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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

August 22, 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Chairman, Base Closure and Realignment Commission
2521 South Clark Street, Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This week you and your fellow commissioners will vote on recommendations regarding the infrastructure that will be used by the Department of Defense for the next ten years. I wanted to take one last opportunity to commend you for your efforts on behalf of the American taxpayers and our men and women in uniform.

As you engage in your final deliberations, I urge you to keep in mind a few key points regarding Naval Air Station (NAS) Oceana. NAS Oceana ranked 5th of all military air installations in military value, the highest priority in the Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) process. NAS Oceana surpasses Cecil Commerce Center in its proximity to the aircraft carriers. NAS Oceana surpasses Cecil Commerce Center in its access to unencumbered and instrumented joint training airspace. NAS Oceana supports classified missions which Cecil Commerce Center cannot. According to certified data, Cecil Commerce Center will require more than \$1.6 billion to reopen. While some may disagree with this figure, the lowest estimate is several hundred million dollars.

The only area in which Cecil Commerce Center has been held up as better than Oceana is encroachment on the ground and the restrictions imposed on take offs and landings. The Commonwealth of Virginia and the City of Virginia Beach have taken positive steps to stop encroachment and roll it back. The restrictions on take offs and landings are self imposed by the Navy and could be eliminated if the Navy determines it is necessary. The new outlying field, which will be built, will alleviate any problems that NAS Oceana has and do so at a fraction of the cost of reopening Cecil.

At my request, the Commissioners who attended the August 4, 2005 hearing were briefed by individuals from the Department of Defense in a closed session regarding other national security missions supported by NAS Oceana. During the August 20, 2005 hearing, a consultant for the State of Florida, retired Admiral Natter, stated that another air installation could be used instead of Oceana to support that mission. Enclosed you will find a letter I received on the 22nd of August from the Special Operations Command which directly contradicts that statement.

Congress created the BRAC process to shed excess infrastructure and save money. A final vote to open a new master jet base at Cecil Commerce Center will increase excess infrastructure and cost the taxpayers—by the lowest estimates—several hundred million dollars.

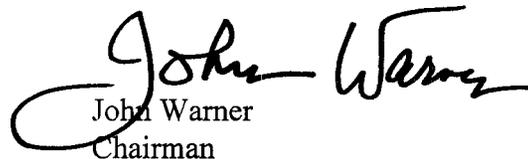
Section 2903 of the BRAC law states that before the Commission may make changes, the Commission must determine “that the Secretary deviated substantially from the force-structure plan and final criteria referred to in subsection (c)(1) in making recommendations.” There is no evidence that there was any deviation, let alone substantial deviation. In fact, it would be impossible to present arguments of such a deviation in the Secretary’s recommendations since the Secretary did not make a recommendation regarding the closure or realignment of a Navy master jet base.

The senior leadership of the Department of Defense has made its position clear. Secretary England stated in his August 17, 2005 letter that “there is no viable alternative to Oceana Naval Air Station.” Admiral Mullen stated on August 4, 2005 in his testimony before this Commission “I need now—your Navy needs now—Naval Air Station Oceana.” These sentiments have been reinforced by Navy officers throughout the Atlantic Fleet including the Commander of Fleet Forces Command. The judgment of these individuals, not elected officials or paid consultants, should be given the greatest weight by the Commission since they are advocates for the men and women in uniform, not a particular state or municipality.

Thank you again for taking the time and making the effort to perform the difficult tasks associated with the base closure process.

With kind regards, I am

Sincerely,



John Warner
Chairman

Enclosure