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Murkowski, Begich Fighting F-16 Aggressor Squadron Move from Eielson to Elmendorf, 4 C-130 Retirements at Elmendorf

Lawmakers to Introduce Legislation Monday That Would Prohibit Action

Senators Murkowski and Begich today issued a united set of statements opposing the Department of Defense's plans to relocate the F-16 Aggressor squadron from Eielson Air Force Base to Elmendorf Air Force Base and retire four C-130 transport aircraft at Elmendorf – as part of a nationwide Pentagon budget reduction strategy.

When the Senate returns to session on Monday, Murkowski and Begich will introduce legislation that would prohibit the Air Force from making these moves.

Senator Lisa Murkowski:

"While I am gratified the Air Force plans to keep the F-16 aggressor squadron in Alaska, I believe its rightful home is Eielson Air Force Base – at the gateway to the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex (JPARC). Today's announcement is identical to the BRAC proposal the Air Force advanced in 2005, when the Fairbanks community conclusively proved to the independent Base Realignment and Closure Commission that the Air Force would not achieve any savings by attempting to maintain a warm base in a cold place.

"Yet the Air Force suggests that today's action will result in a cost savings in Fiscal Year 2015. I no more believe that they will be able to achieve that cost savings in 2015 than they could in 2005. I'm going to do everything in my power to change the Air Force's plan.

"I am also concerned about the Air Force's plan to retire four C-130 transports at Elmendorf, with an anticipated loss of 120 active duty positions. The C-130 plays a crucial role in disaster relief missions. Coming on the heels of an earlier announcement that the Army National Guard will retire the remaining C-23 Sherpa, I need to be convinced that this action leaves the Air Force and Guard with sufficient assets to respond to a catastrophic earthquake or other natural disaster requiring immediately available airlift capacity."

Senator Mark Begich:

"Relocating the 18th Aggressor Squadron from Eielson to JBER is an unacceptable proposal. I will not support the Air Force's attempt to circumvent the law and the formal BRAC process by trying to piecemeal one of the most strategic installations in the country. As Alaska's only member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I will fight this action every step of the way. A decision to relocate the F-16s from Eielson was already rejected in 2005, when the independent BRAC Commission overturned the Air Force's recommendation, recognizing Eielson has the best airspace and range complexes and the estimated costs savings were inaccurate. Nothing has changed since 2005. Eielson Air Force Base is critical to the defense of the United States.

"The Air Force also plans to retire 4 C-130Hs stationed at JBER. It is unfortunate this will result in the loss of the active duty personnel in the integrated unit that fly these planes. However, I am pleased Air Guardsmen of the 144th Airlift Squadron will retain eight C-130s and the manpower to continue to provide important lift capability in defense of our

nation and in support of our state. As members of our community, these Guardsmen will continue to make us proud in Alaska.”

Kendra Kloster

Subject:

FW: Murkowski, Begich File Legislation Prohibiting F-16 Move

Attachments:

12.02.06.F16.Legislation.pdf



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For Immediate Release

Monday, February 6, 2012

Murkowski, Begich File Legislation Prohibiting F-16 Move

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Senators Murkowski and Begich today introduced legislation (*attached*) in the U.S. Senate that would expressly bar the United States Air Force from planning or executing the relocation of F-16s from Eielson Air Force Base to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson – and requires that just as many, if not more, F-16s are based at Eielson this September.

Alaska's entire Congressional Delegation will be sitting down with U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General Norton Schwartz on Thursday, to further discuss the Air Force's plan and question the reasoning.

The Senators issued the following statements after filing the bill:

Senator Lisa Murkowski:

“This is déjà vu all over again, reminding me of the Air Force's BRAC proposal for Eielson in 2005. Back then, Alaskans made the case that the Air Force wouldn't achieve any savings by attempting a move. 7 years later, I remain unconvinced that moving existing units from one part of Alaska to another is an efficient or effective way of cost-cutting. I want the Air Force to show me its math.”

Senator Mark Begich:

“Moving F-16s from Eielson Air Force base to Anchorage will neither save money nor make our military stronger. If military leaders try to end-run the formal base-closing process with this piecemeal approach, I will do whatever I can through my position on the Senate Armed Services Committee to stop it. I'll work with community leaders to demonstrate this is not the right decision and keeping these fighter jets at Eielson makes strategic and economic sense. If we have to stop it through legislation, that's what we'll do.”

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S 2073 IS

112th CONGRESS

2d Session

S. 2073

To prohibit the permanent relocation of F-16 aircraft assigned to Eielson Air Force Base.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

February 6, 2012

Ms. MURKOWSKI (for herself and Mr. BEGICH) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services

A BILL

To prohibit the permanent relocation of F-16 aircraft assigned to Eielson Air Force Base.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. PROHIBITION ON RELOCATION OF F-16 AIRCRAFT.

The Secretary of the Air Force--

(1) may not plan or execute the permanent relocation of any F-16 aircraft assigned to Eielson Air Force Base as of the date of the enactment of this Act; and

(2) shall ensure that the number of F-16 aircraft assigned to Eielson Air Force Base as of September 30, 2012, equals or exceeds the number of F-16 aircraft assigned to Eielson Air Force Base as of October 1, 2011.

END

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Sen. Begich questions F-16 move

by Jeff Richardson/jrichardson@newsminer.com

02.28.12 - 11:19 pm

FAIRBANKS — Sen. Mark Begich questioned the legality of the Air Force's plan to relocate its F-16 squadron from Eielson Air Force Base during a hearing Tuesday, asking Defense Secretary Leon Panetta whether such a move needed to be part of a formal process.

The Alaska Democrat spoke to Panetta during a Senate Budget Committee hearing on the Department of Defense budget request and said such significant moves are typically part of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission process — known informally as BRAC — that is used to shift assets throughout the military.

On Feb. 3, the Air Force announced plans to move the 21-plane squadron from Eielson to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson by mid-2013, part of a proposed nationwide realignment that would affect 60 installations in 35 states.

Begich asked Panetta why such a major move wasn't part of the BRAC process. Eielson was targeted for closure in 2005 by the Defense Department but was deemed too strategically valuable to abandon by that year's BRAC members. The commission allowed only the partial downsizing of Eielson.

"That's the same debate we had with the BRAC, the exact same debate," Begich said. "We're not doing a BRAC now — we're just (relocating the squadron)."

The departure of the F-16 squadron would significantly alter the makeup of Eielson. Nearly half of the 3,100 military and civilian jobs at the base will be transferred to the Anchorage area if the move takes place.

Begich said he's received little explanation from the Air Force about why moving the F-16s makes strategic or economic sense. He said the move is especially mystifying in light of the Air Force's stated goal of boosting its role in the Asia-Pacific region.

"I don't get this, to be very frank with you, that it's almost like they picked a location ... but they're now starting the analysis," Begich said to Panetta.

Panetta recommended Begich talk to the Air Force to get more details about the process. When Begich said he hadn't received a satisfactory response from Air Force leaders, Panetta said he would get back to him with the information.

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