



March 7, 2012

Honorable Michael Donley
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330

General Norton A. Schwartz
Chief of Staff, US Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330

Dear Secretary Donley and General Schwartz:

Over the President's Day recess we had the opportunity to visit with many Alaskans, including members of the Alaska Legislature, about the future of Eielson Air Force Base. While the Alaska community remains deeply concerned about the proposed move of the 18th Aggressor Squadron it takes the Air Force at its word that Eielson Air Force Base will continue to operate far into the future as the home of the 168th Air Refueling Wing and launching point for Red Flag Alaska and other exercises in the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex.

We respectfully submit that the incremental cost that will be saved by relocating the Aggressor Squadron will prove to be relatively negligible, if it exists at all, in contrast with the more significant cost of maintaining Eielson Air Force Base in an operational state as General Schwartz described in his briefing with the Alaska congressional delegation on February 9, 2012. As the 2005 BRAC Commission found, you simply cannot maintain a warm base in a cold place.

There is strong support among statewide leaders and within the Interior Alaska community to find a path forward that will enable Eielson Air Force Base to continue to operate at a higher level of utilization than presently exists. Alaska's leaders are committed to work with the Air Force in search of creative solutions to make this possible.

General Schwartz emphasized that the cost savings associated with the move was calculated in a tabletop exercise and would have to be "truthed" in a site survey which would include visits to Eielson Air Force Base as well as Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER). We welcome that decision. We write today to share some additional thoughts about the work of the site survey team.

If the Air Force proposal briefed to us by General Schwartz is implemented, the 168th Air Refueling Wing would be the only year round operational tenant unit at Eielson Air Force Base. However, conversations with the leadership of the Alaska National Guard leave us to believe that there has been minimal, if any, consultation regarding the requirements of the 168th Air Refueling Wing going forward. This failure to consult threatens to place the 168th Air Refueling Wing in a position where it cannot fulfill its mission. We strongly encourage the site survey team

to spend as much time as necessary with the leadership of the 168th Air Refueling Wing and the Air National Guard.

Mayor Luke Hopkins and the leadership of the Fairbanks North Star Borough have expressed an interest in visiting with the site survey team while they are on the ground, primarily to impart information about local conditions which may be relevant to an evaluation of the issues at hand. We encourage the survey team to visit with appropriate officials of the Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the Fairbanks North Star Borough and other appropriate stakeholder groups who may be in the best position to help the survey team present an accurate report to senior leaders.’

In addition to direct costs, an accurate report must also include an assessment of all risks and indirect costs associated with the proposal. We therefore strongly urge the site survey team to include the following in their assessment:

- The cost of the potential need for expanded eligibility of the Homeowner’s Assistance Program to offset financial losses to Airmen impacted by the relocation and permanent change of station (PCS) costs. Many Airmen have purchased homes in the Fairbanks/North Pole community. If the Air Force moves several hundred service members to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), they may find themselves unable to sell their houses in a suddenly flooded market. It is unacceptable to expect our service members to incur significant financial losses as a result of the proposed realignment. PCS costs must also be factored in.
- The cost of building additional housing and increasing civilian personnel in base support services at JBER. The housing on JBER is currently at capacity. Support services are already taxed meeting current base needs due to significant Air Force civilian personnel reductions. The addition of several hundred service members and their families to the JBER community would require building additional housing and expanding base support services.
- The cost of increased fuel usage and temporary duty assignment pay associated with Red Flag exercises. Under the Air Force’s current proposal, Eielson would be placed in “warm” status and used to host an increased number of large-scale Red Flag exercises. However, these large exercises would increase the amount of transit fuel used and result in TDY costs for the Aggressor Squadron. Furthermore, they may require a surge of civilian personnel at the base.
- Workforce impact and the cost of voluntary separation incentives. Civilian employees will be displaced as a result of the proposal. Many of the personnel in these positions have proudly served our country and the Air Force for years, and implementing an across the board reduction-in-force to achieve the reduced number of billets would be an unacceptable solution. The Air Force must factor in the cost of voluntary separation incentives and training personnel for other open positions.
- Congested air space in Anchorage. The Anchorage air space is extremely active, with air traffic from Ted Stevens International Airport, Fed Ex, UPS, Lake Hood Seaplane Base,

and existing traffic from JBER. Given the number of aircraft already operating in this air space, the feasibility of incorporating an additional squadron of single-engine F-16s is questionable.

- Increased risk of having all fighter assets located at JBER. Locating all fighter assets in Alaska at a single base increases their vulnerability in the event of a natural disaster. The possibility of a volcanic eruption or earthquake that could potentially ground all aircraft at a given base is serious concern in Alaska. Dispersing our fighter jets throughout the state decreases the likelihood a natural disaster would affect all aircraft.

Thank you for considering these suggestions. We look forward to your response.

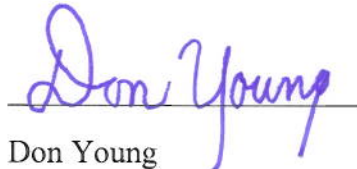
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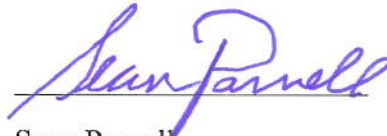
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United States Senator



Mark Begich
United States Senator



Don Young
Congressman for All Alaska



Sean Parnell
Governor of Alaska