

DCN 3432
Executive Correspondence

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515



June 28, 2005

06292005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
BRAC 2005 Independent Commission
2521 South Clark Street, Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Chairman Principi,

Let us begin by thanking you for your hard work in support of our men and women in uniform. As you are aware, the Department of Defense has recommended that the Air Force turn 23 Air National Guard bases into "enclaves". At this time, we do not know of any existing enclave bases and are concerned that the concept is not practical, or even proper, under the established BRAC criteria. As such, we respectfully request that the BRAC Commission hold a hearing into this proposal in order to determine if the enclave concept makes sense from a military and national security standpoint.

As we understand it, "enclaves" are bases that will entirely lose their flying units but are expected to retain Expeditionary Combat Support units. This concerns us for several reasons.

First, it is not clear that an enclave base can sustain expeditionary combat units. Once flying units are removed from the enclave bases, many will no longer be able to support military or civilian aircraft operations. Even in cases where there is a civilian landing area, the loss of rated firefighters will cause many shared airports to lose FAA ratings and fail to meet minimal Air Force and civilian criteria for landing and loading.

Second, we are concerned that this is an effort to circumvent the BRAC process. The Air Force has indicated that these bases will be kept in "anticipation" of follow-on missions; however, they plan to "shrink" the facilities. It seems this shrinkage will hinder the growth required for a follow-on mission down the road. So, in reality, these enclaves are closures that will happen slowly and without following the BRAC process.

Third, in addition to logistical concerns, recruitment of new Air Guard personnel and retention of Expeditionary Combat Support and air crew personnel will become increasingly difficult. Given recent experience with the B-IB and the on-going war effort, it is critical that we have a better understanding of the possible retention impacts of creating enclaves. GAO's September 2002 analysis (GAO-02-846) pointed out:

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Air Force officials did not conduct a formal analysis to assess how a reduction in B-1B bombers from 93-60 would affect DOD's ability to meet wartime requirements. Nor did they complete a comprehensive analysis of potential basing options to know whether they were choosing the most cost-effective alternative...As a result, the Air Force understated the potential savings for some options...Our comparison of active and Guard units' missions, flying hour costs, and capabilities showed that active and Guard units were responsible for substantially the same missions but Guard units had lower flying hour costs and higher mission capable rates than their active duty counterparts.

Last, we are concerned that enclaves will not meet our national security needs. It is our understanding that originally the 23 enclave bases were proposed to be closures; however, once the Air Force belatedly recognized that this would dramatically reduce the ability of governors to meet their homeland security needs, the enclave proposal was created. We feel this proposal makes no sense from a national security point of view.

We urge the BRAC Commission to hold a hearing specifically on the enclave concept. Nowhere in the BRAC legislation is the enclave concept mentioned as an option. If it is a good idea, that can only become clear through a thorough investigation of the Air Force's plans and rationale in a public hearing.

Thank you for your continued leadership in our united efforts to maintain the strength of our military. If we can answer any questions regarding these concerns, please let us know or have your staff contact our staff.

Sincerely,

Spencer Bachus
Harold Ford
Joseph R. Pitts
Arthur Davis
Wm. Lacy Clay

Tommy Simmons
Harold Stachem
Lu A Day
JA Sk
Cooper

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John B. Ruan

Bill Jenkins

Chris Sabrod

Joe Hoover

Mark [unclear]

Mike Castle

Jane Evans

Corey [unclear]

[unclear]

Jim Oberstar

William Delahunt

Ernest [unclear]

Melanie Waters

Cheryl Stays

Shelley Moore Capito

Michael E. Capuan

[unclear]

John Boozman

Ann [unclear]

Ken Calvert

David [unclear]

Martin Oliver Sabo

Lonny Culberson

Paul [unclear]

John A. Boehner

Dwayne Hooley

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Allyson L. Schwartz

Robert Byrd

Jim Gibbons

Jerry Chalker

Tom Geall

Debra

John

Rosa C. J. Lane

Jerry Bellberg

STB/jb

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Principi Letter:

Spencer Bachus(AL-6)
Rob Simmons(CT-2)
Harold Ford(TN-9)
Marsha Blackburn(TN-7)
Joseph Pitts(PA-16)
Robert Brady(PA-1)
Artur Davis(AL-7)
John Shimkus(IL-19)
Lacy Clay(MO-1)
Jim Cooper(TN-5)
John Larson(CT-1)
Christopher Shays(CT-4)
William Jenkins(TN-1)
Shelley Moore Capito(WV-2)
Ray Lahood(IL-18)
Michael Capuano(MA-8)
Sam Graves(MO-6)
Mike Fitzpatrick(PA-8)
John Boozman(AR-3)
Mike Castle (DE)
John Tanner(TN-8)
Lane Evans(IL-17)
Ken Calvert(CA-44)
Collin Peterson(MN-7)
David Hobson(OH-7)
Mike Oxley(OH-4)
Martin Olav Sabo(MN-5)
James Oberstar(MN-8)
Kenny Hulshof((MO-9)
William Delahaunt (MA-10)
Darlene Hooley(OR-5)
Emanuel Cleaver(Mo-5)
John Boehner(OH-8)
Maxine Waters(CA-35)
Allyson Schwartz(PA-13)
Jim Gerlach(PA-6)
Stephen Lynch(MA-9)
Joe Baca(CA-43)
Joe Schwartz(MI-7)
Jim Gibbons(NV-2)
Rosa DeLauro(CT-6)
Dennis Rehberg(MT)
