

**LOU BARLETTA**

11TH DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA

**TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

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**EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE  
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**Congress of the United States  
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The Honorable Ashton B. Carter  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1400 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

I write to ask some pointed questions in the wake of the “Runaway Blimp” episode of October 28, 2015, as the news media has taken to calling it. As you are aware, on that day an observation blimp – a Joint Land Attack Cruise Missile Defense Elevated Netted Sensor System (JLENS) – broke free of its mooring at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland and drifted freely for approximately four hours. As it happens, the blimp caused most of its damage in my 11th Congressional District of Pennsylvania, which was what prompted my communication with you today.

While the news media reported the story with great amusement, I can report that people in my district viewed the incident with somewhat more serious attitudes. Residents began suffering power outages, which in itself was not a particularly noteworthy event, but they were somewhat surprised to learn of the culprit. Imagine their shock when they learned that the outages – which numbered in the tens of thousands – were not caused by a storm, accident, or mechanical failure, but by an unmanned blimp dragging a 6,700-foot tether across the countryside.

During its journey northward, the blimp took out electricity to roughly half of Columbia County, Pennsylvania, and impacted a substantial number of residents in Montour and Schuylkill Counties, while causing a yet to be determined amount of property damage. Additionally, the blimp travelled through one of our nation’s busiest air quadrants, undoubtedly delaying flights and forcing the rerouting of planes. Moreover, two F-16 fighter jets were scrambled to track its movements. While thankfully there were no reported injuries to persons on the ground, my constituents deserve answers as to how such a spectacle was allowed to occur.

I respectfully submit to you the following questions to which I am seeking answers:

1. How exactly did a 243-foot-long, helium-filled blimp, roughly the size of a football field, get loose?
2. What is the status of any internal investigation?
3. What steps are being taken to ensure that something like this doesn’t happen again?
4. Why wasn’t there a system in place to ensure a controlled landing in a scenario such as we witnessed?
5. With such an enormous amount of public money expended, why did we rely on gravity and a few trees to bring such an expensive piece of equipment back to earth?

I have informed my constituents of the existence of the Army Claims Services, should they have sustained any damage to property as a result of the unfortunate mishap. I further understand that procedures have been put in place to all for the filing of claims by those who were impacted by this incident. I hope that this process will progress in a timely manner so that individuals, as well emergency responders on the ground in Pennsylvania, can be fully compensated for this absurd inconvenience.

I appreciate your attention to this manner and look forward to your reply.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lou Barletta". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a prominent initial "L" and a long, sweeping underline.

Lou Barletta  
Member of Congress

LB/kb