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DCN 5772

To:

Chairman Principi
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From: Chairman Bill Thomas

RE: See attached

Date: July 29, 2005

Pages: 3 , including cover sheet.

Please see attached.



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July 28, 2005

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

Dear Chairman Principi:

As you prepare to compile your base closure and realignment recommendations for President Bush, I would like to lend my support to the Pentagon's recommendations to create a Naval Integrated Weapons Center of Excellence and move sensors, electronics, and weapons work to Naval Air Warfare Center, Weapons Division, at China Lake. This installation and its neighboring city of Ridgecrest are willing and able to accept the new missions and personnel that will better streamline weapons, armament, sensors, and electronics work in the areas of research, development, acquisition, test and evaluation for the United States Navy.

China Lake is an ideal place for the military to conduct these activities. Encompassing 1.1 million acres, there is no encroachment on military action at the base, providing an excellent environment for the many sensitive tests that are necessary for weapons, sensors, and electronics development. The natural topography of nearby mountain ranges allows testing of new and developing sensors and electronic warfare equipment that require a secure location. The R-2508 airspace, shared with nearby Edwards Air Force Base and Fort Irwin, is the largest overland complex of military-controlled airspaces in the country. The joint operation of this airspace ensures that all services have access to this unique asset.

Our country's air warfare continues to move toward a more integrated approach as airframes become more complex. Next generation Navy planes have an unparalleled complexity of sensors, avionics, electronics and weapons integration. The Joint Strike Fighter, for example, has sensors actually integrated into the airframe, versus current aircraft that have sensors added separately after the airframe comes off the assembly line. The current model of building a sensor and shipping it to another location for testing will not support these sophisticated new airframes. Co-locating the intellectual capital for

sensors, electronics and weapons at China Lake will provide for greater synergies in the development and testing process.

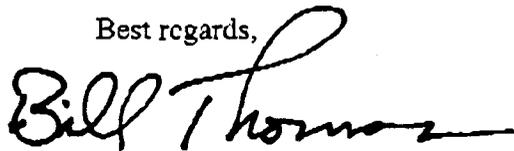
During this process, much discussion has centered around whether or not civilian military employees would move to Ridgecrest, the closest town to China Lake, from other areas of the country. Ridgecrest is a vibrant and extremely supportive community for our active duty military and civilian personnel who work at the base, and the military contractors who work on base and in town. The town has amenities including a wide variety of housing options, excellent schools, and a community college. A wide variety of small and large retailers have made Ridgecrest their home, including Home Depot, Walgreens, Cold Stone Creamery, and Super Wal-Mart, which will replace the existing Wal-Mart in 2006. Residents have access to a variety of outdoor activities, from skiing at Mammoth Mountain about an hour away to boating at nearby Lake Isabella. Many residents take advantage of the desert environment for off road vehicle activities and hiking.

City leaders actively work to support the base, from community welcome receptions for new base leaders to the city planning process. Whenever new development is proposed, either commercial or residential, the city leaders first consider what impact the development could have on China Lake and work diligently to mitigate any impact. When a developer proposed a new apartment complex under the approach and landing pattern for the base's main runway earlier this year, the city worked with the developers to find a more appropriate location that would not impact base operations. City leaders have assured me of their continued commitment to supporting China Lake's mission.

I also represent Edwards Air Force Base, home of the Air Force Flight Test Center. The Pentagon has recommended moving approximately fifty jobs related to Air and Space Sensors, Electronic Warfare & Electronics and Information Systems Test and Evaluation to Edwards. I strongly support this recommendation, which will increase efficiencies in test and evaluation for the Air Force.

I appreciate the Commission's close consideration of the Pentagon's base closure and realignment recommendations, and I am confident that this review will show the merits of the recommendations related to China Lake and Edwards.

Best regards,



WILLIAM M. THOMAS
Member of Congress