



Legislative Journal

Air Force to assess impact of F-16s move from Eielson

By Tim Bradner

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Alaska military officials are doing their best to soothe ruffled feathers in Alaska over the U.S. Air Force announcement that 21 F-16s based at Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks will be relocated to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage in 2013.

The relocation of military personnel and families will adversely affect the Fairbanks-area economy.

Air Force Lt. Gen. Stephen Hoog, commander of Air Force and Army units in Alaska, told the Legislature's Joint Armed Services Committee Jan. 14 that an Air Force team will arrive in March to assess just how many personnel from Eielson will actually move.

Hoog said there are 300 to 500 military personnel at Eielson who are directly engaged with the F-16s and assuming a population multiplier of 2.1 to 2.3 when families are included, "we will see an impact," the general said.

The Alaska Air National Guard aerial refueling mission will remain at Eielson and some capital improvements relating to the tankers will continue, such as a planned upgrading of railroad track to the base that are used to transport fuel.

However, a planned \$45 million remodeling of base housing set for this year has been put on hold by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers because of the announced move, Hoog said.

The Air Guard operates 9 KC-135 tankers from Eielson and performs refueling operations for military aircraft operating in northern areas and the Arctic, as well as other parts of the world. The tanker operation is vital and the Air Guard has been able to be "wheels up" with a loaded KC-135 with-

and their location, said Gen. Thomas Katkus, the Alaska Air Guard Commander, who was with Hoog in the briefing.

"We've never missed it," on that record, Katkus said. "There is no shortage of people asking for fuel (in the air). It's a growth industry."

Hoog said Eielson, meanwhile, will continue to be the main base supporting the annual Red Flag air combat training exercises, where air crews from the U.S. and other nations come to Alaska for training. The F-16s now at Eielson play the "aggressor" role in the training, and that will continue.

It also means that for part of the summers, the relocated F-16s will return to Eielson temporarily to participate in the exercises. The Red Flag exercises typically run from April to October, and this year will involve about 7,000 people from 73 units from eight nations.

Hoog said the Air Force hopes to save money in support of the F-16s at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson because of other aircraft based there, such as F-22s. Maintenance and other work can be done for all the aircraft, gaining efficiencies.

A member of the legislative committee, Sen. John Coghill, R-North Pole, said, "I appreciate that the Air Force sees continued value for Eielson for training, but I hate to see the pullout (of the F-16s). That is going to be an economic burden for my area, and also the Air Force. The efficiencies you anticipate are, to me, open to question."

Rep. Carl Gatto, R-Palmer, another committee member, asked Hoog that with another round of base closings possible, whether Eielson could be on the chopping block even with the tanker mission.

Hoog couldn't comment on the possible closings, but said, "We will need tankers (for aerial refueling) in Alaska. The

Force view, the relocation (of the F-16s) is part of the effort to reduce spending by \$8.5 billion in 2013."

On other matters, Hoog said improvements at missile defense facilities at Fort Greely and Clear Air Force radar site are continuing. A new power plant at Fort Greely is to be on line soon and Missile Field 2, a second set of launch silos, is to be completed.

"This will give us added silos when additional interceptors are purchased," Hoog said.

Fort Greely is operated by the Alaska Army National Guard, which have 200 soldiers employed full-time operating the facility.

Also, improvements to the missile radar facilities at Clear, south of Fairbanks, are continuing. The budget for middle defense improvements in Alaska is \$350 million this year, he said. About 60 Alaska Air Guard airmen are employed at Clear to provide support.

On planned reductions of civilian positions at Air Force and Army installations, Hoog said the goal is to eliminate 222 civilian positions at Eielson and 48 at Eielson, but that he was not informed as to the Army's plan at Fort Wainwright. As for the Air Force, an early retirement program has been reopened and some people are being moved to other positions.

Even after those moves, "It appears that there will still be 40 to 60 people that we cannot place," Hoog said.

One concern for Air Force and Army commanders is any reduction in civilian workers providing support to families of soldiers and airmen deployed overseas, the general said.

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