2005 BRAC COMMISSION REGIONAL HEARING

TUESDAY, JUNE 21, 2005

RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA

RUSHMORE PLAZA - CIVIC CENTER

STATES TESTIFYING:

SOUTH DAKOTA

WYOMING

CERTIFIED

COMMISSIONERS PRESIDING:

The Honorable Samuel Skinner, Commissioner

The Honorable James Bilbray, Jr., Commissioner

The Honorable Philip Coyle, Commissioner

Daniel Cowhig, Deputy General Counsel

COMMISSIONER CHAIRING THE HEARING:

THE HONORABLE SAMUEL SKINNER

MR. MCKEON: Ladies and gentlemen, the commissioners from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, for welcoming the commissioners from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Commissioners, you've just met the people from South Dakota.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Now it is my pleasure to introduce to you the Shrine of Democracy Chorus, which will sing our National Anthem.

(Shriners sing National Anthem)

MR. MCKEON: It is now my pleasure to introduce the Chairman of the Realignment Commission, Mr. Skinner, and he will make opening remarks at this time.

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: Thank you very much, Jim.

Ladies and gentlemen, the ladies and gentlemen and children and families from South Dakota, and maybe a few from Wyoming as well, thank you very much for coming out and giving the Commission such a warm welcome. It was really very inspiring. Thank you.

(Applause)

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: Having seen the wonderful,

wonderful fellowship here in South Dakota, I don't understand why they call it the Badlands. It appears to be the good land, so thank you very much. I am Samuel Skinner and I'm Chairperson for the regional hearing of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment. I'm also pleased to be joined by the my fellow Commissioners, Congressman Jim Bilbray on my right and your left, and on my left, Philip Coyle, who will be joining me for today's session.

As this Commission observed in its first hearing, every dollar consumed in redundant, unnecessary, obsolete, inappropriately designed or located infrastructure is a dollar not available to provide the training that would save the Marine's life, provide ammunitions to when the soldiers fire fight, or fund advances that could ensure continued dominance of the air or the seas or on the land. The Congress entrusts our armed forces with vast but not unlimited resources. We have a responsibility to our nation and to the men and women who bring the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps to life to demand the best possible use of these resources. Congress recognized that fact when it authorized the Defense Department to prepare a proposal to realign or close domestic bases. However, that authorization was not a blank check.

The members of this Commission accepted this

challenge and necessity of providing an independent and fair and equitable assessment and evaluation of the Defense Department's proposals and the data and methodology used to develop that proposal. We committed to the Congress, to the President, to the American people that our deliberations and decisions will be open and transparent, and that our decisions will be based on the criteria set forth in the enable statute.

We continue to examine the proposed recommendations set forth by the Secretary of Defense on May 13th, and measure them against the criteria for military value set forth in the law, especially the need for search manage and homeland security. But be reassured we're not conducting this review as an exercise in sterile cost accounting. This Commission is committed to conducting a clear-eyed reality check that we know will not only shape our military capabilities for decades to come, but will also have profound effect on our communities and the people who bring our communities to life.

We're also committed that our deliberations and decisions will be devoid of politics, and the people and communities affected by the BRAC proposals would have through our site visits and public hearings a chance to provide us with direct input on the substance of the

proposals and the methodology and substance behind it.

I would now like to take the opportunity to thank thousands of involved citizens throughout this country, especially those in this room, who have already contacted the Commission or supported the Commission’s effort, and shared their thoughts with us and their concerns and their suggestions about the Defense Department proposals. Unfortunately, the volume of correspondence we received makes it impossible for us to respond to each and every communication. But we want you to know that we received it, we appreciate it, and we're doing everything we can to read and evaluate every one of them. We want you to know that the public input we received is not only appreciated and taken into consideration, but everybody in this room will not have an opportunity to speak, and every piece of correspondence will be made part of the record as appropriate.

Today we will hear testimony from the states of South Dakota and Wyoming. Each state's elected delegation has been allotted a block of time determined by the overall impact that the Department of Defense Closure and Realignment recommendation on their states. The delegation members have worked closely with their communities to develop agendas that I'm certain will provide information

and insight that will make up a valuable part of our review. We would greatly appreciate if you would adhere to our time limits. Every voice today is important.

Let me make a personal observation to all of you here. This morning the Commission had the chance to visit Ellsworth Air Force Base and it, with all of your elected officials, the Governor, your two Senators and your elected Congresswoman, and I can assure you that it is, as you well know, dually impressive. These men and women are doing an outstanding job in the service of our country. It was demonstrated today by --

(Applause)

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: This afternoon we will be taking testimony and written information from them on what we call a certified basis, which is necessary under the BRAC statute. As part of that process, all witnesses including the Secretary of Defense was required to stand, and was asked to stand and be administered the oath required by the Base Closure and Realignment Statute, and the oath will be administered by Dan Cowhig, the Commission's designated federal officer for administering oaths. So I think at this time we can have them all that are going to testify stand as one, and take that oath and we won't have to duplicate it.

(Witnesses sworn by Mr. Daniel Cowhig, Deputy

General Counsel)

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: All right. The, I think the first, Jim, I think the introductory testimony and the quality video is probably the first thing on the schedule.

Jim, as many of you know as head of the Chamber of Commerce here in the business community, but he is also a retired Colonel in the United States Air Force, so we thank you both for your service not only in the Air Force, but what you're doing afterwards, so thank you very much.

MR. MCKEON: Thank you Chairman Skinner.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Okay. I thank you for the applause, but now our two hour block begins, so I don't want to hear from you again until the end.

(Laughter)

MR. MCKEON: Okay. Chairman Skinner, Commissioner Bilbray and Commissioner Coyle, I am Jim McKeon, President and CEO of the Rapid City Area Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Ellsworth Task Force. On behalf of South Dakota, I welcome you to the Black Hills of South Dakota and the home of Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Before we begin, we would like to express our sincerest appreciation for accepting the monumental task placed before you. We know it will challenge your endurance

and skills as credentialed public servants, but as you go through the remainder of the summer and find you are asking yourself not only what town am I waking up in, but why did I not listen to that little voice that cautioned me about what I was getting into, know that we admire you for your service to our country.

It is our pleasure to meet and address you today. You have seen Ellsworth firsthand, a modern platform from which the bomber of choice in our ongoing global war of terror engages our presence -- , are presented to you. We believe you likewise share our sense of frustration with the presentation of such unnecessary challenges to our community, such as for the matters and same as for the matters of the Commission. The last several weeks have been like working with a kaleidoscope of ever emerging pictures. While such maybe an amusing adventure in some circumstances, we have found it to be inconsistent with the gravity of the national security decisions being made in this process. As late as last Friday data was being released, and as such, we sincerely believe that your offer to communities to be able to present new information to you over the next several weeks will help to compensate for the Department's actions.

Here to open our message is a former commander of

the Air Combat Command, General Mike Loh. General Loh is an Air Force visionary, who told us when Ellsworth became an Air Combat Command base in the 1990's that the Air Force will need Ellsworth, a base with great expanses of open skies and uncongested airspace into 2020 and beyond, but the Air Force needs the vision to get it there. I would offer that nothing could be more appropriate to you today as you decide whether Ellsworth will be here in 2020 and beyond.

Although General Loh was unable to join us in person due to a medical condition, he has provided this video for us. A copy of his written testimony along with his sworn affirmation is being provided for your consideration.

Commissioners, General Loh.

Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Don't do that. I screwed up. I'm sorry. Play the other video first. This tells us a little about our community. My apologies to the Commission. It was taking too long. I knew they were probably trying to fumble.

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: We won't hold this time against you, Jim.

VIDEO NARRATION: We live in a land called South Dakota. Flyover country to some. To others, the last region of this great country to be met. A land of natural

wonders. Native American heritage and rich, western history. A place where men carve mountains and the stars and stripes and the eagles still fly. Through world wars and a history of conflict, they heeded the call of a nation, born from the simple premise that all are created equal, and that each shares unalienable rights worth defending at home and abroad. From the beaches of Normandy and the jungles of Vietnam to today's war on terrorism in Afghanistan and Iraq, South Dakotans have long served their country and still do so today surrounded by neighbors who welcome them home from their service, and in times of tragedy who never forget. For well over half a century, the Black Hills community, this place of proud patriots have supported Ellsworth Air Force Base and welcomed the airmen and women into their hearts and into their homes. In return for this enduring relationship, the Ellsworth community has served the United States military with distinction, fulfilling evolving missions, hosting the latest in technological advances and in times of shared tragedy such as a devastating Rapid City flood that claimed 238 lives in 1972, Ellsworth personnel provided needed assistance in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

For so many reasons, which will be explored here today, the great state of South Dakota greeted with sadness

the Secretary of Defense's recommended closure of Ellsworth Air Force Base, an economic lynch pin in America's outback. Today the people of the Black Hills are the power of this land, undeterred by setback, confident in their future, and resilient in the cause of freedom and Democracy.

Many things may be said as the days turn to weeks and the months turn to years ahead, but it will not be said that South Dakotans have shirked their duty or shied away from the hard choices that befall those who dare greatness and who celebrate that which is best in America. And so it is in South Dakota, where Ellsworth stands as a sentinel on the plains with a worldwide reach capable of defending our nation's borders while simultaneously generating awesome fire power in any international theater of war.

It is said that those who ignore history are destined to repeat it. On that fateful day in December 1941, America learned firsthand the error of concentrating its defense forces in one place. With tens of millions of dollars invested in infrastructure improvement in the past decade and the minimal prospect of encroachment, Ellsworth is uniquely positioned to play an ongoing roll in our nation's defense.

As South Dakota's second largest employer, Ellsworth Air Force Base has a 65-year history of supporting

joint mission’s capabilities and multiple aircraft weapon systems including bombers, tankers, command and control, jet trainer, helicopters, and ground and flight training.

Since 1942, nearby Rapid City has provided unparalleled quality of life to the base's military members, civilian employees, and their families who named Rapid City one of the nation's Military Communities of Excellence. Ellsworth's 11,183 military, dependent and civilian employees constitute 18 percent of Rapid City's population, creating an annual economic impact of $278 million dollars. However, our grandchildren will not measure the legacy of this BRAC Commission in dollars and cents. Generations unborn will gauge what we do here today and what you decide tomorrow by discerning their own security. In that evaluation, Ellsworth Air Force Base makes good sense and sound security.

