

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

ORIGINAL

May 16, 2005

The Honorable Anthony Principi
Chairman
Base Realignment and Closure Commission
521 South Clark Street
Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

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5/20/05

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Last week, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld released to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission his recommendations to close military installations within the United States. The decision to include Ellsworth Air Force Base was short-sighted and detrimental to our national security. We are confident that the BRAC Commission will realize the Department of Defense deviated substantially from their established base closure criteria when recommending Ellsworth for closure and will support removing it from the list.

The recommendation to close Ellsworth defies logic. As the backbone of our bomber fleet, the B-1 bombers stationed at Ellsworth have flown missions in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, B-1s were integral in liberating Iraq by dropping more than half the satellite guided munitions on critical targets including command and control facilities, bunkers, and surface-to-air missile sites. In addition, Ellsworth is a world-class military installation that is not threatened by urban encroachment or congested air space. Since the last round of base closures, substantial investment has been made to upgrade facilities at the base. Rather than closing, we believe Ellsworth is well positioned to receive additional missions.

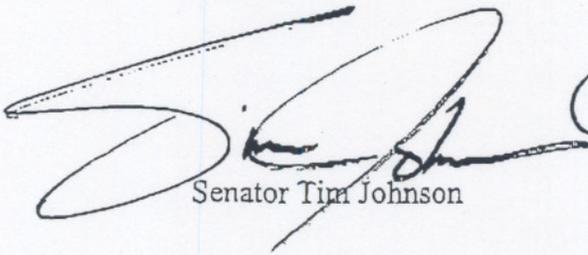
According to the Secretary's recommendations, the B-1s currently stationed at Ellsworth will be transferred to Dyess Air Force Base in Texas. The justification for this decision is that consolidating the B-1s at one installation will achieve operational efficiency. While that assertion remains to be seen, we firmly believe that it is a critical error in judgment to station all B-1 bombers at Dyess. Consolidating our premier bombers at one location makes the B-1 an easy and indefensible target for those who wish to do our country harm.

Furthermore, initiating this current round of base closures during a time of war is damaging to our national defense. Recently, the Overseas Basing Commission stated there are a number of problems with the Department of Defense's plan to rotate soldiers back to the U.S. from overseas installations. We strongly believe that the current round of domestic base closures should wait until after the Department of Defense finishes redeploying troops to American soil. Simultaneously closing domestic and overseas bases will irrevocably damage our ability to defend against threats at home and abroad.

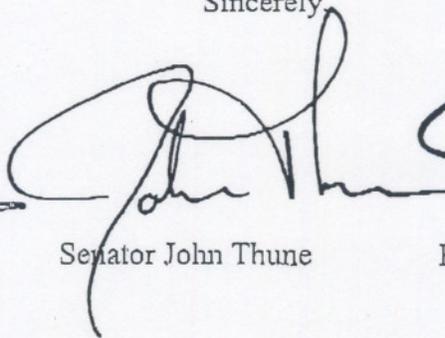
We have shared with you a few reasons why Ellsworth should not be closed, but would appreciate an opportunity to discuss this important topic with you at length. We would like to schedule a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to underscore the importance of Ellsworth Air Force Base, both for our national security and to the economic livelihood of western South Dakota. We also extend an invitation to the BRAC Commission to hold one of their regional field hearings at Rapid City, home to Ellsworth Air Force Base, as soon as possible. We are confident that the Commission will see the military value of Ellsworth and will support removing it from the base closure list.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your reply.

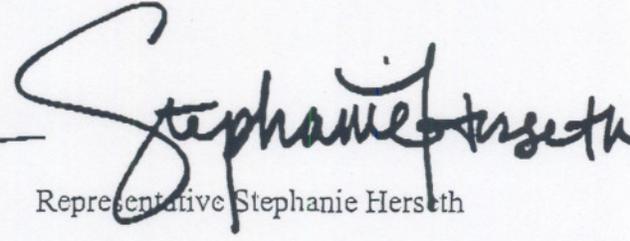
Sincerely,



Senator Tim Johnson



Senator John Thune



Representative Stephanie Herseth