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Keep Cannon A.F.B.!

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The Honorable James H. Bilbray,

As a disabled veteran, retiree from Cannon Air Force Base, and a recent graduate of Eastern New Mexico University, I am devastated by your BRAC Commission decision to close Cannon AFB.

I understand the primary criteria for BRAC list selections are consideration of the military installation's military value "to implement opportunities for greater jointness"; such as, current and future mission capabilities, availability of land, facilities and airspace; as well as, ability to accommodate future force structure; and, cost of operations and the manpower implications.

I also understand that the economic impact on existing communities in the vicinity of the military installation; as well as, the ability of the infrastructure of the existing communities to support forces, missions, and personnel; and, the environmental impact including the impact of costs related to potential environmental restoration, waste management, and environmental compliance activities were also considerations for BRAC list selections.

So, objectively looking at the primary criteria and other considerations, I am perplexed as to how Cannon AFB made the BRAC list of selections since it does not fit the criteria provided for base closure.

First, I will address Cannon's military value. Cannon AFB has an abundance of unencroached air space (PRICELESS) and no encroachment issues (PRICELESS) at either the primary or the alternate runway or at the Melrose bombing range that is truly seconds away from Cannon. Think of the cost savings in fuel alone by our pilot's ability to get to their job sites faster and therefore cheaper. Time is money. The cost of jet fuel is also money. Has the cost of jet fuel gone down as the cost of vehicle fuel has gone up? The less travel time affords more bang for the buck for more realistic training scenarios while having safer take-offs and landings for everyone. The impending implementation of the New Mexico Training Range Initiative will further enhance our training abilities with supersonic flying during training missions. Cannon continues to be "THE Go-To Base".

Cannon AFB, while having weather that supports practically 365 days of flying and training, also has ample space and ramp space to accommodate surge force requirements in training and emergency situations. Flooding is not a problem. Hurricanes are not a problem. Tornados are not a problem. Fires are not a problem. Earthquakes are not a problem. Terrorists are not a problem. Anyone conspicuous approaching Cannon AFB can be identified and deterred long before reaching its critical assets due to Cannon's strategic location and recent upgraded gates of entry and perimeter fencing. Cannon has the space for expansion and facilities to accommodate joint warfare training and readiness. The Joint Red Flag 05 exercise conducted from March 19 through April 2 also included the Army's Roving Sands exercise conducted at White Sands

Missile Range. NAVAIR ranges supported that venue with ARDS pods and support personnel at Cannon AFB, N.M. Cannon AFB has supported ROVING SANDS, the world's largest joint theater air and missile defense exercise, and Joint Red Flag.

The recent upgrade of the alternate runway and alternate runway lighting, the new air traffic control tower, new fire station, and the new police station are significant and remarkable improvements to Cannon AFB that contribute to make it "THE Go-To Base" for the latest and greatest facilities. Cannon AFB is the perfect candidate to support future training missions for the F-22, Joint Strike Fighter, and other military aircraft.

Cannon AFB has won countless awards, both on ACC level, Air Force and NAF levels, and national and STAT levels. These mission related accomplishments at Cannon AFB are because the personnel at Cannon AFB have motivation to not only achieve, but to excel in all they do.

Cannon AFB is also an International Host Base to the Singapore Air Force. By contract, the Singapore Air Force invested millions of their own dollars to upgrade some of the Cannon AFB facilities for their use to fly their F-16 planes. If Cannon AFB is closed, the Singapore Air Force will have to be relocated at a substantial cost to the U.S. government. This international contract agreement should be of grave concern for a couple of reasons. First, I do not perceive this as a good business practice and proper international etiquette to break a 25-year contract, especially in its early years. Second, other international communities who might be considering renting base usage will think twice about making such an expensive investment.

Clovis and Portales both have 801 Housing contracts that are young as well. It is my understanding that the base closure will not terminate the costs these houses will continue incur to the Air Force; although, these assets will revert to the respective communities.

