

JAMES T. WALSH
MEMBER OF CONGRESS
25TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

ASSISTANT MAJORITY WHIP

CHAIRMAN
FRIENDS OF IRELAND

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3225

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEES:
MILITARY QUALITY OF LIFE
AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS
CHAIRMAN
LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES,
EDUCATION AND RELATED AGENCIES

July 20, 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman, Defense Base Closure
and Realignment Commission
Suite 600
2521 S. Clark St.
Arlington, VA 22202-3920

BRAC Commission

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Received

Dear Chairman Principi:

Thank you for visiting the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station and attending the regional hearing on June 27, 2005. I hope you were convinced after your visit that the closure of the Niagara Air Reserve Station would undermine the Global War on Terror, Homeland Security and New York's ability to respond to disasters in Western New York.

The Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station is the only Air Reserve Component base that hosts two wings – the 914th C-130 Air Reserve unit owns the installation and the 107th KC-135 Air National Guard unit is a tenant. If the base is closed, New York State will not have an Air Guard presence in the western half of the State which will adversely affect disaster and terrorism response in the region with the 2nd largest population center.

As the Chairman of the House Military Quality of Life subcommittee that appropriates billions of dollars for military construction, I believe the Department of Defense is making a mistake targeting Air Reserve Component installations. The Air Force Reserve provides 20% of the air force capability for only 4% of the budget and the Air Guard provides 34% of the air force capability with only 7% of the budget.

The 914th and the 107th have high military value, excellent recruiting and retention records, and are strategically located to provide airlift and refueling for the Northeast and Midwestern United States. The 914th is an elite unit and is designated the Air Force Reserve's Lead Night Vision capable C-130 unit which Special Operations Forces relied upon in the initial combat phase of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The 107th Air Refueling Wing operates KC-135R tankers and participates in the Northeast Tanker Task Force to support the "air bridge" operations for Europe and Southwest Asia. The 107th was selected due to its modern tanker aircraft, hardened 10,000-foot runway, and its strategic location that was optimal to support NETTF missions and mitigate weather factors which impact the refueling bases on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean.

Soon after the BRAC list was released Major General Heckman, co-chair of the Air Force Base Closure Executive Group, stated that part of the rationale for closing Reserve bases like Niagara is because “we need to rebalance the Active and Reserve mix of aircraft....and we may be working them too hard.” I find these to be specious arguments considering the fact that the Active Duty air force will end up with only four additional C-130 aircraft than the Reserves if the BRAC recommendations are approved. In addition, there is little or no evidence to support MG Heckman’s assertion that the 914th is “being worked too hard,” since the unit continues to lead the Air Force Reserve in recruitment and retention, even as it prepares to deploy for the third time since September 11, 2001. An unintended consequence of closing the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station would be the loss of combat proven service members who volunteer to serve our nation during a time of war. It is unrealistic to expect the aircrews and their families to transfer 1,075 miles to Little Rock, Arkansas.

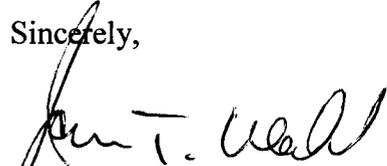
Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station is not encumbered by the infrastructure, weather and training space constraints that the two receiving bases will encounter if the closure scenario is approved. NFARS can accommodate 8 additional C-130 or KC-135 aircraft without any military construction. The BRAC military construction estimate for Little Rock AFB was \$107 million. But after a recent site visit by Air Force BRAC staff, the costs have soared to \$270 million. NFARS has two runways, two-drop zones and an assault strip on the cross-wind runway as well as a 15,000 square mile Low Altitude Training and Navigation Area (LATN) controlled by the base. Little Rock AFB has one runway, no drop zones and must fly to other airfield to practice takeoffs and landings. Moving the 914th does not make any sense and is not worth the risk to the warfighter.

The Government Accountability Office has confirmed that the payback figures for closing NFARS are greatly exaggerated because they take manpower costs associated with the units as savings despite the fact the units are expected to continue to exist at the same manpower levels after BRAC. One-time costs of \$65 million to close have been under-estimated, and the Air Force’s proposed annual savings are inflated since they failed to account for \$10 million in annual costs associated with enclaving the Military Entrance Processing Site opening there this year, and the Ground Air Transmission Radar site which support the Northeast Air Defense Sector mission.

The Air Mobility Command has four primary missions, and the Niagara Air Reserve Station does them all – Combat Airlift, Air Refueling, Aeromedical Evacuation and Expeditionary Combat Support. NFARS is a small, efficient, “joint” reserve base and a great value for the American taxpayer. I urge you to reject the Department of Defense recommendation to close the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station.

I appreciate your dedicated service and your commitment to the defense of the nation. If you need any additional information to help you with your deliberations, please feel free to contact me. Best wishes!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James T. Walsh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "W".

James T. Walsh
Chairman
Military Quality of Life
Appropriations Subcommittee

Cc: Hon. James H. Bilbray
Hon. Philip E. Coyle III
Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr.
Hon. Jim Hansen
Gen. James T. Hill
Gen. Lloyd Newton
Hon. Samuel K. Skinner
Brigadier Gen. Sue Ellen Turner