For three generations, Ellsworth has served our nation. For nearly half its history of statehood, South Dakotans have been proud to play a role in America's defense. Today, the thousands of Black Hills residents gathered here in this great hall and the thousands more who could not be with us share a love of freedom and the faith that this Commission will have the insight to not approve the Secretary's recommendation to close Ellsworth Air Force

Base, and they stand ready to exert their energies in reaffirming their love for country and home and friend. We live in a land called South Dakota.

(End of video)

MR. MCKEON: Hopefully, hopefully your brief visit to the base and discussions with its airmen and civilians accurately depicted that it began its transformation and modernization long before the concepts became widely accepted. And as a community so long tied to the defense of our nation, I am sure that the audience assembled here, although adamantly opposed to your approval of the Secretary of Defense's recommendation to close Ellsworth Air Force Base, appreciates your service to our nation.

In a like manner, we are fully aware that you are seated as an independent body of examiners and were not involved in the formulation of the Secretary's recommendation. As such, we believe you'll find our preliminary analysis of the limited information the Secretary released in the weeks after his recommendation were forwarded to you and the bodies of data, minutes and decisions released in the past week will establish that there is substantial deviation from the criteria approved for this round of closures and realignments. We believe you will ensure this is a fair process and the credibility of

data used in your determinations must be above reproach if the American public is to believe in the integrity of the BRAC process.

From what you just saw in the video, you have should have an understanding of who we are and the values in which we believe. Now that you know a little bit about our community and the values by which we live at this time, let's get down to the facts about our reaction to the Secretary's decisions. In addition to being adamantly opposed to your approval of the Secretary of Defense's recommendation to close Ellsworth Air Force Base, we are deeply disappointed in the Department of Defense's management in the release of data, records of discussions and decision processes that were used in formulating the recommendations proposed to you. We believe that you likewise share our sense of frustration with the presentation of such unnecessary challenges a community such as ours, and for the matter, for that matter to the Commission.

For the last several weeks, again, have been like a kaleidoscope, and I mentioned that earlier when I was on the wrong page. I won't repeat it. At this time I would again like to introduce the video that the Air Combat Command, former commander of Air Combat Command, General

Mike Loh, has provided for this Commission.

Please show the General Loh video at this time.

GENERAL LOH (via video): I thank the Commission for this opportunity to present this statement to the BRAC Commissioners in Rapid City, South Dakota, supporting Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am John Michael Loh, a retired Air Force four-star general. I served as the commander of Air Combat Command from its inception in June 1992, until my retirement from the Air Force in July 1995. Prior to that, I was the Air Force Vice Chief of Staff during the first Gulf War, and commander of Tactical Air Command from March '91 until June '92.

As commander of Air Combat Command, I controlled all of the Air Force's bombers and bomber bases including Ellsworth Air Force Base. I was responsible for training, equipping, and maintaining combat readiness for our bomber aircraft and crews for combat operations worldwide. This included all of the B-1 bombers and B-1 bases.

I speak today to urge the Commission to retain Ellsworth Air Force Base as a B-1 operational base vital to our nation's security and defense preparedness.

And by the way, just for the record, I submit this statement voluntarily, at my own request, and I am not being

compensated in any way for this testimony.

I believe the Pentagon deviated significantly from six of the eight BRAC criteria in its recommendation to close Ellsworth and move all of its B-1 bombers to another B-1 base. I will complain why in a minute, but first we must understand how valuable our fleet of 67 B-1s is to our current war fighting needs.

The B-1 bomber is the backbone of the bomber force. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the B-1s delivered more weapons and struck more targets than any other bomber or fighter by far. In Afghanistan, the B-1 accounted for 40 percent, by weight, of the weapons delivered. In Iraq, 34 percent. No other weapon system came close.

So whatever decisions you make regarding B-1s, please do so carefully because you are dealing with the Air Force's number one offensive weapon system in terms of its impact on the global war on terror.

Now, when the Air Force created Air Combat Command in 1992, it had four large B-1 bases, each with about 24 B-1s. These bases were Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota, Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota, McConnell Air Force Base, Kansas, and Dyess Air Force Base, Texas. Subsequent BRACs and Air Force decisions reduced the number of B-1s to its current number, 67, and the number of

B-1 bases to two bases, Ellsworth and Dyess.

I mention this brief history because when the Air Force consolidated to two bases in 2001, it violated one of the guiding principles I consistently and scrupulously followed for long range bomber operations, and that is, do not operate more than 36 heavy, long range bombers from a single base. This long-standing principle has a sound basis. In the case of the B-1, putting more than 36 bombers at one base results in a very inefficient operation. Operational readiness suffers because too many crews must share too few training ranges and training airspace. Logistics suffers because there's too little support infrastructure to handle greatly expanded maintenance, supply and transportation needs, and the quality of life suffers because one base cannot provide adequately for all the medical, housing, and other needs of our people.

So putting all 67 B-1s at one base, the current plan under BRAC, almost doubles the maximum size for a bomber base and will greatly aggravate these adverse operational, logistical, and security problems. It's a recipe for an unmanageable congestion and never-ending chaos that spells inefficiency, waste and degraded operational readiness for the B-1s.

Moreover, having the entire B-1 fleet at one base

with only a single runway presents an unacceptable security risk. This situation provides an inviting target to an enemy that could render the entire B-1 fleet inoperable with a single weapon.

In addition, having two B-1 bases allows the Air Force the option of adding more B-1s from inactive status as it did just recently, and allows for the introduction of additional missions at both bases, an important BRAC criteria not available if Ellsworth is closed.

So as I read the eight BRAC criteria, I find that the Pentagon deviated significantly on six of them in its recommendation on Ellsworth.

Criteria one concerns the impact of operational readiness. Closing Ellsworth will decrease the operational readiness of the B-1 fleet, as I explained earlier.

Criteria two concerns facilities and airspace at receiving and existing bases. Closing Ellsworth shuts down forever valuable training airspace in the northwest U.S. and aggravates the available training ranges and airspace at the receiving base.

Criteria three concerns the ability to accommodate future requirements. Closing Ellsworth will deny the Pentagon a valuable base for future missions in an area that will offer ideal, unencroached land and airspace for

generations to come.

Criteria four concerns cost and manpower. Closing Ellsworth will not reduce cost or manpower. In the long run, trying to operate 67 B-1s from a single base will cost more than operating two B-1 bases at peak efficiency for each.

Criteria six concerns the economic impact on the community. Closing Ellsworth will be devastating to the regional economy. Others will speak to this impact better than I.

Criteria seven concerns the ability of the receiving infrastructure to support the mission. Closing Ellsworth will cause enormous, long-term infrastructure problems at the receiving base that will adversely impact operational readiness of the B-1 fleet.

So, in my opinion, the Pentagon in its zeal to consolidate and reach some perceived quota for base closures, picked the wrong base by putting Ellsworth on the list. There are many other options that do not involve this questionable move of all B-1s to a single operating location while closing the one base, Ellsworth, that is located in a region of the country having the capacity for unencroached military operations as far in the future as the eye can see.

Mr. Chairman, I have served as the senior

commander of bomber operations for our nation. I sincerely feel that tinkering with our most productive bomber fleet in this way is a misguided and risky application of the BRAC process. I urge you to retain Ellsworth Air Force Base as an urgently needed B-1 base and remove it from the closure list.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Commissioners, to bring another personal face to the powerful testimony General Loh has provided to you, I present to you Air Force Lieutenant General Thad Wolfe, retired. General Wolfe commanded the 509th Bomb Wing and its FB-111, he also commanded Ellsworth's Strategic Warfare Center from 1990 to 1992, with its three wings of B-1Bs, KC-135s, EC-135s, B-52s, T-38s and UH-1s flying missions as well as the 44th Strategic Missile Wing as an associate unit. General Wolfe concluded his career as Vice Commander of Air Combat Command from 1993 to 1996 with a vast variety of bases and weapon symptoms assigned.

General Wolfe.

GENERAL WOLFE: Thank you for the opportunity to present this statement regarding the proposed closure of Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Like General Loh, you should know that I am here as a private citizen. Neither I nor the company with which I work are being compensated for my appearance here today. I am joining you today because I am concerned about the tentative decision on the closure of Ellsworth.

As Jim said, I served at Ellsworth in 1990 as a commander of what was then called the Strategic Warfare Center, and I was a senior commander at the base. Later from 1992 through 1995 - how soon we forget, it could have been '93 - I served as Vice commander of Air Combat Command, overseeing the operations of Ellsworth along with about 30 other bases. I worked directly for General Loh, whose statement you have just heard. He is widely respected for his intellect, pragmatism, and his advocacy for good analysis. His thoughtful comments should be helpful to you.

My sole purpose today is to provide this panel with information and insights that may also help you reach some difficult decisions. In the end, I have concluded that the Commission should recommend retaining Ellsworth as a B-1 operational base for its current and future mission value, for security reasons which weigh against consolidation of all B-1 assets at one place, and as a unique hedge against evolving new mission requirements in uncertain times. I will support my conclusion in terms of my doubts about the

OSD and Air Force closure recommendation.

But first, something we all seem to agree on. Most everybody agrees on the viability of the B-1. That viability was apparently not a factor in deciding to recommend closing Ellsworth. The B-1 will undoubtedly beat its life expectancy and will have new technology inserted to extend its service life and its effectiveness as a weapon system.

But military value takes more than just the weapon system. What ads to the B-1 operational effectiveness may be unique to this region because of Ellsworth's remarkable proximity to uncrowded and quickly accessible airspace and ranges, sparsely populated and diverse terrain, proximity to other training areas nearby for joint and combined operations, and finally to modernize infrastructure. Ellsworth is literally a new base.

So how did Ellsworth end up on the closure list? I am not sure, but let me offer some thoughts for context. Ellsworth has been a well kept secret, perhaps too well kept. As our Air Force, our major air commands and our Unified Combatant Commands have changed, including resuborination of units, fewer people in decision-making roles have long-term, direct insight into some unique and valuable aspects of Ellsworth. What I am referring to in

addition to the physical environment I just mentioned, is the close relationship between Rapid City, the State, the Congressional Delegation, and tribal entities in the area. I say this to underscore my concern that when it comes time to make judgments about Ellsworth, the forced decision between closing one or other of the B-1 bases, during that decision the judges lacked the more rounded insight required to make the best decisions combining objective data and subjective judgments.

