

13 April 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman, Base Realignment and Closure Commission
Polk Building, Suite 600 & 625
2521 South Clark Street
Arlington, VA 22202



Dear Chairman Principi,

There are a lot reasons why it is a mistake to destroy the primary Air Defense capability in the Northwest to the South and East. You will have many letters from Portland and other parts of Oregon talking about life threatening circumstance, the Northwest economy, jobs people will lose, and putting the northern West Coast from northern California to northern British Columbia at risk. Many of these reasons are very valid. Some are rhetoric. And many are 180 degree turns in correspondents' enthusiasm for anything military.

I will assume the BRAC Commission knows about the history and capabilities of the 142nd Fighter Wing and its F-15 aircraft and I won't reiterate their worth to the Northwest from the other letters you will receive. I won't present the obvious story of international flights loaded to the max with fuel taking off from Portland and Seattle with nobody to intercept a high jacked airplane with our F-15s transferred to New Orleans or some other strategically important target area like Atlantic City. And I won't try to convince you that Al Qaeda is banging on our doorstep. But I will mention two things.

First, there is an economic impact that I have not seen come up on the BRAC radar. The Northwest is a target-rich environment with vulnerability to air and ground strikes at several points and centers which would have much greater impact on the lives of the entire West half of the United States than an airplane crashing into Harrah's or Bourbon Street would in the East. Within 250 air miles of where I am typing this, there are at least eight hydroelectric dams, hundreds of miles of petroleum pipelines and the world's largest electrical power distribution center. This list doesn't include the cities of Portland, Seattle, Boeing's aircraft industry or any of the other things you will hear about. What do you suppose would happen if, say, Grand Coulee, Chief Joseph and Wells Dams on the Columbia River were to be breached? By the time the water got to Bonneville, it would be carrying the rest of the dams with it and the entire West Coast would be dark. For a long, long time. Oregon, Washington, California, most of Nevada and much of Arizona would lose most or all of their electrical power. Industry would shut down. That event would destroy the economy in the West and grossly impact the economy of the entire country. Even a strike at Big Eddy, a power distribution center 50 miles from here would disrupt electrical power usage and capabilities over an area into which you could fit the East Coast area from Atlantic City to New Orleans.

Second, there is a political undercurrent, whether real or imagined, associated with the decision to close the Guard unit at Portland. It's hard to defend keeping a military facility in the Portland environment where the rule of protest is riots in the streets and the Mayor refuses to fully participate in Homeland Defense because his nose is bent when he can't get all the clearances he wishes. When 75% of the city of Portland votes for Kerry and Kerry loses, the politics of keeping Portland in the Northwest's defense picture can hardly be overcome. Nobody outside of the military is thinking about the safety of Portland when all this occurs - not the citizens, not the Mayor, not the BRAC - no one. If the decision is made to close the Guard unit at PDX, the City of Portland and its citizens can only blame themselves.

Yet that's not the way military has been trained to think and it is not the way all people tasked with the defense of our country should think. Whether citizens of Portland who in their letters are crying wolf, wringing their hands, or all of a sudden having a 180 degree change of mind on the defense of our country are the same people who would be more likely to blame the September 11 events on George Bush than personally come to the defense of their country is not the concern of the men and women on the pointy end of the spear. And it shouldn't concern the people making decisions on how we do it. We have laid the requirement on the military to defending all citizens' inalienable rights to be criminally stupid and our warriors must have the wherewithal to do just that. That is what the BRAC has to know. It's not the people of Portland that should determine whether or not Oregon and the rest of the Northwest are defended; it is the potential targets throughout the Northwest and their importance to the entire West and the rest of the country.

I only point this second aspect of perceived decision making out because, like it or not, the decision to close Portland will be seen as payback time. And even if the perception is right, the decision is wrong. It's the wrong decision because it affects the entire country in ways 9-11 didn't. In spite of the horrendous human loss, life as we knew it went on pretty much the same as it always had. But power failure in California, for instance, will affect the price of every tomato, every bottle of wine, every piece of celery, every gallon of gas and every cut of meat that has to be processed and/or stored and/or shipped to the east. It will affect the entire nation.

The citizens of the Pacific Northwest and Northern California need the same protection afforded the Eastern United States. This decrease in Air Defense capability, coupled with known current threats and the likelihood of multiple targets in the Northwest area becomes a scenario that is more appealing and potentially a very successful opportunity for the terrorist. Realistically, the 142nd Fighter Wing's homeland defense mission is more critical now than previously perceived.

Portland has the votes to press Oregon in almost any political direction they choose. Those of us in the east and rural western Oregon are generally fully supportive of Homeland Defense efforts and look at Portland politics, in general, with amusement. If it costs Oregon the capability to defend ourselves, it is no longer amusing. There is a lot of red territory in this blue state. We are not all disciples of Ken Kesey. I believe that a **maximum** effort must be generated to change the DoD recommendation that transfers Dedicated Air Defense from the Northwest. I strongly ask for your support and leadership to help reverse this DOD recommendation.

Thank you for your help and consideration in keeping the Pacific Northwest and the United States safe.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis D. Ross". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dennis D. Ross, Lt Col USAF (Retired)
Mayor, City of Maupin
P.O. Box 308
Maupin, OR 97037