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THE ASSEMBLY
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

JIM HAYES
Assemblyman 148TH District

MINORITY WHIP

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June 6, 2005

Anthony J. Principi, Chairman
Base Realignment And Closure Commission
2521 South Clark Street, Ste. 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Chairman Principi and BRACC Commissioners:

I am strongly opposed to the recommendation that the Niagara Reserve Air Station in Niagara Falls, New York, be shut down. The base is both strategically important to our national defense and to the safety of citizens living in the Buffalo Niagara region. At the same time, its closing would be economically disastrous in an area that already suffers from a high rate of unemployment.

As you know, the base is one of very few that can support both C-130 transport planes and KC-135 refueling planes. Its 914th Airlift Wing and 107th Air Refueling Wing provided distinguished service during the Korean War, Berlin Crisis, Vietnam War, and first Gulf War. It continues to provide important support for Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

It is notable that the station has consistently achieved the highest standards, earning the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award and Air Combat Command Flight Safety Award in 1992, the Superior Rating for Operational Readiness Inspection in both 1994 and 1996, and the Superior Rating for Quality Air Force Assessment in 1998. Of special note is the fact that the BRACC recognized the 914th in 1995 as a Validated Essential Contribution to the Nation's Defense.

Situated near the Canadian border, this region must be especially vigilant when it comes to the threat of terrorism. Our border location, and Western New York's role in generating power for downstate residents, potentially make the region a prime target for terrorist activities. The legitimacy of this concern is evident in the fact that the "Lackawanna Six" —men who were indicted and jailed for participating in al-Qaeda terrorist training camps—were living in this area. In the event of any threat to public safety, the Niagara Reserve Air Station would be an important first line of defense.

At the same time, the base is the second-largest employer in Niagara County. In an area that is struggling economically, the loss of jobs resulting from a base closing would be nothing short of disastrous.

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I respectfully urge you to reconsider these points as you make a final decision about the proposed base closing. Too much is at stake, both locally and nationally, to shut down a facility with an influence of such magnitude.

Sincerely,

JIM HAYES
Member of Assembly
146th District

JPH/sb
cc: Merrell Lane, Chair, Niagara Military Affairs Council
Hon. Hillary Rodham Clinton
Hon. Charles E. Schumer
Hon. Brian Higgins
Hon. Randy Kuhl
Hon. Thomas Reynolds
Hon. Louise Slaughter