Now that you have spent even a day here and on the base, you may also share my concern as former commander of Ellsworth and later overseeing ACC bases, that the Air Force and OSD decision lacks an appreciation of just what this enduring civil-military relationship between base and community has provided, provided to the military success of Ellsworth and the Air Force, and would continue to bring in the future an aspect not quantifiable within DOD data calls. While you'll hear more about this in a moment, as someone who led the airmen at Ellsworth, I urge you to consider what that relationship has meant in terms of quality of life and quality of service; unquestionably significant elements of military value directly and indirectly at Ellsworth.

As you notice today, Ellsworth is one of the best equipped and most updated in the Air Force inventory. For

instance, over a thousand housing units, including many under construction today improving the quality of life for our young airman, officers and their families. These were a result of the combined commitment of the base, the Air Force, the townspeople, the Governor, and the Congressional Delegation over time.

The same is true for vast infrastructure improvements. In fact, the infrastructure is newer, more modern and in better shape than most bases not on the closure list, and I'm not sure the data reflects the most recent upgrades.

The partnership extends to such vital elements as continued community support for combat competitions that enhance military value - although most of the competition today is with the enemy on the battlefield - and support for our people increasingly placed in harm's way in the Global War on Terrorism. It also extends to open information flow between the Governor's office and Ellsworth when plans, policies and activities would affect the other; shared insights in environmental technology valuable to state and base; regular opportunities to exchange cultural insights with the Lakota Sioux; efficiencies in medical care through exchange of patients and equipment between the Ellsworth medical facility and the VA hospitals in the area; and an

open and rational relationship with the union representing many Ellsworth employees; a strong program to support the hiring with skill development of individuals with special challenges; and access to the most accessible forests, mountains and other attractions that draw vast numbers to the Black Hills and surrounding area. Young people who serve here want to stay or return.

Well, the list could go on, but the real point is that there is a flaw, it seems to me, in the BRAC assessment criteria and process that fails to capture and consider vital subjective factors such as these that contribute directly to the success of our air crews and support personnel, so it is left to the Commission to overlay their judgment onto the OSD analysis.

I have additional concerns with closing Ellsworth with its adverse affect on our nation's security and future flexibility of our Air Force. I share General Loh's view that consolidation of B-1s at one base will have a measurable adverse impact on readiness and military effectiveness of the B-1 fleet. For instance, as an aside, Ellsworth's B-1s regularly outscore their peers in readiness measurements in large part due to factors unique to this region and this base, not unlike the partnership I just spoke of moments ago and the flying environment. Due to

that flying environment, Ellsworth has proven to be the ideal location for B-1 bed-down and crew training, and I urge you to review readiness differences between the B-1 bases.

Of further concern about the data used justify closing Ellsworth, I believe that the assessors erred when comparing the Lancer military operating area with the Powder River Complex literally overhead here. It is not clear that they looked at the qualitative value of the training available, but appeared to score primarily the distance to and number of entry points of each range complex. Those data are interesting, but not compelling when looking at overall training value.

I also believe BRAC is dealing with an incomplete view of future missions and Ellsworth's roll and value therein. Important command missions are changing rapidly while the BRAC process is underway. New missions like global strike, information operation, intelligence/surveillance and reconnaissance, missile defense, support to civil authority, and the broader homeland security arena, and again just broadened homeland defense to include maritime and land surveillance. They are rapidly emerging.

And again, I look at the context this way. You

realize that Ellsworth is subordinate to Air Combat Command. Air Combat Command in turn is a component to several combat and commands that rely on capabilities at Ellsworth. ACC also provides forces to the Strategic Command headquartered in Omaha, US Northern Command headquartered in Colorado Springs, and Joint Forces Command at Norfolk, and also through Joints Forces Command to other regional combatant commands around the world.

The point is that each of these supported commands has evolving missions that would use the kind of capabilities at or potentially resident at Ellsworth if it were tasked. There is no base in the central region better positioned to do that.

All of those evolving missions will require forces, synchronization, training, exercises and education. To further complicate it, DOD is transforming to joint functional component commands wherein service forces can work for anybody, anyplace at any time. This is occurring as the U.S. is pulling back from overseas stations reducing forward based forces. That puts additional premiums on bases in the U.S. To date, I don't believe that the BRAC process has been capable of giving this adequate airing because the changes are ongoing right now, and some are anticipated.

Well, with these evolving missions, factors which should be further considered include Ellsworth's potential value in near space activity and the essential use of the airspace in this region in support of missile defense; the need to maintain forces at different locations to place stress on the information technology and net-centric nature of conflict. DOD is changing to this model today, which appears to run somewhat counter to closing of high value bases like Ellsworth. Our response to the Global War on Terrorism should consider Ellsworth for potential, conventional ICBMS, unmanned air vehicles, as I mentioned earlier, and perhaps even unmanned combat air vehicles, taking advantage again of the special airspace and ranges as far as population and existing infrastructure.

Redundant somewhat to that, NORAD and U.S. Northern Command may have potential for Ellsworth in maintaining, training with and operating UAVs for surveillance of our borders.

Again, this list could go on, but it is illustrative and not exhaustive. It points out that resolving Ellsworth's capabilities due to a questionable a priori decision to consolidate the fleet seems a risky proposition, to say the least. Our Air Force itself appeared to recognize this when it reviewed its decision

regarding keeping a strategic presence in the upper Midwest. As you may know, Ellsworth's military value scores ranked first and sixth of the eight mission areas, and second in the other two. The solution to both of these is to recognize the strategic redundancy and operational effectiveness are simply too important to sacrifice on the alter of consolidation and budget cuts. Both are solved by removing Ellsworth from the list, preserving the dual B-1 bed down and working with due diligence to expand Ellsworth's missions.

Napoleon once said that in combat, the moral is to the physical, as three is to one. Well, the combination of the superior training environment, young people who want to serve here, and the enduring positive civil-military relationship have added uniquely to the dominant value of the moral component of military effectiveness at Ellsworth. It shows in combat today, and it promises to do so even more dramatically in the future.

We are counting on your roll as Commissioners to be the adequately empowered authority capable of judging some of the judgments that have been made in the process to date. That is what I very respectfully ask of you in removing Ellsworth from the BRAC closure list. Thank you and good luck as you execute this awesome responsibility.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Thank you, General Wolfe.

Now, before I move onto more specifics of our preliminary analysis, I would like to provide you with a little more information about my Air Force career experiences.

From 1987 until 1989, I was commander of the 11th Strategic Group responsible for flying operations of the European Tanker Task Force, at RAF Fairford in the U.K, there goes to Spain and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. In 1989, I stood up and was wing commander of the 99th Strategic Weapons Wing here at Ellsworth Air Force Base, a wing unique in that from Ellsworth it trained crews from B-52s, B-1s, FB-111s, and KC-135 aircraft. And finally, I served as Chief of Staff of the Warfare Center under General Wolfe.

As to some of our specific analysis to date, a close examination of the comparative military value rankings among the three bases in north central U.S., where the Air Force has stated they plan to maintain a strategic presence, Ellsworth ranked first in six of the eight functional categories. Ellsworth is clearly a base to be retained.

As used for their Ellsworth recommendation, Air Force basing principle number 10 directing consolidated operations violates Air Force basing principle number seven

that directs long range strike basing to provide flexible strategic response. Consolidating all B-1 aircraft in one base with one runway violates that principle.

The information on Ellsworth's infrastructure is not accurately categorized in the data used in the recommendation to close Ellsworth. Clear examples are the total square footage of facilities and aircraft parking capacity.

Ellsworth's rating on current and future mission capability is undervalued by a misconstructed metric measuring access and use of the primary aerial training range managed by Ellsworth.

Consistent with General Loh's assessment of the ability of a single B-1 base to maintain a satisfactory or higher aircraft mission capable rate, the Air Force substantially deviated from military value criteria number one in recommending the consolidation of Ellsworth's consistently higher rated B-1 operations at a base that maintained a lesser operational readiness rate, thereby impacting training, readiness and war fighting.

The Air Force substantially deviated from Military Value Criteria #2, in that the recommended closure of Ellsworth will relocate the B-1B aircraft, which constitutes 82 percent of the use of the immediately adjacent airspace,

called the Powder River and MOA, or military operating airspace area, to a base at least two hours flight time away, thereby either increasing operational costs or reducing mission effectiveness.

The Air Force substantially deviated from Military Value Criteria #3 in that the reduced use of the Powder River MOA will either increase the cost of operations per missions flown from out of the area, or cause it to be abandoned for use by future total force requirements.

If the Secretary's recommended closure of Ellsworth is approved, General Loh's assessment of the loss of valuable training airspace constitutes substantial deviation from Military Value Criteria #3 regarding use of the Powder River MOA. If on the other hand, the Powder River MOA is not closed, it is difficult - if not impossible - to understand how Ellsworth scored low with respect to access to the Powder River MOA.

The Air Force substantially deviated from Military Value Criteria #4, in that the cost to operate the entire B-1 fleet will exceed the cost of maintaining two bases, each of which has the capacity to accept future forced bed downs.

The Air Force substantially deviated from Military Value Criteria #6, in that of the three bases in the north

central U.S. considered for strategic presence retention, the recommended closure of Ellsworth will eliminate the most highly rated base for realigning tanker aircraft, or the bed down of future forced missions such as the unmanned aerial vehicle, commander control, intelligence/surveillance and reconnaissance, C2ISR, or emerging missions such as the airborne laser.

The Air Force substantially deviated from Military Value Number #6, in that of the three bases in the north central U.S. considered for strategic presence retention, the recommended closure of Ellsworth will more severely impact the existing community and it's vicinity than the one being recommended for retention for an emerging mission.

The Air Force substantially deviated from Military Value Criteria #7, in that the recommended closure of Ellsworth will relocate B-1B assets to a base that has a lesser current plant replacement value, and will have a lesser infrastructure and overall capacity even after the more than $100 million required facility projects are constructed.

Commissioners, I would now like to introduce to you Air Force Colonel Pat McElgunn, retired. Pat served at Ellsworth from 1989 to 1994, and commanded the largest security group in the Strategic Air Command. After 27 years

of service, he joined us in 1994, as Director of our Ellsworth Task Force.

Mr. Pat McElgunn.

