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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-3808

May 9, 2005

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BRAC 2005 Independent Commission
2521 S Clark St, Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202-3909

Dear Members of the Commission,

I am writing today to express my support for the Willow Grove Joint Reserve Base in Horsham, Pennsylvania.

As stated by Secretary of Defense, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission is charged with the task of reviewing the status of our military installations in order to streamline operation costs, promote interservice cooperation and consolidate military assets. In doing so the commission will look at certain criteria that will define which installations are to be signaled for possible closure. These criteria include, cost, inter-service cooperation and expansion potential. I do not believe that Willow Grove meets the requirements for closure as set forth in the BRAC guidelines for the following reasons.

First, one of the major issues related to Department of Defense force transformation includes the need for "jointness," or the ability to base, train and deploy forces from different service branches together. Willow Grove is the largest joint force base in the United States and the only major joint reserve base in Pennsylvania.

The base is home to the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Air National Guard. Willow Grove's close proximity to Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York and New Jersey provides reservists an easily accessible base to fulfill their training requirements. The base is also home to Pennsylvania's oldest flying unit, the 111th Fighter Wing that was recently deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Second, Willow Grove has room to expand within its current "footprint" in the community. While the other branches have been increasing their operational tempo, the Navy has begun to move aircraft off base either to active duty units or to other squadrons that need the planes for current combat operations. This allows room for expansion on the base by the Air Force into areas formerly used by the Navy.

Third, Willow Grove has a proven history of emergency preparedness and can accommodate contingency, mobilization, surge and total force requirements. After the September 11th attacks, Willow Grove took on first responders from the Department of Environmental Protection and became a training area for homeland security preparedness. The Federal Emergency Management Agency named the base an "alternate regional operations center," which was activated and used during the 2000 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia and shortly after 9/11. Additionally, Willow Grove supports an 8,000 foot runway, which can facilitate military and large commercial aircraft. Given its close proximity to Philadelphia, Washington, DC, New York and Baltimore, Willow Gove could easily land aircraft diverted from their major airports in case of emergency. The base is currently used by Air Force One during presidential trips to the region and could place military assets into the air to patrol the region during a possible attack.

Finally, I believe that closing Willow Grove will have a significant negative economic impact on the surrounding community. According to a local consulting firm, Willow Grove maintains 10,724 jobs and creates \$378 million worth of local economic activity per year. Closure of the base would heavily affect the community, especially since it is located very close to the former Naval Air Warfare Center in Warminster, PA that was closed during the 1995 BRAC round. Only recently has the community surrounding the NAWC begun to revitalize. Closing Willow Grove would not only hurt the off-base community, but further imperil Warminster.

Willow Grove Joint Reserve Base is an outstanding asset to the United States Department of Defense as well as to the community. For the above stated reasons, I do not believe that recommending Willow Grove, JRB for closure will be an advantageous move for the Department of Defense. I am more than willing to provide supporting materials if requested. Additionally, I am available to speak to any of the commissioners once the recommendation list becomes public this week. Please contact Mr. Jeff Urbanchuk on my staff to schedule an appointment at (202) 225-4276. Thank you very much and I look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael G. Fitzpatrick", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

MICHAEL G. FITZPATRICK
Member of Congress

MF/JU