The relationship between Cannon Air Force Base and the surrounding cities, towns, and communities in eastern New Mexico and west Texas is unlike any other installation in the United States. The Committee of 50 has ensured world-class community support for Cannon AFB unrivaled for more than 50 years. Recently the leaders within our community spear-headed the effort to expand and convert the air space of Cannon AFB to supersonic capability through the New Mexico Training Range Initiative. Three times in the past, the people of this bases community purchased and then GAVE significant assets to the Air Force for the sake of Cannon. In the early 90s, Curry County, in conjunction with the state of New Mexico, purchased air easements around Cannon and GAVE them to the Air Force. This was done to protect the air space from encroachment. The local community purchased the land north of Cannon and gave it back to the Air Force for additional housing. Now it is known as Chavez Manor. Within the last few years, our community purchased land west of Cannon and GAVE it back to the Air Force for the installation of instrument lighting on the alternate runway where the new construction is close to completion.

I feel the highways traveled to Cannon AFB are some of the safest in the nation. I also feel this should be relevant to consideration since bases are open 24 hours a day. Folks traveling the base roads are usually folks going to the base. People in this area are friendly, respectful, and

courteous to other drivers. People in oncoming traffic, who you personally don't even know, take the time to wave as they pass.

Having an active duty military installation is a plus for any community not just for the economic factors, but also for the national, civic, and family values they have. Military people come from all walks of life. They have learned how to adapt to their environments and to achieve cooperation from reluctant participants. Children of military members are disciplined and add this much needed dimension to local public schools. Active duty military children have contributed to the much needed improvements to our public schools. There is strength in numbers. The more students there are to teach, the better the classrooms, teachers, and technology. This is also true for the active duty members and retirees as well.

Education is critical to the development of a strong and wealthy society. Since we have lived here in Portales for the past 13 years, we have seen a new Valencia Elementary School built, the Portales Junior High School undergo a massive renovation as well as the Portales High School renovation. Recently there was a bond passed to do some major improvements for our local university, Eastern New Mexico University. If we lose the military people, we lose the strength in numbers that supports the teachers, classrooms, and technology. Along with these losses we will lose our most important assets, educated people for the more difficult jobs of the future.

Within the past couple of years, this area was categorized as a Microplex. This made positive and significant economic and morale impacts on the base and local populations. There are several new franchises in the area. They offer the people better quality products through greater competition. In short, our quality of life has improved immensely. The active duty, civilians, and retirees from Cannon AFB were and are significant to the Microplex development.

As well, this entire area, including Amarillo (lost their base years ago) and Lubbock (lost its base with the last BRAC), is home to a large military retiree population. As a retiree, I rely on Cannon AFB for TriCare Prime healthcare and the commissary. The closest installation for me to use TriCare Prime healthcare and the commissary privileges is a 230 miles drive one way. This is not a practical alternative for a disabled veteran as me with extremely limited bus service to Albuquerque or to any of the alternative military bases. Portales has already lost its hospital once. The newly built hospital in Portales and the recently renovated Clovis hospitals are critical to the wellness of the people of these surrounding communities. Again, good doctors, specialty doctors, and support staffs come to places where there is greater population and greater income. Loss of the base will be detrimental not only economically but also physically in regard to the wellness of the communities.

Cannon AFB is to Clovis/Portales Microplex as the heart to the human body. While it supports an estimated 20.5 percent of economic area employment, it is a critical 20.5 percent. All the people employed at Cannon, military and civilian, have the best paying jobs in the vicinity. If the best paying jobs leave the community, the quality of life for those remaining will decline to a demoralizing low.

Our skies are alive with the F-16 jets streaking by and ripping the air with the "Sound of Freedom". The sound reminds us that we in this Microplex have several PRICELESS assets

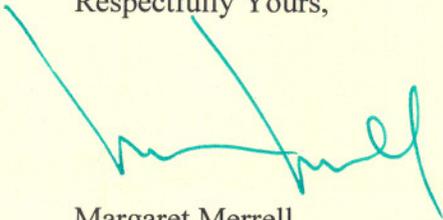
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through Cannon AFB that do now and can continue to contribute to our nation's values and principles.

Can the human body live without a heart? Without Cannon AFB, this Microplex will blow away in the wind and ghost towns will be all that remain.

Please, reconsider ALL the facts before making your final decision.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Margaret Merrell', written in a cursive style.

Margaret Merrell
USAF Retired TSgt

403