(Applause)

COLONEL MCELGUNN: Commissioner Skinner, Commissioner Bilbray, and Commissioner Coyle, on behalf of the Ellsworth Task Force, I welcome you to the military support community of Rapid City.

As we began to analyze the data and the minutes and the decisions the Secretary had used in the preparation of his recommendations, we became concerned about the integrity and the clarity of the data. We were also concerned about the unprecedented withholding of information used in determination which bases should close. I testify here today with a conviction that from what we have seen to date, the Air Force's recommendations to the Secretary regarding Ellsworth are not based on accurate information and substantially deviate from the BRAC 2005 criteria.

You have heard a number of specific citations to the effect, and I am convinced that the Air Force took a basic imperative and applied it to the B-1B weapon system, thereby violating the violating the basic principle of ensuring the flexibility of its Long Range Strike Force.

In addition, from what limited information and

time we have been afforded, Ellsworth's modernized facilities and base operations support cost were not properly considered in head-to-head competition with bases in our central U.S., and in similar evaluations in this region's bases capable of handling heavy aircraft.

Some examples of Ellsworth's military value in terms of operational advantages are best characterized by easy and quick access to ranges in the upper Midwest, and in terms of air flight, ranges in Utah and Nevada; low density air traffic, unconstrained airspace. This is fly over country. We understand that. And excellent flying weather provide ideal conditions for DOD, and in addition, they can add in multiple missions.

We are at the geographical center of the United States in certain terms. We are in an ideal location for global strike missions from Ellsworth. The Air Force perceives that that is an evolving responsibility that they have to be able to launch those missions from the central United States.

We obviously are also positioned to have access to the shortest polar routes in the most likely theaters of operation we face today. We also have the security advantages of being distant from the coast in terms of being well within the evolving national missile defense umbrella.

We have a low density population. We do not have the probability of high volume urban sprawl that we are seeing in large metropolitan areas where the Air Force is currently positioned.

The bottom line is that Ellsworth has operational advantages to make it the ideal base for the 21st century, as General Loh as so accurately described. In terms of joint mission capability, we have a 65-year history of supporting multiple aircraft symptoms, including bombers, tankers, command and control, jet trainers, helicopters, and ground and flight missions.

As recently as 1990, Ellsworth housed the Strategic Warfare Center that General Wolfe described to you. We have four wings with 7,300 personnel assigned here. We have the capacity. Ellsworth is better positioned today to support those missions due to its comprehensive facilities modernizations. Our delegation has worked diligently for the last decade plus to modernize Ellsworth's facilities. We have space available for operations, maintenance and support: 230,000 square yards of ramp space; 200,000 square feet in eight large aircraft docks; 100,000 square feet in a single arched structure, one of very few that are left in the United States, for oversized aircraft capable of handling two 747s at the same time;

99,000 square feet of administrative space; and 20,000 square feet of maintenance and support space. A flight line dock can also support multiple joint base options for future manned and unmanned atmospheric platforms.

In terms of undeveloped and suitable characterized space in terms of environmental issues, Ellsworth has 1,800 acres of land, which can be developed in a relatively short period of time due to the aggressive work of the environmental shop on the base in the last two decades.

And last in this arena, Ellsworth's mil-con and airfield infrastructure do not present major funding requirements in the Air Force's FY06 Unfunded Priority List.

In terms of future missions, referring to the Air Force's Transformation Flight Plan, that infrastructure I just described to you makes an ideal base for both active duty, guard or reserve missions. Ellsworth can support National Guard initiatives, and reserve component foot prints can be placed within the base itself without extraordinary mil-con requirements, and take advantage of the excellent opportunities we have in terms of the infrastructure and training opportunities. And also, in terms of some joint training that was going on in the pre-911 period, we have the capability not only on the base, but also in the arena of western South Dakota, McGurns range

in Wyoming, to conduct significant large sized blended operations with guard, reserve and active duty.

Our bottom line is if we have a modern in place base, it does not need to be built. You've heard it described as a base that's less than 20 years of age in terms of how it has been rebuilt in the last decade or more. It was, significant improvements were made to it in the early to mid 1980s to bed down the B-1 platform. Today Ellsworth is a platform as described that does the heavy lifting in AEF cycles, the B-1 bombers rotation out on high demand. Their troops, their air crews perform flawlessly. As described by General Loh, they deliver the lion's share of the ordinance when called upon. They are the weapon of choice for CENTCOM in terms of being the linebacker when the troops on the ground need support.

In 2001, Ellsworth was rated as one of the five top Air Forces bases for the bed down of Global Hawk Mission. And subsequent infrastructure improvements have enhanced this for future man or unmanned aerial vehicle capabilities. Overall, the last decade or so we have seen an investment of an excess of $150 million into Ellsworth's infrastructure and into its quality of life facilities.

The majority of the work force at Ellsworth, you probably heard this morning, operates and works on a daily

basis in structures that have been built since 1985, and with approval of $14 million in the FY07 budget with aggressive management provided by the base's military housing office, every family on Ellsworth will live in a military family house less than 20 years of age. Unprecedented in terms of the problems that the services have with military family housing in today's constrained budget environment. On a daily basis you can see that Ellsworth has the lowest utility rates in the Air Combat Command. Some of the most reliable and extremely cost effective electric power generated at 50 percent of the commercial rates. The base upgraded its internal electrical system in the 90's, similar savings in natural gas requirements, and they have long-term water rights and agreements with the City of Rapid City at reasonable rates. Ellsworth's waste water treatment plant is operating at about half of its capacity. It has the potential to obviously handle another similar load, but is also being upgraded as we go through this particular budget cycle.

The bottom line overall in terms of Ellsworth and its infrastructure and facilities, is that it is a cost efficient base, it is an efficient base, and it has a proven record of being able to generate combat sorties out of Ellsworth into the theaters that are of most concern to our

nation today.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Thank you, Colonel McElgunn.

Commissioners, I would now like you to hear from our Rapid City Mayor, Jim Shaw, who will speak to you on behalf of the other mayors throughout the Black Hills, and actually all the other government leaders in South Dakota.

(Applause)

MAYOR SHAW: Commissioners, we welcome you here to Rapid City, the Black Hills, and to this great hall, the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, and being greeted, of course, by nearly 10,000 of our citizens from throughout the region, and especially here in Rapid City.

Our community, and that includes Rapid City, but the broader Black Hills area, and really all of South Dakota, have a long and well-established history of both supporting and embracing our nation's military services. For over 60 years, we have supported Ellsworth's many and varied missions. Throughout World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Cold War, and the Gulf Wars, including a 12,000 square mile intercontinental ballistic missile field here in western South Dakota.

Since 911, we have supported Ellsworth's base and

family needs during their repeated deployments in support of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. And in a similar manner, we have seen our area's National Guard units mobilized with many still serving in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In my position as Mayor as someone who has the privilege of personally associating with Ellsworth's B-1B crew members, I can tell you those who train to fight from Ellsworth absolutely rave about our uncongested skies and the immediate access, as you have been hearing this afternoon, to the Powder River military operating area. The inherent military utility Ellsworth offers air crews, maintainers and support personnel is being continually demonstrated by the B-1B squadron's skilled crews delivering precision weapons and tremendous firepower for Central Command's missions over Afghanistan and Iraq.

In another area of base support as a community, we addressed the issue of encroaching development near Ellsworth Air Force Base in the 1990's, and took the unprecedented initiative costing multi-millions of dollars to relocate an entire interstate highway interchange and build a new five lane base access road to the main gate at Ellsworth. Now, as a result of this initiative, development that could have been an encroachment issue instead is not. Development has been drawn away from this area, and property

and acreages have been purchased in that accident prevention potential zone to ensure its longevity.

In that same area of concern, I can assure you that we have few, if any, prospects of suffering the congestion and urban sprawl that is limiting the operational utility of many other bases, some located within cities and other in high to explosive growth areas of our nation.

As to another important factor in the overall management and retention of military personnel, our community pays close attention to the quality of life afforded them, and most importantly, their families. Such categories as best public schools, spousal employment opportunities, and middle-class living standard have stood out from the rest, and when combined with the quality housing and access to both national and state parks nearby, military families flourish here. In fact, a 2004 survey by Expansion Management magazine rated the overall quality of life afforded to those who live in the Rapid City community to be in the top 25 percent of 60 military support communities evaluated.

Further evidence of the sustained quality of life we and the rest of South Dakota enjoys is a 15-year record of being nationally recognized as one of the 10 most livable states in terms of 44 evaluation categories.

Commissioners, we are convinced that Ellsworth offers the Air Force and the Department of Defense an opportunity to both realize Ellsworth's military value and expand on its operational advantages and expansion capability. And further, we can assure you that the base and its missions will be fully supported by the public policy decisions within our collective communities. We will continue to embrace its people as integral members of our communities and our Congressional Delegation will be similarly supportive.

In closing, please allow me to commend each of you on behalf of the citizens of Rapid City and the Black Hills area. We appreciate the great challenges and the huge job that you have as Commissioners. We believe when you have evaluated the Secretary's recommendation to close Ellsworth, you will find the counter points that we have offered and will offer here this afternoon in the testimony of experienced officials and military leaders, to prevail. As we say, we truly and sincerely believe America needs Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Thank you for this opportunity.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Thank you, Mayor Shaw.

We'll now go into a lengthy introduction of our

Congressional Delegation. Actually, they asked me not to, so here without further ado is our senior senator from South Dakota, Senator Tim Johnson.

(Applause)

SENATOR JOHNSON: Well, thank you. I'd like to welcome Commissioner Skinner, Commissioner Bilbray and Commissioner Coyle to South Dakota, and to thank them for their service to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. I know each of you will give careful and thoughtful consideration to the arguments presented today in defense of Ellsworth Air Force Base.

I'd also like to recognize the Ellsworth Task Force, the Rapid City and Box Elder communities, the men and women stationed at Ellsworth. Your steadfast dedication, patriotism and support for Ellsworth has strengthened America.

This morning I had the opportunity to join the Commissioners in touring Ellsworth Air Force Base, and we saw firsthand that it is an unparalleled and world class military installation that is uniquely qualified to bed down the B-1 bomber fleet. Ellsworth is physically not the same Air Force Base that it was a decade or more ago. In an age of every changing and emerging threats, it was imperative to upgrade the facilities at Ellsworth in order to confront the

new enemies of the 21st century. Without question, we have succeeded.

