



June 15, 2005

Base Realignment and Closure Commission
The Honorable Anthony J. Principi, Chairman

Mr. Chairman, committee members

I write this letter in reference to the proposed closure of Cannon Air Force Base in Clovis New Mexico and the realignment of the 27th Fighter Wing.

I would like to preface my remarks by saying that I am not a representative of the Clovis or Curry County governments, nor am I a member of the Clovis-Curry County Chamber of Commerce, the Clovis Industrial Development Commission, or the Committee of Fifty. I have no direct economic interests in the City of Clovis.

I come to you from the perspective of a family farmer in northern Curry County and as a private American citizen who is concerned about the security and well being of our nation and of this region.

Many have made arguments for Cannon in regard to the Clovis economy and the abundance of air space for training. The entire High Plains region of West Texas and Eastern New Mexico has military and strategic interests that could be lost if attacked, and Cannon (27th Fighter Wing) was not there to provide defense.

This region is known as the High Plains or Llano Estacado, which is the southernmost extension of the Great Plains straddling both New Mexico and Texas. At its longest points it stretches from the Canadian River 250 miles south to the Edwards Plateau and is over 100 miles wide in places. Its major population centers are Amarillo, Lubbock, Midland and Odessa in Texas, and the cities of Clovis and Hobbs in New Mexico.

Imagine if you will an enemy air strike flying over Mexican air space and entering the United States over by Alpine or Marfa, Texas. Their mission is to destroy defense weapons facilities, oil and gas fields along with refineries. They may also have chemical or biological weapons.

If Cannon closes, there would be four bases in proximity to the region: Altus (97th Air Mobility Wing), Dyess (7th Bomb Wing), Holloman (49th Fighter Wing) and Kirtland (377th Air Base Wing). From reading the various base websites, I understand that the 97th and the 377th are primary support and training wings, while the 7th and the 49th serve a more direct combat function. The distance spans between some of these bases is over 400 miles. The real question is; Which combat mission base could respond the fastest to protect strategic and military interests in the High Plains?

In the southern tip of the High Plains and a portion of the Trans-Pecos region is the Permian Basin. This area is over 100,000 square miles and has ¼ of the nations natural gas and 17% of the nation crude oil. The basin includes Midland and Odessa Texas, along with Hobbs, New Mexico. While the 7th Bomb Wing is the closest response, would they be able to avert a full air strike alone? The 27th has the capability and mission to back them up. It could be very difficult for the 49th Fighter Wing to help since they would be busy defending White Sands, Fort Bliss, Las Cruces, El Paso, Juarez along with other areas close to or across the border. Damages to oil and gas wells, refining, transportation and support services could be in the trillions of dollars.

From an agricultural standpoint this region is one of the top producing in the nation. If chemical or biological weapons were utilized, damages to dairies and beef cattle along with crops and support businesses would occur in the trillions of dollars as well. That assumption also includes international trade losses. Our ability to export would be severely compromised. If Japan is uptight over one BSE cow from Canada, just wait until something like this happens. This would not only put our nations food security at risk, but it would also significantly injure the US economy.

In the Amarillo area, there is the Pantex nuclear weapons plant, the helium plant and Bell Helicopter, which produces the V-22 Osprey and the new Marine One helicopter to be used for transporting the President. The northern Texas Panhandle also has significant oil and gas production, refineries and related support. Damages could also be in the trillion-dollar range.

The High Plains is also a major connection point for the Texas, Central and Western US power grids. The coal fired generation plant at Muleshoe, Texas (Tolk Station) supplies power to portions of all these grids in several central and western states. Damage to this facility would cause catastrophic economic losses and create a major security threat.

Without getting into many pages of statistics and charts, do not the aforementioned scenarios constitute military and strategic reasons to keep the base open? Some people may be thinking that a foreign invasion is far fetched and would never happen, that the southern border with Mexico could not be breached by air strikes from an enemy force. It is breached everyday by hundreds of illegal aliens crossing over, some of who might be terrorists. It is not secure from either the ground or the air.

Does the Mexican military have the capability to provide a first line of defense for itself or the United States? No one believed that two commercial airline jets could be flown into the World Trade Center towers, but it happened. No one believed that someone like Timothy McVeigh could blow up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, but it happened. Some people might even believe that we are now the only superpower and no other country can touch us. North Korea could be this danger if negotiations by the Administration for disarmament fail and turn sour. If conflict broke out, China could easily back them up. The Korean War was proof of this.

Cannon is already in place and is the only military base for any of the armed forces in the High Plains region. It bridges the 400+ mile gap. The 27th can scramble and be in Amarillo the quickest. The 27th flew patrol over the Pantex plant on September 11th 2001. It has been reported by news media that the 7th Bomb Wing and the 49th Fighter Wing could provide the necessary response if Cannon is closed. My question is: How much lives and property would be destroyed in the time difference of the 7th and/or 49th responding versus the 27th? There are around one million people living on the High Plains and the Permian Basin who could be killed or injured.

If Cannon were closed and the nation was attacked, what would be the costs to reactivate the base versus closing this one out? If a new base were needed in the Texas Panhandle, what would be the costs of constructing a new facility? Does not keeping Cannon open constitute more effective cost savings in the long run? Could not Cannon and the 27th's mission be changed to meet Department of Defense criteria for military readiness and cost savings?

While I do not claim to be an expert of any kind in military matters, the fact remains that Cannon is here and is the closest to defend these interests and help in the Permian Basin. Cannon needs to be maintained because of the border vulnerability with Mexico. The existing bases and fighter wings in the southern US could have their hands full if we are attacked. Thank you for your attention and willingness to listen to the public. I appreciate your efforts to come to Clovis on June 23rd and 24th to see and hear up close.

Respectfully Submitted



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