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BRAC Commission
2521 South Clark Street, Suite 600
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Dear Chairman Principi and Commissioners:

I was amazed recently when, after weeks of delay, the Department of Defense released some of the data concerning the evaluation process that led to the recommendation that Cannon Air Force Base be closed. The Air Force has for many years told members of this community how important the encroachment issue was in the operation of bases throughout the country. Lowrey AFB (Denver, Colorado), Bergstrom AFB (Austin, Texas), Williams AFB (Phoenix, Arizona), Carswell AFB (Fort Worth, Texas) and many others were sited as bases that were closed in large measure due to encroachment. Many other bases were either closed or the flying operation curtailed because of encroachment. It is obvious that other existing bases face the same encroachment issues that will have to be dealt with in the next few years (Luke AFB and Shaw AFB). In the 1995 BRAC process the Air Force placed great importance on encroachment. Yet, after all the direct information on the impact to military value resulting from encroachment issues, the Department of Defense and the Air Force have assigned a weight to encroachment as 2% of total military value. The shortsightedness of this evaluation is astounding.

As a newly assigned Judge Advocate at Cannon Air Force Base in 1972, I was assigned to approach the Curry County Commission to adopt an AICUZ (Air Installation Compatible Use Zoning) ordinance to protect the approaches to Cannon. The County did not have a general zoning code (it still doesn't), so the County Commission was reluctant to adopt the ordinance. After long discussions and several public hearings, the County Commission did adopt zoning regulations around Cannon. As a result of a lawsuit in Federal Court, the zoning was ruled unenforceable.

The local community did not abandon its efforts to protect what the Air Force claimed were invaluable air rights. The County and the local support organization (Committee of Fifty) worked with the New Mexico legislature to appropriate funds to purchase (or condemn, if necessary) air easements that provide a permanent protection for Cannon AFB. This is but one example of the local community's continuing efforts to do anything to enhance and protect Cannon AFB. The list is long and includes donations of land, expansion of Melrose Bomb Range, chaff and flare training capabilities, and the New Mexico Training Range Initiative.

Now, the Air Force has placed a 2% weight to encroachment in assessing military value. I have been unable to find any justification for this change of attitude. Such a dramatic reversal deserves an explanation and serious scrutiny. Frankly, I don't believe there is a rational explanation,

BRAC Commissioners
06/14/2005
Page 2

because the military value of an operational Air Force base depends directly on the ability to access and utilize the air space.

As both an active duty and reserve JAG, I was assigned to Cannon AFB for twenty-five (25) years. I have observed the transition of Cannon from a World War II facility to a modern operational fighter base capable of deploying combat air power worldwide, with distinction. To throw away an asset like Cannon ignores the long term needs of the Air Force and the future military needs of this country. There is simply no base that can offer the same combination of protected air space, flying weather and conditions, access to training facilities, and community support. I am confident our representatives will provide a detailed analysis to support these arguments and many others, both at the regional hearing on June 24th and in the supporting data that will be submitted. Please give careful consideration to our arguments. The country cannot afford to lose an asset like Cannon Air Force Base.

Respectfully,



David F. Richards

DFR/dnm