The challenge to transform Ellsworth was necessary given our military's growing reliance on the B-1 bomber in defending our country. The B-1 bomber was first used in combat during Operation Desert Fox in December of 1998. In recent years, B-1 bombers and their crews proved their combat value in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. In fact, in Operation Iraqi Freedom, B-1s flew fewer than 2 percent of the combat sorties, but dropped more than half of the satellite guided munitions. They showed great flexibility and were assigned a broad range of targets in Iraq, including command and control facilities, bunkers, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and surface-to-missile sites. They also demonstrated the ability to linger for many hours over the battlefield, and to provide close air support for U.S. forces engaged in the field.

Clearly, the B-1 bomber has proven it is the backbone of our bomber fleet. To ensure that its mission was not compromised and to maintain operational efficiencies and readiness, the South Dakota Congressional Delegation secured funding necessary for substantial upgrades to the base's infrastructure. As a result, today Ellsworth is a top-notch, modern, high-tech facility without equal among

military installations in America.

In the past decade, we have secured nearly $140 million that has been invested in Ellsworth's infrastructure. This includes funding for a new flight simulator facility for B-1 crews to replace an outdated facility allowing aviators access to improved training methods. A new operations center for the 37th Bomb Squadron was built to consolidate operations that had previously been housed in three separate locations. Erected in closes proximity to the new headquarters of the 77th Bomb Squadron and to the flight line, it has enhanced mission responsiveness and productivity.

While service members must have access to the most advanced training systems available, it is equally important to provide a good quality of life to the men and women who serve Ellsworth and who serve America. The dilapidated family housing units have been replaced with military housing that ranks among the best in America. In addition, a new library and education center have been built, while the McRaven Child Development Center has been remodeled and expanded. These improvements have made Ellsworth one of the most family friendly and desirable bases for military personnel and their loved ones anywhere.

Finally, Ellsworth is strategically located with

good access to training ranges and potential for growth. Ellsworth has strong community support and does not face the urban encroachment issues that confront many of our other military installations. Rather than closing, Ellsworth has without a doubt demonstrated that it is our nation's premier bomber base, and is well positioned to receive additional missions.

The entire State of South Dakota is proud of Ellsworth and the men and women stationed there for their role in keeping America safe and free. The B-1s that call Ellsworth home are integral to our nation's defense, and Ellsworth is uniquely qualified to maintain that B-1 mission. Closing Ellsworth and stationing all our bombers at one installation without carefully considering the long-term consequences will impair our ability to protect against threats at home and abroad. Thank you for taking our thoughts here today into very careful consideration.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Thank you, Senator Johnson.

Next, I would like to introduce Senator John Thune.

(Applause)

SENATOR THUNE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members

of the Commission, thank you for coming today. Welcome to Rapid City and the Black Hills.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I know that you and your fellow Commissioners will bear a great responsibility in the coming months. As Commissioners, your decisions will directly impact the safety and security of all Americans.

The B-1 bomber, as the backbone of our nation's bomber force, plays a critical war in our war on terror. The question before this Commission is this: Does it make military sense to house the entire B-1 fleet in a single location? Members of the BRAC Commission, we believe the answer is clear. Any further consolidation of the B-1s would create an unwise and unnecessary security risk, and the Pentagon's proposal to do so should be rejected by this Commission.

Let's take a look at the risks and the dangers of the Pentagon's proposal. As General Loh and General Wolfe explained, putting all of our B-1s in a single location would make our B-1 fleet unnecessarily vulnerable.

First, as we have so painfully learned, military installations are not immune from attack. We should never forget about the short-sightedness we had as a nation before Pearl Harbor. We might dismiss that as some past distant

war from another place in another time, not really applicable to today's threats, but it is.

We were reminded of this on September 11th when Al Qaeda attacked the Pentagon itself with tragic results. And there were also reports that the terrorists had targeted other military installations before September 11th.

With the terrorists clearly bent on targeting our military assets and their willingness to use unconventional weapons, we should make it harder, not easier, to destroy or immobilize our fleet of B-1s. But the Pentagon's proposal would create the possibility --

(Applause)

SENATOR THUNE: But the Pentagon's proposal would create the possibility that a single terrorist attack could wipe out our entire B-1 fleet or all of the B-1 pilots and flight crews.

Second, the risk of natural disasters is a constant reminder that we shouldn't put all our B-1 assets in a single location, particularly one located in the heart of tornado alley. We simply cannot afford to risk --

(Applause)

SENATOR THUNE: We simply cannot afford to risk our nation's security on the whims of a single deadly tornado that could destroy or damage our entire B-1 fleet.

The tornado you see on the screen came within 1,000 feet of the runway of McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas. The Air Force is good, but they can't control the weather.

Third, we can't afford to look only at the world as it is now. Instead, we have to look at the emerging threats that our nation will face 10 to 20 years from now. This is not as easy as it sounds. From the abrupt ending of the Cold War to the events of September 11th, it is clear that we live in an uncertain world full of surprises. We have must learn from our history. Although the Soviet Union is gone, countries like China, North Korea, and Iran either have nuclear weapons or are actively developing them. What's more, they are seeking the means to deliver those weapons by long-range ballistic missiles.

The lesson in all this is that the threats we face as a nation will continue to change, and to respond to those threats we need to maintain or increase our flexibility, not reduce it. If the Pentagon is allowed to close Ellsworth, it will be difficult or impossible to reopen it if we are once again surprised by the unexpected.

The statements by General Loh and General Wolfe that we should not over consolidate our B-1 fleet makes perfect sense. It is also supported by sound military principle.

The Department of Defense itself has stated, if you look at the screen in its National Defense Strategy report issued just three months ago, that we should be guided by the goal of "developing greater flexibility to contend with uncertainty by emphasizing agility and by not overly concentrating military forces in a few locations."

(Applause)

SENATOR THUNE: Similarly, the DOD has stated, if you look at the screen again, that they need "secure installations that ensure strategic redundancy."

Finally, Ellsworth's military value is clear even under the Pentagon's own analysis, and could easily expand with additional missions. The Pentagon gives to Ellsworth one of its highest scores for a tanker mission, a significantly higher ranking than the three bases that will actually bed tankers under the Pentagon's plan: McConnell, Fairchild, and McDill. Among the three bases in North and South Dakota -- Ellsworth, Grand Forks, and Minot - Ellsworth scored highest in six of the eight Air Force mission evaluation categories, with the other bases scoring first in only one category each. The surge capacity of Ellsworth is unmistakable.

We fully understand that one of the purposes of this BRAC round is to save money, but we should not do so at

the expense of our nation's security. With the ever-changing threats that we face in this century, we simply cannot take the chance of closing Ellsworth. If we eliminate this base, it cannot be easily replaced later.

Members of the Commission, we are all here today urging you to take Ellsworth off the Pentagon's proposed closure list. Obviously, Ellsworth is critically important to our state, but it is even more important to our country and to our national defense. Ellsworth is a first-class base with a critical mission in our War on Terror, both now and in the future. As a nation, we simply cannot afford to lose it.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Thank you. Thank you very much.

And next we have Representative Stephanie Herseth.

REPRESENTATIVE HERSETH: Mr. Chairman, distinguished Commissioners, members of the Commission staff, thank you for your time today and for your consideration in the weeks ahead.

As Senator Johnson discussed, and as you undoubtedly noticed in your tour this morning, Ellsworth has been transformed from a base of the past to a modern base of the future. It has served and can continue to serve the

existing B-1 mission extremely well. A mission that should not be fully consolidated into one location for the reasons that Generals Loh and Wolfe, and Senator Thune have set forth. As we in Congress work to transform our nation's military, there's no doubt that Ellsworth is also uniquely positioned to serve as an exceptional facility for emerging missions.

Now, you've heard earlier testimony to reference these emerging missions, so allow me to elaborate. The transformation of the Air Force is already underway, and while we have some good guesses as to what the Air Force will look like in 2025, there's never any absolute certainty about how the military will look in the future, or about how the strategic environment for our national security may change. Ellsworth is one of the few bases with the viability to accept the emerging missions currently being developed and deployed, and it is well-positioned to operate virtually any defense platform conceived by the military in the future.

Because of Ellsworth's existing infrastructure and airspace quality, the Air Force has already recognized it as a base well-positioned to handle various emerging missions, and that makes Ellsworth an extremely important aspect to our nation's military in the years to come.

For example, the Air Force has already identified Ellsworth as an excellent candidate for an unmanned aerial vehicle mission, such as the Predator or Global Hawk. In contract to the other base in the region recommended by the Pentagon for retention and bed down of the UAV mission, Ellsworth was one of the five continental U.S. bases identified by the Air Force's internal alternative identification and evaluation process, and the only north central base, the only north central base considered suitable for the initial bed down of a Global Hawk UAV mission in 2001. Given the Air Force's own recommendations, I submit that the Air Force substantially deviated from the Military Value Criteria by not designating Ellsworth as a base to be retained in the north central continental United States for a UAV mission.

Additionally, the Air Force's own evaluation of Ellsworth's location and infrastructure positions it as a prime candidate to bed down new missions such as Command and Control, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, or C2ISR, Space Operations and Tankers. As Senator Thune mentioned, Ellsworth received one of its highest scores for a tanker mission. It scored substantially higher than that received by any of the three bases the Department of Defense recommends to bed tankers.

Importantly, Ellsworth also has been surveyed for the bed down of an Airborne Laser, and its arched hanger, which you saw this morning, known as the Pride Hanger, is capable of housing two 747 sized aircraft, making it a prime candidate for that mission.

In closing, allow me to reiterate that Ellsworth is the only facility in the region considered suitable for a Global Hawk UAV mission. It is also ready and uniquely capable of accepting the Airborne Laser mission, and the base has the flexibility of accepting emerging missions, such as C2ISR tanker missions and space operations. I submit that the Department of Defense by not adequately considering the merging mission compatibility of Ellsworth, engaged in an analysis that resulted in a substantial deviation from the Military Value Criteria. The Secretary's recommendation to close Ellsworth Air Force Base is, therefore, misguided and should be disapproved. As the Commission moves forward, I ask that you review the Air Force's own findings related to the potential of Ellsworth to house both a UAV and airborne laser mission. Those findings reflect what those of us familiar with the base already know, and hopefully you've now come to know in your site visit and this hearing today. It is a world-class modern facility well-positioned to handle emerging and unencroached mission operations in

the decades to come, and to help meet our national defense needs in an ever-changing strategic environment.

