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August 5, 2005

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

Dear Chairman Principi,

I am writing to call your attention to "Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support," the Pentagon's new report which further strengthens our argument for keeping the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NFARS) open and fully operational.

The Pentagon, acknowledging that the nation is "confronting fundamentally different challenges from those faced during the Cold War," released a new strategy to overhaul and improve the Department's homeland defense and civil support capabilities. Several of the strategy's key objectives are already being carried out at NFARS and by the men and women in the 107th Air Refueling Wing and the 914th Airlift Wing. Closing the base would be a significant set back to DoD's new transformation.

As you know, NFARS is strategically located within miles of six bi-national bridges, and is the only military base within 50 miles of the northern border that the Pentagon has recommended for closure. NFARS is also less than five miles from the Niagara Power Project, the largest producer of electricity in New York State. Furthermore, Canadian intelligence last month reported that at least 50 terrorist cells are believed to be in Canada and looking for a way to enter the United States. It is clear that NFARS is stationed on the front lines of the war on terror, and plays a critical role in keeping the Niagara Frontier and the Northeast region safe and secure.

On page 3, the Pentagon identifies a key objective as one that "support[s] civil authorities in minimizing the damage and recovering from domestic chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high yield-explosive mass casualty attacks." NFARS' fire department and HAZMAT teams already specialize in responding to nuclear, biological and chemical threats. Due to their significant expertise, the fire department has responded to three threats at our bi-national bridges in the last six months alone.

In addition, DoD's new strategy will provide additional support to civil authorities. The report cites that "this support is part of a comprehensive national response to prevent and protect against terrorist incidents or recover from an attack or disaster." However, NFARS is the only staging area for homeland defense and disaster response in Western New York, and was instrumental in responding to the 9/11 attacks. The 107th Air Guard was the first Refueling Wing to fly Combat Air patrols over New York City. This guard unit also sent dozens of volunteers to ground zero to help with the rescue and recovery operations. In addition, a specialized unit of the 914th Airlift

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Wing, trained in identifying and preparing the remains of disaster victims, was instrumental in the 9/11 recovery mission. Since 9/11, the 914th has provided one, three, and twelve-hour response alert aircraft and crews to support homeland defense response plans.

A third strategic goal emphasized in the report is strengthening the DOD's ability to share capabilities and expertise with domestic agencies. They specifically cite assisting the Department of Homeland Security as critical to protecting the homeland. NFARS is a joint-use facility and several security agencies train and house equipment at the base, including the U.S. Border Patrol, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. The installation also supports the deployment of Army Guard helicopters assigned to the U.S. border.

I am encouraged that the DoD recognizes their homeland defense responsibilities given the new and emerging threats we face as a nation. However, if the DoD is serious about reshaping their approach to homeland defense, then they acted prematurely and irrationally by recommending NFARS for closure. Closing NFARS would severely damage the DoD's ability to implement their homeland defense strategy and leave the northern border and Northeast region grossly unprotected.

As the BRAC Commission continues to review the Pentagon's closure list, I respectfully urge you to continue to take into account the strategic importance to homeland defense operations of NFARS. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Louise Slaughter
Member of Congress