

SHËLLEY BERKLEY
1ST DISTRICT, NEVADA

DCN: 8337

COMMITTEES:
TRANSPORTATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
CAUCUS TASK FORCES:
EDUCATION
HEALTHCARE

439 CANNON BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
202-225-5965

2340 PASEO DEL PRADO
SUITE D106
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA 89102
702-220-9823

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2801

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for calling this hearing on the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) findings. The decisions faced by the Commission are difficult ones, and I commend you and the other commissioners for your hard work and dedication. In particular, I would like to express my thanks for convening these hearings on the proposed closure of the Hawthorne Army Depot and the realignment of the 152nd Airlift Wing of the Nevada Air National Guard. Both of these actions would have serious negative consequences for Nevada—both economically and from the perspective of homeland defense. I urge the committee to reexamine these proposals.

I am a strong supporter of the BRAC process. As our military is called upon to fight the wars of the 21st Century—smaller, regional conflicts—and to engage in anti-terrorism and peacekeeping operations, it is imperative that it transform into the next generation fighting force.

Let me begin by stating that I applaud the DoD findings regarding Nellis Air Force Base and Fallon Naval Air Station. According to the recommendations, Nellis will gain nearly 1500 military and civilian personnel. Fallon Naval Air Station will become the Fleet Readiness Center for the West. These facilities can continue, and in some crucial areas such as UAVs, expand their important role in defending America.

However, I do not agree with the other recommendations affecting Nevada—specifically those involving the Hawthorne Army Depot and the C-130s of the 152nd Airlift Wing of the Nevada Air National Guard.

Regarding the C-130s, a key factor in the Defense Department's recommendation was its determination that Reno-Tahoe International Airport was unable to expand beyond its current 10 C-130s. This determination is inaccurate. The Airport has additional land and ramp space not considered in the Department's evaluations. Current law allows Reno to accommodate up to 12 C-130s, allowing for an immediate increase of two aircraft. Within four years, that capacity will be increased to 16—with the infrastructure already in place to support the added personnel.

I am especially concerned that the Defense Department failed to consider the Homeland Security implications of such a realignment. The 152nd currently constitutes nearly 60% of C-130 airlift assets west of the Rocky Mountains. These crucial missions encompass all aspects of Homeland Defense—from civil support, search and rescue, transportation of emergency personnel, and airlifting of emergency supplies including food and water.

Nevada is the fastest growing state in the nation. Las Vegas is the fastest growing metropolitan statistical area. Nearly 1.7 million residents and nearly 250,000 visitors are in Las Vegas at any given time. Travel time to the next largest metropolitan area, Reno / Tahoe—a journey of nearly

500 miles—would take nearly 8 hours over land.

The Air Force has indicated that any loss in airlift capacity can be compensated for with transports based in Southern California. Unfortunately, the use of these transports will result in a 72 hour reaction time for issues in Nevada. In a Homeland Security or other emergency situation, assets will be required well within that long window.

I would also like to call the Commission's attention to several flaws in the economic impact analysis surrounding the Hawthorne Army Depot. According to the Department's inaccurate figures, total loss of employment as a result of the Depot's closure for the surrounding community would be less than 0.1%. This was calculated by incorporating employment data from the Reno/Sparks metropolitan area—nearly 150 miles away. A more accurate employment displacement figure is 30% and could reach as high as 50% when indirect jobs are added to the model. Hawthorne's closure would have disastrous consequences for Mineral County.

I would like to conclude by joining Senator Reid in inviting members of the Commission to visit the Silver State. Nevada faces several unique challenges in Homeland Defense and Security as well as first response—challenges that cannot be truly appreciated until experienced in person.

Thank you again for convening today's hearing and for your willingness to hear our concerns. I believe that when the facts are reexamined, the flaws of the Defense Department recommendations will merit their revision.