

United States Senate

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ORIGINAL

May 17, 2005

Mr. Anthony Principi
Chairman
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
2521 South Clark Street
Suite 600
Arlington, Va. 22202



Dear Chairman Principi:

I would like to personally extend an invitation for you to visit the 120th Fighter Wing of the Montana Air National Guard in Great Falls, Montana, at your earliest convenience.

As you are aware, the Department of Defense (DoD) has slated the 120th Fighter Wing (FW) for realignment under the Base Realignment and Closure. This proposal would reassign three of our F-16s to the 132nd Fighter Wing in Des Moines, Iowa, and three F-16s to the 187th Fighter Wing in Montgomery, Alabama. The proposal would also retire nine of the Montana Air National Guard's aircraft. The loss of Montana's only fixed wing aircraft mission has many folks in Montana, including me, troubled.

During my 16 years in the U.S. Senate, and the last 14 years as a member of the Appropriations Committee, I have provided funding for the missions and facilities that have proven themselves effective and essential to our Nation's national security. In my opinion, the Department of Defense (DoD) was shortsighted and has completely failed to take into account all that Montana has to offer in regard to our nation's defense. Quite frankly, there are no other places in the continental United States that offer unrestricted access to uncongested airspace for training over very low-populated areas, and Great Falls, Montana, has on average, 328 clear flying days per year. I have a great deal of concern over how such actions will impact this nation's ability to defend itself with fewer Guard and Reserve units. I am also worried that this huge increase in operations tempo for remaining units will pose a challenge to recruitment and retention. I have serious concerns as to how the Air Force expects to perform their Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) duties with fewer F-16s and fewer units.

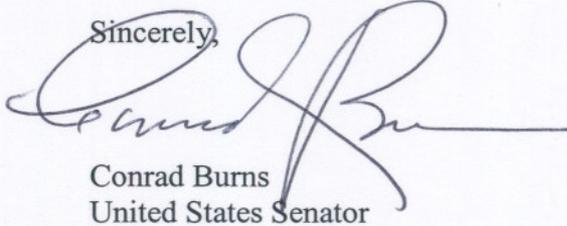
In addition, I remain puzzled by DoD's recommendations, as our 120th FW has been to the desert for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) many times, just won three outstanding unit awards, and is higher on the military value list than the unit in Des Moines. I remain unconvinced of the projected cost savings associated with the move. The BRAC recommendations include an estimated cost of \$9.3 million to move and retire these aircraft, with only a \$700,000 in net savings to the Department.

In October 2002, during your visit to Fort Harrison, in Helena, Montana as Secretary of Veterans Affairs, you saw just one area out of many, which Montana has where the infrastructure is in place to easily welcome and support more military missions. When you visit Great Falls, you will see that we have the infrastructure in place to easily handle additional and a diverse range of missions, while at the same time keeping the F-16s assigned to the 120th Fighter Wing.

The citizens of Montana are pro-military, have always supported our military men and women, and have thereby contributed significantly to our nation's defense. We stand ready to meet with you to discuss DoD's recommendations and to show you that Montana stands ready to increase its contribution to this great country's national security.

I look forward to hearing from you about this request in the near future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Conrad Burns", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Conrad Burns
United States Senator

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