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

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank the Commissioner and the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission for conducting a field hearing to determine the validity of the Secretary of Defense's recommendations realigning the Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota.

The Grand Forks base has a long history of strong support from the civilian community and the states of North Dakota and Minnesota. In 1954, when the Defense Department chose Grand Forks as the site for an Air Defense Command base, citizens of the area demonstrated their support by donating sixty-five thousand dollars for the purchase of the land where the base eventually was placed.

Given its central geographic location, the area's low cost of living, the availability of quality, affordable healthcare, access to excellent post-secondary education and the low volume of commercial air traffic, the Grand Forks area is a perfect fit for the base.

The Pentagon is correct to see the military's strategic value of Grand Forks and I am pleased that the base is not being closed. The military argued for a continued strategic presence in the north central U.S. and Grand Forks fits that requirement perfectly.

However, I am concerned with the proposal to realign its mission, so please consider this my formal request that the Commission reconsider the Pentagon's recommendation. If the air refueling tankers do leave by 2009, I hope the Air Force can optimize Grand Forks to its fullest potential. Specifically, the Air Force should consider placing the new generation of weapons called Unmanned Aerial Vehicles program, which includes the Predators and the Global Hawks, at Grand Forks.

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But even with that said, I am afraid of the job loss that will come about as a result of the mission realignment plan. I am concerned that the realignment plan will relocate 85 percent of the military employees and -- using the Defense Department's own estimate -- reduce employment in the Grand Forks and East Grand Forks area by 7.4 percent.

Throughout this process, I ask the Commission to take into consideration both the defense and community development roles of Grand Forks. My colleagues from North Dakota remain committed to providing the support necessary to secure the future of this base and I stand resolutely with them in this commitment.

If you leave this hearing with only one thing I would like it to be a clear sense of Grand Forks' military value to national security and the danger posed by losing the Grand Forks base's workforce.

I look forward to working with you and with all the Members of the Minnesota and North Dakota delegations to achieve an appropriate and economically energetic mission for the base in Grand Forks.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Collin C. Peterson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Collin C. Peterson
Member of Congress