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September 5, 2012

General Herbert A. "Hawk" Carlisle
Commander Pacific Air Forces
United States Air Force
Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, HI 96853

Dear General Carlisle:

Congratulations on your promotion to the rank of General and your new assignment commanding Pacific Air Forces (PACAF). As you know from your long tenure at Elmendorf Air Force Base, the people of Alaska strongly support their Air Force. Alaskans are particularly pleased to see exemplary airmen like yourself who have spent their formative years in our state ascend to positions of senior leadership within the Air Force. We extend our best wishes for success in this important new position – a position made even more important by the Defense Department's strategic emphasis on Asia and the Pacific.

I write today to express my concern about some disturbing news suggesting that contrary to commitments that senior leaders have made to the Alaska congressional delegation and Congressional defense committees, the Air Force continues to move forward with plans to downsize Eielson Air Force Base.

Last February, Secretary Donley and General Schwartz unveiled a plan to eliminate year round active duty flying from Eielson by relocating the 18th Aggressor Squadron to Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson in 2013 and reducing the base population by about 50% in 2015. This proposal was one of several force structure reductions that did not find favor with Congress.

The Defense Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee on which I sit reported a Fiscal Year 2013 bill which prohibits the Air Force from executing any of the force structure adjustments proposed in February until the later of October 1, 2013 or the date upon which a new commission to study the future of the Air Force has evaluated proposed force structure reductions and reported to Congress. The House of Representatives has passed its Fiscal Year 2013 Defense Appropriations Bill. That bill provides in relevant part that the Air Force may not "retire, divest, realign, or *transfer* Air Force aircraft, to disestablish or convert units associated with such aircraft." (emphasis added)

On June 8, 2012, Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee wrote to Secretary Panetta expressing the committee's view that "the proposed [Air Force] force structure adjustments should cease immediately and that the Department should wait until Congress gets the benefit of advice from the Commission." Senator Levin closed this letter with particularly strong words. He stated, "[I]t is hard to see how more thoroughly we could have rejected the Air Force's plans and what additional antipathy will be engendered if the Air Force continues to act as though Congress is not in the process of rejecting its proposals."

On Friday August 31, I became aware that some corners of the Air Force may not have gotten the message. I understand that a contractor team, led by Robert Van Tassle of SAIC, Inc., visited with Fairbanks community leaders last week to discuss matters related to Eielson Air Force Base. Van Tassle told community leaders that his mission was to undertake "preparatory work in anticipation of a National Environmental Policy Act action that would not take place until the end of Fiscal Year 2013."

The community leaders my staff has spoken with were left with the clear impression that SAIC's work was commissioned by PACAF and that SAIC was moving forward toward providing the Air Force with an environmental document by August of 2013. Mr. Van Tassle invited Fairbanks community leaders to submit comments through a liaison at Eielson Air Force base, who would furnish those comments to PACAF, and then to SAIC.

To the extent that these actions are intended to lay the groundwork for a future implementation of the Air Force's February 2012 proposals, I would respectfully suggest they are inconsistent with both the letter and the spirit of the pending Fiscal Year 2013 defense bills. It is equally troubling that my staff was not briefed on the mission of the SAIC team before they were dispatched to Fairbanks. In July, General Welsh pledged to me that the Air Force will be more transparent with respect to its intentions for Eielson Air Force Base in the future than it had been in the recent past.

Assuming the SAIC team is working under the direction and control of PACAF, I would appreciate if you would enlighten me with respect to SAIC's scope of work and deliverables, the amount of funding allocated for its work and the source of funding for this work. I would also appreciate a response to why this work was not put on hold following Secretary Panetta's June 22, 2012 commitment that implementation of Air Force structure changes would be suspended until Congress has provided guidance in the Fiscal Year 2013 bills.

On a related note, I understand that certain buildings on Eielson Air Force Base are slated for demolition this year. The Alaska Air National Guard had requested that some of these buildings be transferred to the Guard which currently operates on a smaller footprint than is authorized at the base. The Air National Guard believed that it was making progress in conversations with the Air Force on this subject until the Site Activation Task Force to implement the force structure changes arrived on base.

Since then there has been no action on the Alaska Air National Guard request, and I understand the Air Force may enter into demolition contracts as soon as September 15, 2012. It is unclear to me why the Air Force would demolish assets the Alaska National Guard has indicated it could utilize, and I respectfully request that you determine why there has not been more progress on this subject and suspend the planned demolition action until the Alaska Air National Guard's request has been fully evaluated.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss these issues with you at your earliest convenience. Nathan Bergerbest, my Senior Counsel and Military Legislative Assistant is staffing these issues for me. Your staff may contact him at (202) 224-2839.

Very respectfully,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator