

Closing B.C. Air National Guard Base is a mistake

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The Air Force has proposed to the federal Base Realignment And Closure (BRAC) Commission that the 110th Air National Guard (ANG) Fighter Wing at Battle Creek be eliminated, the base closed and the A-10 fighter jets from Battle Creek transferred to the ANG base in Macomb County near Detroit. Only a few of the members of the 110th are likely to be offered and accept positions across the state in the Macomb County unit.

As the recently retired vice commander of the Michigan Air National Guard, I am certain that this move doesn't make sense from a military

perspective, doesn't serve the purpose of BRAC (to save money) and DOES a great disservice to the 930 members of the 110th Fighter Wing, most of whom come from west Michigan, and who have served their country so ably.

From a military perspective, does it make sense to do away with a unit that flies a critical, war-proven aircraft during a war? A unit that has had seven highly successful combat deployments in the last 10 years? A unit that occupies the best developed (\$41 million in improvements since 1991) A-10 base in the ANG? A unit that the Air Force has rated as "outstanding" by Air Force standards? A unit whose members have earned

BRIG. GEN. THOMAS N. EDMONDS

100 percent of its authorized personnel strength at a time when all active services are struggling to address serious recruiting and retention problems? A unit that is fully qualified and trained to fly and maintain the A-10 and give their aircraft to a unit that will take three to five years to cross-train and be ready to fly in combat?

Simply put, the answer is a resounding "no."

Does the "cost savings" to the Air Force override all of the foregoing considerations?

Again, the answer is "no."

Independent review of the methodology used by the military to evaluate the viability of the Battle Creek base and to calculate the cost savings from its closure shows the methodology to be fatally flawed. Staff from congressional offices, Battle Creek Unlimited, the W.E. Upjohn Institute, as well as military experts, have documented that there are little or

no savings that will actually result from the closure. They have made their case to the BRAC Commission and anyone else who will listen.

So if logic and/or cost savings aren't driving the Air Force recommendations to close the 110th, what is? Politics!

On a grand scale, the Air Force has suddenly sold out its

Air National Guard behind the smokescreen of the BRAC process. Why? Because it needs to generate money to pay for the new and expensive aircraft it wants to purchase in the near future.

On a local scale, west Michigan is losing a base and a unit that it has supported and nurtured since 1947, and hundreds and hundreds of west Michigan citizen-airmen are being told that their loyal and dedicated service is no longer necessary to the defense of their country. Why? So that the 110th Fighter Wing's A-10 aircraft can be given to a unit in the Detroit area. Why? So that the other unit can replace aircraft that the Air Force is taking away and thus protect that base from future closure.

The politicians who have pressed for, and perhaps engineered, this result are from the districts that benefit from this scheme. A short-sighted approach; Michigan should be fighting a united front to save all of our ANG aircraft and missions.

The presidentially appointed BRAC commissioners are experienced, dedicated citizen-volunteers trying to sort out many situations like this and determine just which bases should be closed. I urge my fellow citizens to contact the commission:

*The Honorable Anthony Principi
Chairman
Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission
2521 S. Clark St., Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202*

Please urge them to give close attention to the strong factual case before them in support of saving the 110th Fighter Wing and the Battle Creek ANG Base. Urge them to make a site visit to the 110th. Most importantly, urge them to spare the 110th for sound military reasons, and reject the political manipulation that has put the 110th on the chopping block!

"So if logic and/or cost savings aren't driving the Air Force recommendations to close the 110th, what is? Politics! On a grand scale, the Air Force has suddenly sold out its critical wartime partner, the Air National Guard. Across the nation, the Air Force has proposed massive cuts in the Air National Guard behind the smokescreen of the BRAC process. Why? Because it needs to generate money to pay for new and expensive aircraft it wants to purchase in the near future."