Thank up again for your consideration.

MR. MCKEON: Thank you, Representative Herseth.

Commissioners, we will now move to another area of concern that can best be addressed by an authority on the impact of Ellsworth Air Force Base as a vital component of our state and region.

Professor Sidney Goss, Ph.D. of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology here in Rapid City will provide you with a perspective that might not be readily understood or appreciated in terms of impact on our state and region.

Doctor Goss.

(Applause)

DR. GOSS: Good afternoon, Commissioners. My name is Sidney Goss. My focus today is to show the impact of the closure of Ellsworth Air Force Base on our community.

Among the BRAC selection criteria is one which states that the Commission is to consider the impact of existing communities in the vicinity of the military installation. Our community is large, cohesive, and may be defined in many ways. Some would define our community as the entire State of South Dakota. Others, as the western

half of South Dakota. Others, as the 100 mile trade area with 144,000 population. Others, as the 200 mile trade area with 459,000 persons, and still others as the Black Hills region. We live in an area where people think nothing of driving over a hundred miles each way to shop. All of these definitions of community are valid.

For purposes of comparison, I'll also refer to the federally defined United States Census Bureau area called the Rapid City Metropolitan Statistical Area, or the Rapid City MSA. This includes the populations of Pennington and Meade Counties. Coincidentally, Ellsworth Air Force Base sits on the county line of the county who is making up this statistical area. The surrounding area by any definition supplies more than sufficient population to support guard or reserve units.

As a state, South Dakota is rural. Our entire state's population is just 771,000 people. That's roughly the size of a small city. In fact, Indianapolis, Indiana, or Jacksonville, Florida, have roughly the same populations as the entire State of South Dakota. This satellite nighttime imagine shows the rurality of South Dakota quite well. The upper Midwest area without many lights, that's South Dakota.

(Laughter)

DR. GOSS: On your way here -- and they like it that way -- on your way here, you drove through the town of Box Elder, South Dakota. Its population is about 3,000. Rapid City, where you are now seated, has a population of about 60,000, and the Rapid City MSA or the combined two county's population is 160,000 people.

Ellsworth contains nearly 4,500 military personnel with 5,600 dependents. It also employs over a thousand civilian employees not counting their dependents, for a total of over 11,000 persons. Ellsworth also creates 1,700 indirect jobs without counting their dependents. If we quickly find employment for 1,000 of these individuals - a major feat in an area with low unemployment - we'll lose an estimated 10,000 people. This conservative number of 10,000 represents 9 percent of that metropolitan statistical area, that two county population base. Ten thousand persons would represent in the Minneapolis MSA only 0.3 percent; in the Denver MSA, 0.4 percent; in the Rapid City MSA, a full 9 percent.

We are also an area experiencing net out-migration. Over the past censual decade, our metro area lost 1,300 persons due to net out-migration. In other words, over 1,300 more persons moved out than into this area between 1990 and 2000, the last censual decade. That's

roughly 130 persons a year net migration loss for our metropolitan area.

We understand that the Department of Defense wishes to move quickly. If our metropolitan area of 116,000 people were to lose 10,000 persons in one year, this would be the equivalent of 76 years of out-migration for this area hitting us all at once. This impact is significant.

Our community has experienced moderate growth because births outnumber deaths, giving us today's 116,000 population. A decrease of 10,000 persons would have put our population back to 106,000, the level of 1988; a 17 year regression.

Economically, Ellsworth represents $278 million annually in our economy. This is a large figure, in South Dakota terms, and represents, in fact, a figure larger than the total annual gross sales of nearby Sturgis, South Dakota, some 20 miles from here.

(Laughter)

DR. GOSS: Simply put, Ellsworth Air Force Base is South Dakota's second largest employer. The state's largest employer is some 350 miles east of here. I don't know how to state its economic -- oh, we're getting a strobe show. I don't know how to state its economic impact more clearly. Ellsworth Air Force Base is South Dakota's second largest

employer.

Now, please allow me to be more specific about the integration of Ellsworth personnel and our community, state, and region. First, schools. Ellsworth is served by area public schools; most notably, the Douglas School system. Douglas K12 School contains 2,500 students, half of whom are Ellsworth dependents. This school is the 10th largest school in South Dakota. Out of South Dakota's 165 school districts, the Douglas system is larger than 155 of them. It is larger than the 25 smallest school systems combined. A reduction of half this total, half this school is equivalent to the closing of 16 of our smallest entire school districts.

University and technical school offerings are poplar at Ellsworth. We combine our local populations with a military personnel and dependents to create a college student nucleus large enough to support our offerings. A reduction of 10,000 base-related personnel will seriously diminish the educational opportunities of those of us remaining in this community.

Services. The local United Way indicates that their member agencies rely heavily upon Ellsworth and its personnel in many ways. While there are too many examples to cite, at last year's Day or Caring, a one day of community

projects, 300 Ellsworth personnel worked on over 54 projects in this community. That's a one-day effort. Their volunteerism is an integral part of our community.

Medicine. The Rapid City Regional Hospital provides most of the inpatient health care needs of Ellsworth personnel and dependents. Twelve percents of the babies born there are to Ellsworth personnel and dependents. During the past 5 years, this hospital served 27,000 military personnel, dependent or retiree cases generating $50 million in gross charges over that five-year time frame.

Culture. Our arts community, our symphony, our theaters, our sports teams all receive substantial support from the Ellsworth community. Our community's ability to offer such life enriching experiences will be diminished with the loss of Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Our places of worship are led by and contributed to significantly by Ellsworth personnel and dependents.

Our security and safety. I'm not talking here about the nation's security, but instead our volunteer fire fighters, search and rescue teams, or police reserves. For example, when search and rescue teams called recently for assistance to find a lost Alzheimer's patient, over 50 of the searchers were Ellsworth personnel. As a part of the mutual aid fire departments, the Ellsworth Air Force Base

Fire Department responds regularly to fires throughout the area.

The law enforcement divisions of Ellsworth are true partners with the local sheriff and police departments. In the Pennington County Sheriff's Department alone, 50 current employees are former Ellsworth Air Force Base personnel or spouses comprising 19 percent of the staff. In fact, 12 of the 18, 12 of the 28 members of the Box Elder Volunteer Fire Department are Ellsworth Air Force Base personnel.

Retirees. Our community is enriched by the countless military retirees residing here. They fill much needed roles in our community and are integral to our economic and cultural well being. While it is difficult to get an exact count, we know that a minimum of over 2,700 retirees use medical facilities at Ellsworth. The number of retirees in our community, however, far exceeds this figure.

Quality of life. The Ellsworth Air Force Base community has been ranked not by us, but by independent agencies and organizations as among the top in lifestyle. Morgan Quitno put South Dakota in the top 10 of the most livable states in America. Expansion Magazine ranks us among 60 military communities in the top quarter, ranking number two in schools, and high in numerous other

categories. In short, the military personnel enjoy living here as much as we have enjoyed having them here.

Commissioners, Ellsworth Air Force Base is a significant part of our community, and we are a significant part of theirs. We know that your decision must be based primarily on military value factors. We also know that your criteria include the impact on existing communities in the vicinity of the military installation. Congress included this provision for a reason. Commissioners, the impact of the closure of Ellsworth Air Force Base on this community, state, and region will be significant and long lasting.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Thank you, Sid.

As you have heard from the testimony provided, we have pronounced differences with the Secretary's recommendations and offer to you that Ellsworth Air Force Base should not be closed. Rather it should be retained for basing the currently assigned B-1 squadron, and that you designate it as a strategic base of presence in the north central U.S. for assignment of the emerging mission now identified as the unmanned aerial vehicle.

Further, we recommend you consider Ellsworth for the basing of tanker missions, which being realigned from

the region or retained for basing of the C2ISR or space missions in which it ranks 5th and 10th respectively in MCI scoring.

The basis of our recommendations are, first, the Air Force recommendation to consolidate all B-1 aircraft at one base with one runway violates Air Force Principal #7, as contained in Department of the Air Force Analysis and Recommendations BRAC 2005, Volume V, part 1 of 2, Air Force Basing Considerations 1.7.1.7, "Insure long range strike bases provide flexible strategic response and strategic force protection."

Number two, in contrast, the Air Force has not recommended the consolidation of any other legacy aircraft principle.

Three, Air Force officials have testified to the Commission that Ellsworth's current bomber mission capability has diminished by training range access. However, the metric on which the measurement is based does not consider the quality of the training available on the range or the average sortie time required to accomplish identical mission requirements.

Fourth, Ellsworth Powder River MOA is 7 to 8 minutes from Ellsworth's runway, and it has a ground or surface to unlimited ceiling operation area, and allows a

training mission to be flown in a duration of 3.8 hours verses the same mission flown at the proposed consolidation base, which has less vertical space and requires an additional /POEUPBLTS 0.7 hours of flight time. The result will be less quality training at an estimated additional $14,000 dollars per mission.

Five, as the aircraft assigned to Ellsworth constituted 82 percent, or 686 of 832 of the missions flown in the Powder River MOA in the past year, and the Air Force has stated its intent to maintain the Powder River MOA, either it will continue to be used as the primary B-1 MOA, or be grossly underutilized. If the B-1B missions from the consolidated base use the range in the future, the added cost per mission is estimated at $100,000, an estimated $68.6 million cost or a $1.3 billion, over $3 billion cost over the next 20 years.

Six, the Air Force's recommendation to assign the unmanned aerial vehicle mission to a strategic base of presence in the north central U.S. other than Ellsworth Air Force Base is inconsistent with the findings of the environmental assessment for Global Hawk main operating base bed down as determined by the March 2001, air Combat Command finding that are Ellsworth Air Force Base is the only base in the region suited for the mission.

Seven, the Air Force recommendation to realign tanker assets to bases ranked lower than Ellsworth's fifth position in tanker MCI scoring is inconsistent with the Military Value Criteria number #1, current and future mission capability.

Number eight, an analysis of the Air Force MCI rating of the three bases positioned to be retained as a strategic base of presence in the north central U.S., rated Ellsworth first in six of eight categories: Bomber, aircraft, tanker, fighter, C2ISR, and space. Each of the other bases only ranked first in one category each, and point of fact, Ellsworth ranked no lower than second in the other two categories. Accordingly, the recommendation to close Ellsworth Air Force Base is inconsistent with Military Value Criteria #1, as it relates to future mission capability.

