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

Dear Chairman Principi:

I had the honor to serve as the 19<sup>th</sup> Secretary of the Air Force and as the Under Secretary and Acting Secretary of the Air Force from 1997 until early 2001. Early in my tenure with the Air Force I reversed a decision made by Secretary Sheila Widnall to close the Air Force Institute of Technology ("AFIT"). It is my understanding that your Commission will shortly be considering a proposal to close or move AFIT, possibly to the Naval Post Graduate School in California. I am writing to urge that AFIT not be closed or moved.

The decision to keep AFIT open was not made lightly. My staff looked at arguably comparable programs available at government institutions like the Naval Post Graduate School and at major universities in the United States and compared the curricula available and the costs associated with sending Air Force men and women to those programs. I personally went to AFIT, interviewed key faculty members, looked at the engineering work being done by students in connection with other commands and laboratories at Wright Patterson AFB, and discussed its programs with senior members of the Air Force procurement and research and development communities, including the Air Force Science Advisor (at the time, an MIT faculty member).

I reached the conclusion that AFIT programs were of high quality, that graduates were receiving training valuable to the Air Force, and that the collocation of AFIT with the research and development complex at Wright Patterson AFB greatly enriched the research and educational opportunities available to AFIT students. In addition, individual researchers and program offices at Wright Patterson had received very valuable assistance from AFIT students and faculty. There truly was synergy between AFIT and the surrounding research community that had significantly benefited both.

I also concluded that sending Air Force men and women in large numbers to the best engineering, business and management programs in public and private universities was prohibitively expensive, even when compared to the full cost of running AFIT. In fact, given then-existing limits on tuition payments, most public and private universities were simply unavailable to large numbers of Air Force students. Finally, while graduate programs offered at government institutions could meet part of the Air Force's needs, but not all, it was not cost

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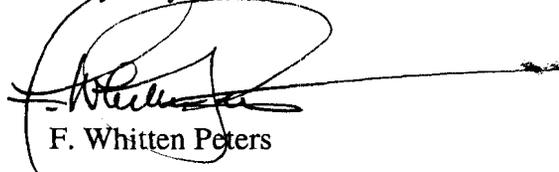
effective to split the student body between AFIT and other institutions given the high "fixed costs" of running AFIT.

It remains my opinion, after several subsequent reviews of AFIT, that AFIT offers graduate education of very high quality that is focused to meet Air Force needs. Because of its collocation with the procurement, research and development hub of the Air Force at Wright Patterson, it can provide a direct connection to the Air Force mission. Furthermore, the Wright Brothers Institute, local Dayton area universities, support from the State of Ohio, and the nearby large commercial aerospace presence provide AFIT and its students with access to some of the best engineering and research minds in the country.

Moving AFIT out of the Dayton community would destroy the unique opportunities AFIT students now have to learn from and work with leaders in the Air Force scientific and procurement communities, with no conceivable offsetting gain in educational value. This would be especially true of moving AFIT to Monterrey, California, where there is nothing comparable to the scientific and engineering facilities and resources found at Wright Patterson AFB. Finally, as the father of three current or recent graduate students, I can attest that the cost of university graduate education has skyrocketed since 1997 and gives every indication of increasing much faster than the cost of living over the next several years. It is therefore inconceivable to me that there would be a cost savings associated with privatizing AFIT that would offset the value to the Air Force of having its own program, tailored to Air Force needs, and supported by and supporting the Wright Patterson community.

If I can provide any further information to your Commission, I would be happy to do so.

Very truly yours,



F. Whitten Peters