



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

August 9, 2005



The Honorable Anthony Principi
Chairman
2005 Defense Base Closure
and Realignment Commission
2521 S. Clark Street, Suite. 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to join the Governor of Florida, the Mayor of Jacksonville and my colleagues in Florida's congressional delegation to urge the BRAC Commission to examine the former Naval Air Station Cecil Field, Florida as an alternative to Naval Air Station Oceana. Testimony before the BRAC Commission to date suggests, but does not objectively demonstrate, that there is no alternative to NAS Oceana for the aircraft currently stationed there. In fact there is an alternative—former NAS Cecil Field, Florida.

I urge you to hold a hearing allowing the State of Florida and the Jacksonville community to lay before the Commission the facts relative to the suitability, feasibility and cost estimates of reoccupation of Cecil Field as a naval air station. The Governor and Mayor have provided the Commission ample justification for a detailed examination of Cecil Field's promise as an Atlantic Fleet Master Jet Base.

The only argument that I have heard so far for keeping NAS Oceana is that there is no alternative. Given the declining quality of training and operations due to encroachment around NAS Oceana, an alternative must be identified, a decision made and investment to reoccupy must begun now rather than later. This round of BRAC is the time to commit to getting out of NAS Oceana and into a new and affordably restored NAS Cecil Field that can carry the Atlantic Fleet's naval aviation well into the 21st Century.

I also note that some argue that northeast Florida lacks airspace. I have been paying particular attention to airspace for military testing, training and operations for quite some time now as I have battled the threat to these by opening the eastern Gulf of Mexico to oil drilling. Northeast Florida has more than enough restricted airspace off the Atlantic coast, down to the Eastern Test Range and Cape Canaveral, and a short distance across an lightly populated portion of north Florida into the eastern Gulf. I have attached a Defense Department map of airspace to demonstrate that this claim is unfounded. The Navy's decision to conduct higher level fleet wide pre-deployment training in and around Florida after the close of Vieques Island was based precisely on the availability of robust air, sea and land ranges.

Since I arrived in the Senate over four years ago, every senior leader in the Department of the Navy, uniformed or civilian, has mentioned to me how much the Navy regrets the loss of NAS Cecil Field. Three years ago a senior leader in the Navy's installations hierarchy informally inquired of my staff of the potential willingness of the Jacksonville community to allow the Navy to reoccupy Cecil Field. The Navy's consideration of a potential return to Cecil Field is not new.

Providing the best possible Master Jet Base for aviators and sailors is a matter of utmost importance for our national security and the readiness of the Atlantic Fleet. This situation begs for a detailed objective examination oriented on potential and promise rather than apprehension and conjecture. The Commission should hold a hearing to allow the nation to understand the reality of Cecil Field's capability and readiness to return to service as a naval air station.

I appreciate the very difficult and important mission that lies ahead of the Commission. There is much work to do and little time to do it. I assure you that, along with the State of Florida and its many military communities, we are eager to assist you in any way to ensure that the 2005 BRAC process provides the best possible defense infrastructure at the best possible cost and enhances our national security today and for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to working with you through the days ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Nelson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Encl



POPULATION, DOD RANGES AND AIRSPACE

