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Black Hills Council of Local Governments

1602 Mt. View Road, Suite 104 · P.O. Box 9686 · Rapid City, South Dakota 57709-9686

July 7, 2005

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

Dear Chairman Principi:

The purpose of this letter is to convey to you the support of the Black Hills Council of Local Governments and its members for Ellsworth Air Force Base as a vital component of our nation's defenses. For over 60 years, we have supported Ellsworth's many and varied missions throughout WWII, Korea, Viet Nam, the Cold War and Gulf Wars including a 12,000 sq. mi. Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Field.

Since 9-11, our respective government bodies have supported Ellsworth's base and family needs during their repeated deployments in support of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. In a similar manner, we have seen our area's National Guard units mobilized with many of them continuing to serve in Afghanistan, Iraq and supporting theaters.

As a body of government leaders who has the privilege of associating with personnel assigned to Ellsworth, we can attest to their beliefs that those who train to fight in the uncongested airspace associated with our skies and their immediate access to the Powder River Military Operating Area are our nation's best prepared bomber crews.

In another area of specific base support, in 1993 the Black Hills Council undertook the *Joint Land Use Study* initiative to address the issue of encroaching development near Ellsworth. We led the way in taking an unprecedented multimillion dollar initiative to relocate an interstate highway interchange and build a new five lane base access road to service Ellsworth. As a result, development has been drawn away from the area and property and acreages have been purchased in that Accident Potential Zone. In that same area of concern, I can assure you that we have few, if any, prospects of suffering the congestion and urban sprawl that is limiting the operational utility of many other bases within cities and in the high to explosive growth areas of our nation.

As to another important factor in the overall management and retention of military personnel, our communities pay close attention to the Quality of Life afforded them and most importantly their families. In fact, a 2004 survey by Expansion Management Magazine rated the overall Quality of Life afforded those who live in the Black Hills communities to be in the top 25% of 60 military support communities evaluated. Such categories as Best Public Schools, Spousal Employment Opportunities, and Middle Class Living Standard stood out from the rest and when combined with the quality housing and

access to National and State Parks, military families flourish here. Further evidence of the sustained Quality of Life we and the rest of South Dakota enjoys is a 15 year record of being nationally recognized as one of the "Top Ten Most Livable States" in terms of 44 evaluation categories.

Commissioners, we are convinced that Ellsworth offers the Air Force and DOD an opportunity to both realize Ellsworth's military value and expand on its operational advantages and expansion capability. Further, we can assure you that the base and its missions will be supported by the public policy decision makers within our communities; we will continue to embrace its people as integral members of our communities and our Congressional Delegation will be similarly supportive.

In closing, please accept our commendations on behalf of the citizens of our Greater Black Hills Area. We appreciate the challenges you face and believe when you have evaluated the Secretary's recommendation you will find that the counter points offered in the bodies of testimony provided will convince you to **not approve** the recommended closure of Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Sincerely,


Terry Weisenberg, Chairman
Black Hills Council of Local Governments
Lawrence County

Black Hills Council of Local Government members:

Bennett County

City of Martin

Butte County

City of Belle Fourche

Town of Newell

Town of Nisland

Custer County

City of Custer

Town of Buffalo Gap

Town of Hermosa

Town of Pringle

Fall River County

City of Edgemont

City of Hot Springs

Town of Oelrichs

Harding County

Town of Buffalo

Town of Camp Crook

Lawrence County

Town of Central City

City of Deadwood

City of Lead

City of Spearfish

City of Whitewood

Meade County

Town of Faith

City of Sturgis

Town of Summerset

Pennington Co. communities

City of Box Elder

City of Hill City

Town of Keystone

City of Rapid City

City of Wall