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To: The Honorable Anthony J. Principi

From: Mack McLarty

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COMMENTS:

MACK McLARTY
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

July 6, 2005 .

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission
2521 South Clark Street, Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I hope this letter finds you well as summer gets under way. I am certain it finds you busy as you head up the BRAC Commission – and I am confident your experience from the Navy to Capitol Hill and the Department of Veterans' Affairs is serving you, and our country, well as you manage those important responsibilities.

It is indeed your work with the BRAC Commission that prompts me to write you today. As I may have told you when we met last year at the Eisenhower Award dinner for Ross Perot, my family has a longstanding connection with Texarkana, Texas – home of the Red River Army Depot, which as you know is being considered for closure. The McLartys opened our first auto dealership in Texarkana in 1959. I grew up in Hope, only 30 miles away; my wife Donna was raised in Texarkana, Arkansas. But if my connection to Texarkana is personal, I believe the case for preserving the Red River depot is persuasive. As your commission prepares for the regional hearing July 11 in San Antonio, I wanted to add my voice to those who believe this important depot should stay open.

There are many positive arguments to be made about the role of the Red River facility, from its award-winning commitment to quality to its vast maintenance mission for all Bradley fighting vehicles, Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, Patriot missiles and the tactical wheel vehicle fleet. The depot's dedication to our nation's soldiers is summed up in the slogan on its website: "Building as if Our Lives Depend on It: Theirs Do!"

But given that Red River is already on the base closure list, let me focus on my concerns regarding that recommendation.

First, I believe that closing Red River risks undermining our nation's ability to meet future mission requirements. The 1995 BRAC round determined this depot played an essential role in meeting the needs of our service men and women. A decade later, Red River is operating above normal peacetime standard capacity -- and given our obligations in Iraq and Afghanistan, our concerns about North Korea and Iran, and the ongoing fight against jihadist extremism, it seems likely this situation will continue. Now is not the time to be eliminating depot capacity; yet it is not clear to me that Anniston Army Depot is equipped to assume Red River's workload -- especially since the Industrial Joint Cross-Service Group conducted its depot workload analysis on the basis of a 60 hour workweek.

Moreover, I am concerned that this shift in workload could disrupt current operations and prompt the departure of many talented, experienced depot workers. Red River, as you know, is one of our nation's largest defense depots, with thousands of employees drawn from Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Louisiana. As Mayor Shipp of Texarkana, Arkansas has said, some families have worked at Red River for generations. In the current security environment, when our military is already stressed and our depots are already operating above surge capacity, it does not seem wise to spend money and time recruiting and training new personnel to replace existing professionals.

Second, I share concerns many others have expressed regarding the transfer of Red River's rubber production capability. The Red River facility has more than forty years of experience in the rubberization of track and roadwheels. It is currently the only source for road wheels for the Abrams M1 tank -- and its processes are state of the art. Officials from Red River and Anniston agree that replicating this capacity and expertise will be a difficult and time-consuming endeavor. Again, at a time when our nation's men and women in uniform are in harm's way, we should not do anything that unnecessarily risks our ability to support our warfighters.

Finally, I am troubled by questions raised in the GAO's most recent BRAC report regarding whether storage capacity at McAlester Army Ammunition Plant is sufficient to absorb Red River's munitions.

Mr. Chairman, I know the BRAC Commission, under your leadership, is going out of its way to obtain the public's advice and perspective as you conduct your difficult work. It is clear you understand the enormous impact base closures have on communities and families, and that you are trying to balance those concerns with calculations of military value. Your ongoing dialogue with elected officials from Texas and Arkansas is a fine reflection of your commitment to understanding the facts and figures in their fullest

context. I admire your efforts and appreciate your consideration of my views as you continue this important service to our nation.

Personally,



Thomas F. McLarty, III

Mr. Chairman -

I remain fondly
our time at the wonderful
dinner honoring Russ Perot.
Thank you for your continued
service to our country. I
hope you will consider my
points of view as expressed
in my letter. I assume
~~they~~ ^{they} are heartfelt and sincere