Before our Governor, Mike Rounds, closes our testimony, I would like to recap the salient points with which General Mike Loh opened our testimony.

First, the Air Force substantially deviated from criteria number one in recommending the consolidation of Ellsworth's consistently higher rate, rated B-1 operations at a base that maintains a lesser operation readiness rate, thereby impacting training, readiness and war fighting.

Second, the Air Force substantially deviated from Criteria two, in that the recommended closure of Ellsworth will relocate the aircraft that constitutes 82 percent of the use of immediately adjacent airspace, Powder River MOA, to a base at least two hours flight time away; thereby, either increasing operational costs or reducing mission effectiveness.

Third, the Air Force substantially deviated from criteria number 3 in that the reduced use of the Powder River MOA will either increase the cost of operations per mission flown from out of the area, or cause it to be abandoned for use by future total force requirements.

Fourth, the Air Force substantially deviated from Criteria #4 in that the cost to operate the entire B-1 fleet will exceed the cost of maintaining two bases, each of which has the capacity to accept future forced bed downs.

Fifth, the Air Force substantially deviated from Criteria #6, in that of the three bases in the north central U.S. considered for the strategic presence retention, the recommended closure of Ellsworth will eliminate the most highly rated base for realigning tanker aircraft for the bed down of future forced missions, such as unmanned aerial vehicles, C2ISR, or emerging missions such as the airborne laser.

Six, the Air Force substantially deviated from criteria #6, in that of the three bases in the north central U.S. considered for strategic presence retention, the recommended closure of Ellsworth will more severely impact the existing community and its vicinity than the one being recommended for retention for an emerging mission.

And seven, the Air Force substantially deviated from Criteria #7, in that the recommended closure of Ellsworth will relocate the B-1B assets to a base that has lesser current plant replacement value, and will have a lesser infrastructure and overall capacity even after the proposed facility projects identified for construction are completed.

Commissioners, as we conclude our testimony before you, I would like to present to you one of the few Governors who has flown the B-1 bomber as it was put through the paces in our Powder River MOA. He knows of what he speaks, and is closely associated with our state's national guard as any Governor could possibly be.

Commissioners, Governor Mike Rounds of South Dakota.

(Applause)

GOVERNOR ROUNDS: Commissioner Skinner, Commissioner Bilbray, and Commissioner Coyle, first let me

say thank you to you for taking the time to come out to South Dakota and visiting with us. We all appreciate your hard work and the extra efforts that you are making to thoroughly understand the Defense Department's recommendations, and the nation's response to them. The time you have spent visiting Ellsworth and listening to us is very, very much appreciated.

As Governor, it has been my privilege to meet the mean and women who fly the B-1 and provide all the support that keeps these bombers in top condition to defend our country. I know firsthand how professional and contentious they are. There aren't enough words in the dictionary to describe how proud we are of them and the work they do for us. We are grateful to have them living and working here in South Dakota. We appreciate them more than you can imagine.

With this morning's base visit and the testimony presented to you this afternoon, I believe you have the information that you need to conclude that the Air Force and the Secretary of Defense substantially deviated from the Military Value Criteria required to recommend a base for closure. Internal Air Force evaluations clearly show that Ellsworth Air Force Base has the infrastructure and other qualities needed to be the only B-1 base, but the argument should not be one base verses another. The bottom line is

that for the defense of our people, America needs the B-1 on more than one base so the B-1 is not vulnerable to a single attack or a natural disaster.

(Applause)

GOVERNOR ROUNDS: The B-1 dropped over 40 percent of the munitions in Afghanistan, and 30 percent of the munitions in the initial push in Iraq. The B-1's vital mission of defending and protecting Americans should not be placed in jeopardy by deploying it on only one base that has only one useable runway for this bomber. America needs two bases and two runways.

We also need more than one base and more than one useable runway so that natural disasters, storms, weather and other things that temporarily close a base don't cause a delay in our B-1s responding to a call for immediate action.

Hickam Field and battleship row at Pearl Harbor, Clark Field in the Philippines all on the same day. They were all concentrations of resources in just one place which allowed the enemy to successfully attack us. The proposed consolidation of 65 or more B-1s at one base brings into question the entire assessment process that refuses to recognize the need for redundancy in protecting this country. When the principles of redundancy have not been followed, our nation and other nations have suffered

terribly. Therefore, please don't allow this principle to be abandoned. Looking through the factors that led to the recommendation to put all the B-1s at one base, why wasn't the importance of redundancy a factor? How many points would Ellsworth and other bases have gained if the importance of redundancy for this and other vital weapon symptoms been recognized and found in the scoring system?

Gentlemen, I am not a military planer, but if you ask a veteran of Pearl Harbor, if you asked a commander in the Korean War, or if you asked a helicopter pilot who flew in Vietnam, or if you ask any of our soldiers from the Gulf and Iraqi Wars - and believe me, they are here today with us - or if you ask the moms and the dads of those soldiers - and they're here with us today too - I don't think any one of them would tell you that it's a good idea to put all our bombers in one location instead of two.

(Applause)

GOVERNOR ROUNDS: Gentlemen, the Air Force also erred when it testified on May 17th that Ellsworth could not handle all the B-1B aircraft. In fact, Ellsworth has the space to house 71 large aircraft. The Air Force also underestimated the total square footage of the available ramp space by 20 percent.

Gentlemen, we're not asking for Ellsworth to be

the only B-1 base. We believe that America needs two bases, not one for the B-1 to successfully accomplish its mission. Even though the Defense Department wants to close Ellsworth, the Air Force, we believe, will still want to continue the use of its ground and airspace presence in an estimated 320,000 square miles of the upper Great Plains. From north of us in Montana all the way south of us into Nebraska, this airspace is some of the most open and uncluttered airspace in the United States, and it's only seven or eight minutes flight time from Ellsworth. I had the opportunity to be there.

In your difficult deliberations, you are evaluating sites for both current and future missions. Many future missions will include joint active reserve component operations as expressed by the Air Force in its May 17th testimony. I believe the people of this region can provide the personnel needed for a blended wing, excuse me, a blended wing of B-1 aircraft, as well as enough personnel for any other future missions. The South Dakota Army National Guard is at 96 percent of its authorized strength and has a retention rate of 87 percent. The South Dakota Air National Guard is at 102 percent of its authorized strength and has a 95 percent retention rate. Both of them rank in the top five in comparison to the other 54 states

and territories in recruiting, retention, and attrition measurements. We want to participate in joint active reserve operations.

In summary, the Department of Defense's recommendation to close Ellsworth puts a critical national defense mission into a vulnerable position where all the B-1s could be destroyed by a single attack or a natural disaster, or they could be delayed in responding by something as simple as bad weather.

The recommendation also ignores the capacity of both bases to continue the B-1 mission and to perform additional future missions. The Defense Department also ignores the desires of people in this region to serve in joint active reserve missions.

I strongly recommend that you reject the recommendation to close Ellsworth. I hope --

(Applause)

GOVERNOR ROUNDS: I hope that you will direct the current B-1s to provide redundancy in our total B-1 mission. I would also ask that you consider adding new missions at Ellsworth to fully utilize the base's underreported capacity.

Gentlemen, nobody's perfect. This Defense Department recommendation to close Ellsworth is a mistake.

But it's a mistake made by good people who are trying their best to do a good job. But now, as part of this process, you have the opportunity to correct it. For the defense and protection of the people of America, we hope that this BRAC Commission will correct this mistake.

I said earlier that we welcomed you to South Dakota. We know the type of a battle, the type of a challenge that we have in asking changes to be made, and we understand as some people said, it's an uphill challenge. We're looking at a mountain in front of us to climb, but in this state, mountains don't scare us. This is a state where people look at a mountain and they carve it, and not just a little bit, but the whole thing.

(Applause)

GOVERNOR ROUNDS: I'd like to add just one more thing. As the Commander in Chief of South Dakota's Army and Air National Guards, I am grateful for the B-1's reliability and effectiveness in killing the enemy and pushing the enemy back to minimize the face-to-face combat that our South Dakota soldiers have encountered overseas. Our B-1s should not be put in a vulnerable position that might allow all of them to be destroyed or delayed in responding to protect our soldiers on the ground.

(Applause)

GOVERNOR ROUNDS: Gentlemen, if that happens, we are less protected here at home, and so, too, are the soldiers that we send from our hometowns to fight our enemies in foreign lands.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Chairman Skinner, Commissioner Bilbray, and Commissioner Coyle, as we prepared for this hearing, we came to realize that it would be both complex and lengthy. The delayed release of information hampered us in preparing a more concise argument, and for that we apologize. We would have liked to have more time to do so, but which realize that you are on an accelerated schedule, and we believed it was best for you to visit Ellsworth Air Force Base and to be with us here in Rapid City. We deeply appreciate the courtesies you've extended to us, the endurance you have exhibited, and your acceptance of the monumental task placed before you. We will obviously be in contact with your staff members in the coming weeks as we are able to analyze the additional data and make our arguments available to you as needed. We're also available to you at any time should you have any questions. Feel free to contact the Ellsworth Task Force or any of our elected officials. Again, thank you for your service to our

country.

This concludes our presentation, but since this is a regional meeting a representative, Mr. Rick Hawkins, from the Crook County, Wyoming, representing the county commissioners, will now make his presentation. But General Counsel Cowhig, I don't believe he was sworn in with the original ones, just for your technical references, and then I understand we'll stand for questions after his presentation.

Thank you very much.

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Chairman and the Commissioners, I certainly didn't save the best for last. I'll say that part.

(Witness sworn)

MR. HAWKINS: I did this earlier when you did the other ones. I was in the back. So now you've sworn me twice. I'm getting all kinds of instructions up here.

Thank you for allowing me to appear and speak to you on behalf of the citizens of Crook County. We're in the northeast corner of the state of Wyoming and we border not only South Dakota, but Montana, and we have interest over here including the Air Force Base and also the Super Kmart which is over in --

There are two major concerns. The first is a

question of continuing monitoring of abandoned nuclear radar station outside of Sundance, Wyoming. At the present time, the people use Ellsworth as a base for their operations, and we just want to make sure that they have a continuing base of operations to do their test for radioactive material in our area.

