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December 6, 2012

The Honorable Carl Levin  
The Honorable John McCain  
Chairman and Ranking Member  
Senate Armed Services Committee  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon  
The Honorable Adam Smith  
Chairman and Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Gentlemen:

The force structure changes proposed by the Air Force in early 2012 have been a key issue dominating consideration of both the National Defense Authorization Act and Defense Appropriations Act for 2013. While much of the focus has been on force structure changes affecting the Air National Guard and the Air Force Reserve, the Air Force also singled out an active duty Air Force base for substantial realignment in its force structure proposals. That base is Eielson Air Force Base, near Fairbanks, in my home state of Alaska.

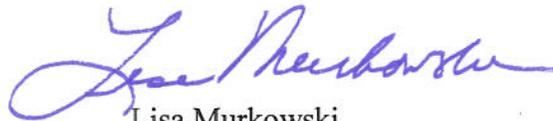
The Air Force proposed to eliminate active duty flying at Eielson in 2013 by relocating the F-16s of the 18<sup>th</sup> Aggressor Squadron to Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson and continue downsizing the base in 2015 by deactivating or substantially reducing the size of the 354<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing. Taken together these changes would reduce the overall population of the base by 50% and the active duty population by about two thirds. Serious questions have been raised whether a base downsized to this level can support the KC-135 mission of the 168<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing -- a critical asset to the North Pacific Tanker Bridge. The Alaska congressional delegation has strongly opposed these Air Force proposals. We characterize them as a hastily conceived "Back Door BRAC."

I deeply appreciate the critical examination that the congressional defense committees have given to the Air Force proposals. I write today to express my support for retention of Section 1076(a) (2) of the House-passed National Defense Authorization Act which prohibits the Air Force from using 2013 funds to "divest, retire, or transfer, or prepare to divest, retire, or transfer, any... aircraft of the Air Force assigned to the Air Force as of May 31, 2012." Under separate cover I have also expressed my support for Section 1076(a) (1) of the House passed bill related to the C-23 Sherpa aircraft.

The Senate Appropriations Committee has gone a step further than either of the authorizing committees in prohibiting the implementation of all of the Air Force structure changes until the Commission on the Future Structure of Air Force has reported. Under my amendment to the Senate version of the National Defense Authorization Act that report would be due on or before March 31, 2014. I urge the conferees to concur in establishing the National Commission as contained in Title XVII of the Senate-passed bill. The conferees might also adopt the Senate Appropriations Committee's view and extend the prohibition in Section 1076(a) (2) of the House passed bill beyond the end of Fiscal Year 2013 to ensure that the National Commission's recommendations are considered before force structure changes are implemented.

Thank you for your steadfast efforts on behalf of those who serve our country.

Respectfully,



Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senator