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June 18, 2012

General Martin E. Dempsey, USA
Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
9999 Joint Chiefs of Staff Pentagon
Washington, DC 20318-9999

Dear General Dempsey:

I write to express my deepest appreciation for your commitment to learn more about the Air Force's near term and future plans for Eielson Air Force Base at this week's hearing of the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. I recently wrote to Secretary Panetta with respect to this issue and enclosing a copy of my correspondence for your review. As a follow-up to that letter I am currently scheduled to meet with Deputy Undersecretary Robyn tomorrow.

Subsequent to our conversation last week, I learned that Chairman Levin had written General Schwartz to urge in the strongest possible terms that the Air Force not implement any of its proposed force structure changes until the beginning of Fiscal Year 2014 at the earliest in order to give the Senate Armed Services Committee time to review a study on the future structure of the Air Force. I wholeheartedly endorse this suggestion.

As each day passes it becomes clearer to me that the Air Force's decision to move the F-16 Aggressor Squadron away from Eielson Air Force Base in 2013 was the first step in a poorly conceived plan to force the downsizing of the base in 2015 – a plan disturbingly similar to that rejected by the 2005 BRAC Commission. As noted in my letter to Secretary Panetta, in its haste to get going on the longer term downsizing the Air Force paid no attention to the financial harm it would cause airmen who may be unable to sell their homes at Eielson and insufficient attention to the housing challenges that they would face upon arrival at Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson. The Air Force has now conceded these fatal flaws in their plans by ordering a Housing Requirements and Market Analysis study for Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson and belatedly engaging the Army on whether the Homeowners Assistance Fund would be available to help relocating airmen, even though the Administration requested no FY13 funding for this account.

Similarly, the Air Force has left Alaska schools poorly prepared to address the consequences of 2013 relocation. The Fairbanks North Star Borough School District may have to abruptly close three schools on Eielson Air Force Base as a result of a 2013 move and relocate remaining Eielson families into more crowded classrooms off base. Since the Air Force conducted an inadequate housing analysis at Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson it is not clear whether incoming students will be placed in the Anchorage School District which has room for them or the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District which is overcrowded.

The current Air Force plan also denies both Congress and Alaska communities various protections that are part of current laws. Even though the Air Force has put forth a single, integrated plan to downsize Eielson Air Force Base by relocating both military and civilian work to Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson in numbers significant to trigger the requirements of 10 USC 993 and 2687 it continues to rely on legal arguments of dubious validity to deny Congress the information and oversight opportunities to which it is entitled under these statutes. It is also unclear whether the Air Force's current direction will comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act as well. Adding insult to injury, the Air Force did not consider the fact that implementation of its plans would create significant financial and economic burdens for Eielson's host communities which ordinarily would be addressed by the Office of Economic Adjustment if these plans were executed in the course of a BRAC round.

Add to this the fact that the Air Force now concedes that implementation of this move will cost the taxpayers at least \$5.65M in unprogrammed cost in FY13 and it should be obvious why the Air Force should abandon its hastily conceived plans for Eielson Air Force Base at the present time.

I appreciate Secretary Panetta's commitment that Eielson Air Force Base is not closing. The Air Force readily admits that "America Needs Eielson Air Force Base" for its refueling capacity and proximity to Asia-Pacific hotspots and the premier joint training range in North America. In light of these requirements, one would think that the Air Force would have focused its energy on how to increase its presence at Eielson to make the base more efficient.

Regrettably, Secretary Panetta's commitment comes as little comfort to a community that is now faced with the relocation of some 1,500 active duty military families, about 267 Air Force civilian positions and an uncertain number of Non Appropriated Funds positions. That is why the community has come to regard the Air Force's force structure reductions as nothing less than a "Backdoor BRAC."

Once again, I deeply appreciate your willingness to further investigate this troubling chapter in the Air Force's relationship with Interior Alaska which has been nothing less than an extraordinary host to our airmen and their families for nearly 70 years.

