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Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 19, 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
Polk Building - Suites 600 and 625
2521 South Clark Street
Arlington, Virginia 22202

Dear Chairman Principi:

We are troubled by the Department of Defense decision to recommend removing the F-16 fighter aircraft of the 183rd Fighter Wing from the Air National Guard base at Capital Airport in Springfield, Illinois. There are at least four clear reasons that this recommendation should be rejected.

First, violating its own stated criteria, the Department recommends moving the aircraft to an installation that has a lower military value. While Capital Airport has a military value rating of 115, the proposed relocation site in Fort Wayne has a military value rating of 130 under the Military Capability Index by which all fighter units were ranked. Military value, based on current and future mission requirements and impact on operational readiness of DOD's total force, was to be the primary factor in BRAC decisions. Military value is not a peripheral question in the BRAC process: it is the central criterion to which all others are supposed to be subordinate. Anything less would violate the trust of the men and women putting themselves in harm's way every day in the service of their country.

Second, the principal justification for this exception – the strong recruiting potential of the Fort Wayne area – is irrelevant. Recruiting for the Air National Guard in the Springfield area has been strong. The 183rd Fighter wing is presently at 100% strength in aircrews and 97.5% overall.

Third, the move will likely further diminish overall military capability because the skills amassed by the people flying and maintaining the F-16 through years of experience will be lost. As part-time warriors with full-time civilian jobs, the affected Air National Guard members do not move with the aircraft but remain in place.

Finally, the consent of the Governor has not been obtained. Title 10, Section 18238 states that, "A unit of the Army National Guard of the United States or the Air National Guard of the United States may not be relocated or withdrawn under this chapter without the consent of the governor of the State."

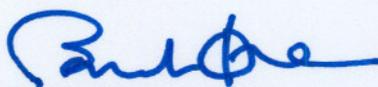
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For these reasons, we would urge the Commission not to endorse the Department of Defense recommendation to remove F-16 aircraft from Springfield. We look forward to discussing this issue with you further as we demonstrate how the Pentagon's analysis deviated substantially from the required selection criteria and base closure law.

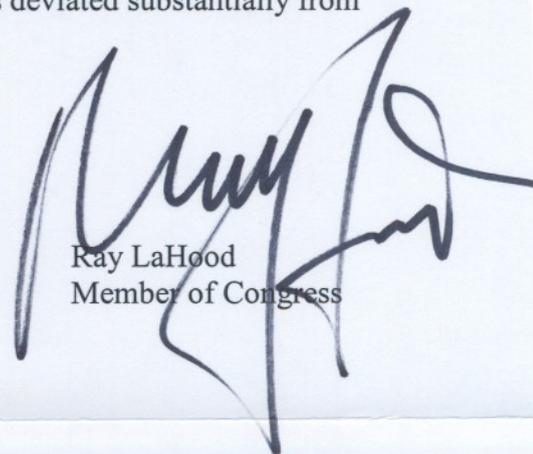
Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



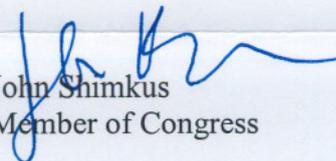
Barack Obama
United States Senator



Ray LaHood
Member of Congress



Lane Evans
Member of Congress



John Shimkus
Member of Congress