The second concern is for the veterans in our county who continue to use the facility for various services, and in a number of cases a lack of access to that facility such as Ellsworth will cause them some hardship, financial hardship. We just want to make sure that this issue is considered in the decision making process either to close or not to close the base.

On a personal note, I'd like to say that as I grew up in Tennessee in the 50's and 60's and 70's, and in the Cold War, Ellsworth Air Force Base was my homeland security, if you want to know the truth, even that far south. Sometimes in our government's effort to make financial expedient decisions we lose site of sometimes what is symbolic to our nation.

Oliver Wendall Holms wrote a poem one time called "Old Iron Sides." He did so in order to save an old wooden revolution area ship that symbolized the strength of the nation at the time. I'd like to quote you about the first

verse of that. It goes, "I tear her tattered insent down long as it waived on high, and many an eye has danced to see that banner in the sky." I think Ellsworth itself symbolizes what our nation stands for in its ability to respond, and I myself personally, and I think most of the people here in South Dakota, would like to see that flag still flying at Ellsworth.

Thank you.

(Applause)

MR. MCKEON: Commissioners, we now stand ready to answer any questions that you might have.

MR. SKINNER: Thank you, Colonel McKeon, for organizing this outstanding presentation, and by not only from the people of South Dakota, but also from Wyoming.

I have a couple of questions. We obviously have spent the day discussing a number of issues you brought up, so we won't be asking all the questions that we might have, because many of them we had answered this morning or at least we understand the question and we may not have the answers yet, and our staff will be dedicated to getting into it.

I have one question and maybe two. One question, and I guess I'll go to you, General Wolfe, but I think Colonel McKeon or Colonel McElgunn could do it as well. I

wonder if you could, you all or several of you referred to operational readiness scores, and the contrast between the operational readiness scores, what they are and the differentiation between those scores that have been achieved by Ellsworth as compared to other bomber bases, and I wonder if you could elaborate on that a little more. That is not something we discussed this morning.

MR. MCKEON: Colonel McElgunn will answer that.

COLONEL MCELGUNN: Commissioner Skinner, in the comparison, which we really prefer not to be involved in, in our operational readiness rates, we have been told by base people for many years that based on the focus of the mission at Ellsworth, particularly the B-1, that they can maintain a higher mission capable rate than they can at a dual mission base where they're being located.

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: Let me rephrase the question so you'll feel more comfortable.

Is it fair to say that the Air Force maintains on a regular basis operational readiness scores for all its units and keeps those in a central depository, and would be available to the staff if they were asked, and I see you're passing it to your former boss there.

Go ahead, General Wolfe.

GENERAL WOLFE: I would, I think the simple answer

is yes, whether it's in the maintenance area for mission capable rates, whether its operational readiness rates, whether it's the kind of things that our units report in their, what used to be called combat readiness status reporting system. So that should be available. Some of it may be classified.

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: Well, maybe, Colonel McElgunn, between the four of you, you can put on a piece of paper for us just stuff that's not classified, just the type, what the names is, not what the actual ratings are, what the names are. I think that would be interesting because I assumed as part of that time to mission and deployment to mission would be a key criteria of that, so I'd like to see that.

MR. MCELGUNN: We'd be happy to get that to you.

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: I'm not surprised that Ellsworth is very high, but I'd like to see it as it compares to everybody else.

Commissioner Bilbray.

COMMISSIONER BILBRAY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, I feel like Mo Udahl, that everything has been said, but everybody hasn't said it, and I'd like to say that you put on a wonderful presentation. I enjoyed being here in South Dakota, especially with my good

friend Senator Johnson, who I came into Congress with a number of years ago. He is a good friend, both him and his wife, and I'll remember that. And I would like to say, though --

(Applause)

COMMISSIONER BILBRAY: I'd like, one other comment I'd like to make to our presider here, please call it Nevada not Nevada.

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: Congressman Coyle.

COMMISSIONER COYLE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a couple questions, and let me say also how much we appreciate all the effort you've put into our visit this morning at the base, and here this hearing. We know it's not easy to organize such an effort.

I'm not sure who should take this question. Anybody who wants. It's been mentioned that Ellsworth has close access to its training range, the Powder River military operational area, seven or eight minutes, and we understand why that's important. Could somebody say something more about why it's important to have such access for a low level training?

GENERAL WOLFE: Is the essence of your question that we do so much of our bombing now at high altitude?

COMMISSIONER COYLE: As I understand it, part of

the B-1 mission is to do work at low level as well as at high levels, and if you don't have access for low level training, that's a disadvantage. I was hoping that somebody could explain why the low level training is important itself.

GENERAL WOLFE: I would be glad to do that. Training at high altitude, bombing at high altitude is considerably different than when their operating at low level, a different kind of returns, different kind of challenges for the crew, the importance of terrain avoidance and that kind of thing that is not factor at high altitude. To have access to ranges close by that let you descend and go low is important.

One of the nice things I think about the Powder River MOA is that it's close by. They can get in. They can go low and they can really do that without having to air refuel, for example, on every mission. It used to be that you had to, if you were of much greater distance from your military operating area or your low level route, or because you needed more air refueling training, you would have to refuel with tankers on each mission. They don't have to do that, and I'd be happy to respond to a follow on if I haven't gotten to the essence of your question.

COMMISSIONER COYLE: And would you say that

Ellsworth's access to, close access to low level training is a unique asset?

GENERAL WOLFE: Nationally, it wouldn't necessarily be unique, but it is certainly an important positive asset for Ellsworth.

COMMISSIONER COYLE: Is there another B-1 base that has closer access for low level training.

GENERAL WOLFE: No, there is not. Thank you for the question.

COMMISSIONER BILBRAY: Mr. Coyle, you're leading the witness.

(Laughter)

COMMISSIONER COYLE: Maybe just one more question. When we were out visiting the base, we asked what the base operating support costs were and we were told that when you add up, you know, things like keeping the lights on and the heat on and maintenance on the base and those sorts of things, it's something like $20 million a year. That's not counting amortizing, military construction, which we understand is nice when you get it and some years you don't, but the Department of Defense says that the annual recurring savings from closing Ellsworth Air Force Base is $161.3 million. Could somebody explain to me how you can save more than you spend?

(Laughter and Applause)

COLONEL MCELGUNN: I cannot explain that in terms of my personal finances. I think it's explainable in terms of the macro that they try and justify. Let me suggest that their costs that include, also include the personnel costs that would be in the base operating support package. I think regarding your question regarding utilities in what I had mentioned earlier in testimony regarding the water availability, you know, the electricity availability and the gas availability. They are very innovative in terms of what they have done over the years. They have reduced their costs. Personnel costs are fairly constant obviously in terms of maintaining a physical plant.

One of the interesting other contrasts, as I sit in the room with you on the 17th of May, the issue came up of the number of people that are being left in the guard and reserve unites without aircraft was that they needed the people for deployment. They cited specifically that in the peak of the Afghan/Iraq operations, they were operating 34 locations overseas. They're down to about a dozen or so now.

I think you have to look at the DOS issue in terms of the perspective of total force requirements over time, under the assumption that you may have another crisis, it

may be a two theater crises, and you will have to have the people. So to discount it off and say we can safe a significant amount of money by closing the base, not only do you give up the facility forever - I've been to a lot that closed; none never really opened - and the people are then costed off and they're not available to you in the next round. I think the Air Force's estimate, as I recall, their description was to reduce force structure by 30,000 people as a result of this effort. I maybe off a little bit there, but that's probably where you see the differential in cost between the 20 and higher number for DOS.

MR. MCKEON: For the executive summary, I would say that we, too, are confused with some of the numbers, and we will analyze those over the next few weeks and provide you additional detail on some of the other things we find disparities with.

COMMISSIONER COYLE: As I understand if, the Air Force is not proposing to cut the B-1 fleet in half nationwide, nor have they proposed to reduce personnel and strength numbers nationwide, so if we're going to have the same number of B-1s no matter where they're operated, it's going to take pilots and maintainers and facilities to support them; is that your understanding?

COLONEL MCELGUNN: Yes, sir, that's a true

statement. In the DOS arena, though, I think what they're looking at is just if you took let's say a thousand people to operate an installation and you closed the installation and you moved the mission, this is another 2,000 people to combat the portion of it, the front end of the spear. You may only need to move 500 people to the new location. What they have would claim is they would have a differential of 500 to be able to be able to do the same mission. The question is can the new place do the mission? Does it have the physical plant to do it? Will you have to invest to get it done? Do you have the air quality? All the other things you need to obtain. But I think if you look at the nunmber, and we will go back and examine that for you, in terms of what we understand in Ellsworth, is that part of their savings is a reduction of the DOS personnel support cost.

COMMISSIONER COYLE: Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: Well, seeing no other questions, let me again thank the people that have helped us prepare for this hearing, which is soon to come to a close. I want to thank all the witnesses for testifying today. We had the opportunity to spend all day with your Governor and your only representative and your two senators, and Mayor, I was going to ask a question: That voice on the video, was that your voice on the video?

MAYOR SHAW: Yes, it is.

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: Well, I must tell you, a good friend of mine is Jim Manson. It sounded like him, so you have a great career coming up if you don't get reelected as Mayor.

(Applause and laughter)

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: You've all brought us a very, very thoughtful information. You'll have the ability to continue to provide it to our staff. The BRAC staff here is a very competent staff. Many of them have a lot of experiences in BRAC, so I want everybody to know that the future of Ellsworth is in very good hands from an analytical and judgment basis because we have a lot of experience on our staff that we're able to recruit from the past, and we're going to rely on them very heavily, so keep that ongoing dialogue coming.

I also want to thank the citizens who came out. I'm glad it didn't rain quite as hard. You obviously have a very special spirit here.

On a personal note, I want to point out that I learned first of this support and spirit firsthand a number of years ago when I developed close, personal relationship with former Congressional Medal of Honor winner and former Governor, and the first commander of the Air National Guard,

Joe Foss.

(Applause)

COMMISSIONER SKINNER: I think he'd be very proud of all of you today. It is clear from the visit today that the spirit, the dedication to our country that was demonstrated by Joe in World War II is continuing to be demonstrated today. Thank you.

MR. MCKEON: Ladies and gentlemen, please rise for the departure of our distinguished visitors.

(Proceedings adjourned at 3:20 p.m.)