Sincerely,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

Enclosure

LISA MURKOWSKI
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Honorable Leon Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In February, the Air Force announced a plan to downsize Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks, Alaska by eliminating year round active duty flying and reducing active duty and civilian personnel by two-thirds between the beginning of Fiscal Year 2013 and the end of Fiscal Year 2015. The Air Force's proposal would bring the base population, which currently hovers around 3,000, down to about 1,500 by September 30, 2015, wreaking havoc on the economy of Interior Alaska.

In my judgment, the integrated plan violates both the letter and the spirit of 10 USC §§993 and 2687 which prohibit the services from reducing military and civilian personnel respectively at a base without undertaking congressional consultation. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate Armed Services Committee have formulated language intended to forestall this hastily conceived action.

I am writing today to ask that you personally encourage the Air Force to abandon its plans for Eielson Air Force Base in 2013 and take this proposal back to the drawing board. Ordinarily letters like this are referred to the Air Force for response. I respectfully ask that this letter be tasked to Deputy Undersecretary Dorothy Robyn for further investigation. Concurrent with the submission of this letter I have asked Deputy Undersecretary Robyn for a meeting to further explore whether the Air Force's plan for Eielson Air Force Base is consistent with DOD basing policy.

My plea for your personal involvement in the Air Force's plan was inspired by Deputy Undersecretary Robyn's testimony before the Senate Military Construction, VA and Related Agencies Subcommittee on March 27, 2012. As you know, Dr. Robyn was involved in formulating the BRAC concept during her service in the Clinton administration. Dr. Robyn noted that prior to development of the BRAC concept communities "were not particularly well treated after bases were closed." "Today," Dr. Robyn observed, "we have a much, much better approach to working with communities. And we do that under authorities that we have in the BRAC law. If we have to realign and close bases without BRAC authority, we can't do it in a way that is -- is good for communities. They're left to fend for themselves."

The context of Dr. Robyn's comment was that from a policy perspective it is far more appropriate to realign a base through the BRAC process than it is to rely on the alternative

process of 10 USC §2687. In addition to my concerns about whether the Air Force's proposal has been well thought through given your Department's new focus on the Asia-Pacific region and whether the savings associated with the proposal outweigh the actual and strategic costs, one of my problems with the current proposal for Eielson Air Force Base is that it neither provides the community protections of the BRAC process or the congressional oversight afforded by 10 USC §§993 or 2687.

Since the Air Force announced its plan in February, the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District has been forced to scramble over how to restructure its school system and grapple with the future of Eielson Junior-Senior High School which is located on the base. According to local realtors, property values in the community surrounding Eielson Air Force Base have plummeted, making it impossible for airmen who may be affected by the realignment to sell their homes and stressing the value of other properties. A business that acquired property near Eielson Air Force Base for a service station is at risk of losing its investment because of the abrupt news that Eielson's future may not be secure.

There are numerous other reasons that the Air Force should shelve their plan to downsize Eielson Air Force Base for the foreseeable future, including:

- The Air Force proposal for Eielson Air Force Base is identical to that which was presented to and rejected by the 2005 BRAC Commission. The Air Force concedes that Eielson Air Force Base is a strategic asset for refueling and asserts an intention to maintain operations post Fiscal Year 2015 to support this 24 hour per day, 7 day per week mission. However, the Air Force has not addressed congressional inquiries about whether Eielson Air Force Base can be made to operate more efficiently by repositioning assets currently assigned to other bases to Eielson. It appears that this was never considered in the Air Force's force structure decision. The Air Force's plan to transfer full-time active duty flying assets out of Eielson while maintaining all base infrastructure intact will result in greater inefficiency, not increased efficiency.
- The Air Force decided to include the proposal in its Fiscal Year 2013 force structure announcement following a tabletop exercise which, according to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, was to be validated by a site survey. The site survey, which would have tested all of the assumptions underlying the Air Force's proposal, was never conducted. Instead, a Site Activation Task Force was convened to determine how, not whether, to go forward with the proposal. Although the Air Force now describes this process as a "SATAF Plus," initial analysis indicates that the study was severely deficient in assessing whether there would be adequate housing in the receiving location and the financial hardships that could be faced by airmen in trying to sell their homes at Eielson. There is also serious question about whether the decision to proceed with an Environmental Assessment is adequate.
- The Air Force has consistently ignored congressional requests to review the data considered in its "tabletop exercise" and the conclusions drawn from that data. It has yet to answer my Questions for the Record on this subject submitted through the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee following the Air Force posture hearing in March.
- The Air Force initially asserted that implementation of the proposal in Fiscal Year 2013 would save \$3.5M. It now has been forced to concede that implementation of the proposal in Fiscal Year 2013 will cost at least \$5.65M and that implementation could be

