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Kevin B. Sullivan
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

July 8, 2005

Anthony J. Principi, Chairman
Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission
2531 South Clark Street
Arlington, VA 22202

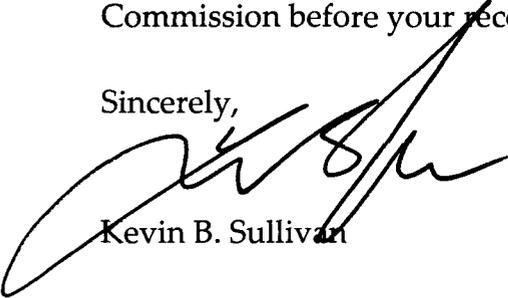
Dear Chairman Principi:

First, let me thank you and your fellow Commissioners for your consideration and attention during Connecticut's recent presentation in Boston. Once again, I am encouraged by the integrity of the process and quality of the proceedings. We believe that there is a compelling case to be made in the interests of national security and military investment for both Sub Base New London and the tactical unit based at Bradley Airport.

On a more personal note, I have enclosed a recent clipping from our major daily newspaper concerning the death of retired U. S. Air Force Major Michael Donnelly after a long struggle with ALS. I send this along because it includes comments by Michael's father, Tom, remembering your consideration and kindness to the family during your tenure as Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Good luck with the balance of the endurance contest that remains for the Commission before your recommendations in September.

Sincerely,



Kevin B. Sullivan

Gulf War Pilot Dies

Campaigned For Recognition Of Veterans' Ailments

By **MARK SPENCER**
COURANT STAFF WRITER

Retired U.S. Air Force Maj. Michael Donnelly, a veteran of the Persian Gulf War whose national crusade led the government to acknowledge the toll that Lou Gehrig's disease had taken on those who fought in the war, died Thursday.

Donnelly, 46, a pilot, flew 44 combat missions in his F-16 Falcon over Iraq during Operation Desert Storm, but was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, in 1996 at the age of 37 and retired with full military honors.

Although the disease had left him paralyzed



DONNELLY

and reliant on a ventilator, his mind remained sharp, his sister, Denise Donnelly, said Friday.

"He was a fighter to the very core, but he was very tired," she said.

Donnelly campaigned on behalf of veterans who suffered from a range of debilitating diseases after the war, saying they had been brought on by exposure to nerve agents, toxins, experimental vac-

PLEASE SEE PILOT, PAGE B5

Pilot

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

cines and other combat-related causes.

Donnelly, of South Windsor, testified before Congress and gave countless television and newspaper interviews. In 1998, Michael and Denise Donnelly published a book about his struggle called "Falcon's Cry: A Desert Storm Memoir."

For years, he and his family encountered roadblocks and denials. Then, in 2001, military officials acknowledged that Persian Gulf War veterans were twice as likely to develop ALS, a fatal disease.

By then, Donnelly's only form of communication was blinking. The spelling code developed by his family was arduous, but it was the last outlet for his still-active mind.

It was how he shared his thoughts with his family, including his wife, Susan, and their children, Erin, 18, and Sean, 13.

And last week, it was how he told them he did not want an infection treated that he knew would hasten the death he had expected for 9½ years. It was how he told them he wanted an Irish wake and a party.

On Thursday, Donnelly died at Manchester Memorial Hospital, where he had been taken earlier in the day from home, surrounded by his family and caregivers.

"He was certainly very sad to leave us, especially his children, but he was at peace," Denise Donnelly said Friday.

Michael Donnelly's father, Tom, is a former Marine helicopter pilot and joined his son in his struggle with the government. On the December day in 2001 when the family learned of their victory, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi called Tom Donnelly to discuss the details, including the fact that he had ordered that full disability and survivor benefits be issued immediately for scores of veterans and their families.

Millions of dollars in federal research money also was released to study ALS.

"I'm devastated at having lost my son," Tom Donnelly said. "Even though I've known this day was coming for 10 years, it still didn't prepare me for this."

He said that anyone who knew his son, including doctors, caregivers and veterans, was amazed and inspired by his ability to carry on despite the disease. He was South Windsor's favorite son, and the town named a 115.5-acre land preserve on Sullivan Avenue after him in 2003.

Denise Donnelly said that to honor her brother's request for a party, the family would invite friends to a celebration after his funeral Wednesday, although plans were still being finalized.

"What a horrible, horrible disease," his father said. "I have no way to account for his courage."

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 10 a.m. Wednesday at St. Margaret Mary Church, 80 Hayes Road, South Windsor. His family will receive friends for memorial hours from 4 to 9 p.m. Tuesday at Samsel & Carmon Funeral Home, 419 Buckland Road, South Windsor.