

RC-26 aircraft to remain in Iowa

By Mike Bell

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The U.S. Air National Guard notified Iowa representatives that the RC-26 aircraft, which is designed to counter drug trafficking and assist in counterterrorism, will remain in Iowa at this time.

Iowa Sens. Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst, along with the full rest of the state's congressional delegation, received notice of the decision Friday regarding the plane's role in the Iowa Counterdrug Task Force.

In a Nov. 17, 2016, letter led by Ernst, Grassley, and Reps. Rod Blum, Dave Loebsack, David Young and Steve King, the delegation urged the Air National Guard to keep the plane in Iowa as it considered the plane's location.

The letter stressed the value of the RC-26 to the task force, citing that the aircraft has flown more than 35 flight hours, including missions for 10 federal and state agencies, and helped seize over \$566,900 dollars in methamphetamine in the 2016 fiscal year.

In 2015, it helped seize 20 illegal weapons, more than \$500,000 in meth, and \$4,000 in heroin. Ernst said in a statement that the aircraft has been invaluable.

"I am pleased to know that Iowa law enforcement can continue to partner with the Iowa Air National Guard to enhance our efforts to fight illicit drugs and threats to our homeland," she said.

"This is great news," Grassley added in a statement. "Protecting the homeland and fighting illicit drugs are public safety concerns that are among the government's core responsibilities."

The plane is equipped with surveillance technology and stationed at the Des Moines Air National Guard Base. The Air Guard Base is at the Des Moines International Airport.

The RC-26 is used for aerial surveillance and reconnaissance, primarily for law enforcement and federal agencies. It can also be used to gather intel in combat zones.