delayed if the Air Force is not allowed to reprogram these funds. This does not account for the potential cost of implementing a Homeowners Assistance Program, providing post-BRAC like financial support to the community, or unanticipated environmental review costs if an Environmental Impact Statement rather than an Environmental Assessment is required.

- The Air Force proposes to transfer more than 500 airmen from Eielson Air Force Base to Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson in Fiscal Year 2013. Some of these airmen own homes in the Fairbanks area and may be unable to sell them due to uncertainty about the future of Eielson Air Force Base. The Air Force has suggested that the Homeowners Assistance Fund may be available to compensate these airmen for their losses, however since the Air Force contends that its action at Eielson is neither a closure nor a realignment it is not certain that this will be the case. Moreover, I have been advised by the DOD Executive Agent for implementation of the Homeowners Assistance Fund that the Air Force did not account for a possible Fiscal Year 2013 need at Eielson Air Force Base when the services were surveyed as to their 2013 Homeowners Assistance Fund needs by the Executive Agent. Failure to address this issue definitively before the move may put some airmen at risk of foreclosure.
- The Air Force contends that there is sufficient housing in the Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson area to absorb more than 500 airmen notwithstanding that local housing surveys in the Anchorage Bowl indicate low vacancies and demand driven increases in housing costs and the fact that in February of this year, I was informed more than 400 soldiers currently live in temporary barracks on the base. The Air Force now admits that its housing analysis may have been deficient and a Housing Market and Requirements Analysis will be undertaken to validate the analysis that the Air Force is currently relying upon. This will take some time, I understand.
- The Air Force initially concluded that no environmental review of the shift in flying from Eielson to Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson was required. It now concedes that environmental review is required but proposes to limit that review to an Environmental Assessment. This may prove to be an unwise course given the controversy that increased Air Force use of airways in Southcentral Alaska has received on the scoping of the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex expansion. My office is aware of concerns that cumulative effects of the proposed Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson relocation and the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex expansion will not be adequately evaluated, creating potential adequacy issues in both environmental documents.
- There are three public schools located within the boundary of Eielson Air Force Base. The Air Force admits that the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District will lose a minimum of \$1.5M in federal funds in 2013 and may have to contract some or all of these schools as a consequence of a Fiscal Year 2013 move.

Deputy Undersecretary Robyn, in her testimony earlier this year, correctly observed that the communities that have hosted installations are enormously important to DoD. "They have been our partners, our hosts." It is incumbent that they be treated with the utmost of fairness. By now it should be evident to all concerned that the communities of Interior Alaska, with a long and storied history of support to the military, have not been treated well by the Air Force's current posture with respect to Eielson Air Force Base. They have indeed been left to fend for themselves. Given all of the effort that you and Deputy Undersecretary Robyn invested during

the Clinton administration to ensure that this would not be the case, it will tragically be the case for Interior Alaska if the Air Force's direction is not reversed.

I deeply appreciate your attention to my views. I look forward to discussing them at greater length with Deputy Undersecretary Robyn at her earliest convenience and with you during your upcoming testimony before the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee on June 13th. If you'd like to arrange a meeting prior to the Subcommittee hearing, my scheduler may be contacted at 202-224-6665 or kristen_daimler@murkowski.senate.gov

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lisa Murkowski".

Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator

cc: Honorable Michael Donley, Secretary of the Air Force
General Norton A. Schwartz, Chief of Staff, USAF
Honorable Dorothy Robyn, Deputy Undersecretary of Defense