Lynn Zerschling lzerschling@siouxcityjournal.com | Posted: Saturday, February 4, 2012 9:15 pm |

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Brian Miller

SIoux CITY -- Sioux City lawmakers said Saturday they will lobby Iowa's congressional delegation to keep the state's two Air National Guard units operating, including maintaining the 185th Air Refueling Wing in Sioux City.

Budget cuts recommended by the Air Force and announced Friday call for eliminating one of the 185th's nine KC-135R Stratotanker refueling planes and replacing 21 F-16 fighter jets assigned to the 124th Fighter Squadron in Des Moines with MQ-1 or MQ-9 unmanned aircraft.

Any cuts would have to approved by Congress and signed by the president. In all, 27 states and territories could be affected over the next few years, a release from Iowa National Guard Public Affairs Officer Col. Greg Hapgood said.

After concluding a budget hearing Saturday, City Council members said the community needs to lobby congressional leaders to keep the tankers in Sioux City and not lose them to another base, including the one in Des Moines. If that were to occur, City Manager Paul Eckert said, Sioux City would feel the financial and personal impact.

"It's a great payroll here and great volunteers to boot," Mayor Bob Scott said.

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## The 185th through time

December 1946: The 174th Fighter Squadron is formed at the Sioux City Airbase after World War II.

April 1, 1951: The squadron is activated for the Korean War, being released from active duty on Dec. 31, 1952.

May 14, 1968: A total 350 members of the renamed 185th Tactical Fighter Group leave for Vietnam. Lt. Warren Brown is killed two months later while flying a combat mission after his aircraft was hit by ground fire.

2003: The symbolic changeover of the 185th from a fighter jet to a refueling tanker base occurs, changing the unit's name to 185th Air Refueling Wing.

2004 on: Members of the 185th are deployed overseas, including to Afghanistan, Iraq and Kuwait.

The 185th converted from fighters to tankers in 2003, a move community leaders hoped would ensure the long-term viability of a local flying unit, Councilman Tom Padgett said.

The 185th, based at Sioux Gateway Airport, has approximately 900 assigned personnel, about 70 of whom are deployed overseas. Col. Brian Miller, 185th commander, said the unit has an annual payroll of \$62 million.

"Our total economic impact to Siouland, including what they spend here, is \$77 million," said Miller, who did not attend the budget hearing but spoke later by phone.

He said the Air Force will announce in March how the Air Force's proposed \$50 billion in restructuring would affect manpower.

"We will present a unified front," Miller said. "The 185th is just as concerned about the 132nd Fighter Wing in Des Moines as they are. We think the Iowa Air National Guard brings great value to our state and nation."

The 124th Fighter Squadron is part of the 132nd.

Hapgood, who is based at Camp Dodge in Johnston, Iowa, said Saturday that the state's Air National Guard leadership will fly to Washington,

D.C., early next week to meet with Iowa's senators and congressmen. Miller said he will be making that trip.

"This is a marathon, not a sprint. It will take many months to resolve," Hapgood said.

Several Iowa congressmen, including Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, and Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa, issued statements Friday voicing their concerns about decommissioning the F-16s in Des Moines. Harkin's statement said he has requested a meeting with the secretary of the Air Force.

Neither mentioned the loss of the tanker at the Sioux City Air Base. Efforts to reach King and Harkin for further comment Saturday were not immediately successful.

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