

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS

April 11, 2012

8:09 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Dan Saddler, Co-Chair
Representative Steve Thompson, Co-Chair
Representative Bob Lynn
Representative Bob Miller

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Carl Gatto, Vice Chair (deceased April 10, 2012)
Representative Alan Austerman
Representative Sharon Cissna

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20

Relating to Eielson Air Force Base and the strategic importance of retaining the 18th F- 16 Aggressor Squadron in the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

- MOVED SJR 20 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SJR 20

SHORT TITLE: RELOCATION OF 18TH F-16 SQUADRON

SPONSOR(s): STATE AFFAIRS BY REQUEST

03/28/12	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
03/28/12	(S)	STA
04/03/12	(S)	STA AT 9:00 AM BUTROVICH 205
04/03/12	(S)	Moved SJR 20 Out of Committee
04/03/12	(S)	MINUTE(STA)
04/04/12	(S)	STA RPT 5DP
04/04/12	(S)	DP: WIELECHOWSKI, KOOKESH, PASKVAN, MEYER, GIESSEL
04/06/12	(S)	TRANSMITTED TO (H)
04/06/12	(S)	VERSION: SJR 20
04/09/12	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/09/12	(H)	MLV
04/10/12	(H)	MLV AT 1:00 PM CAPITOL 120
04/10/12	(H)	Scheduled But Not Heard

04/11/12

(H)

MLV AT 8:00 AM CAPITOL 120

WITNESS REGISTER

ANNA SORENSEN, Staff
Senator Joe Paskvan
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: On behalf of Senator Paskvan, Vice Chair of the Senate State Affairs Committee, sponsor, presented SJR 20.

LUKE HOPKINS, Mayor
Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB)
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SJR 20.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:09:54 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR STEVE THOMPSON called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting back to order at 8:09 a.m. Present at the call back to order were Representatives Thompson, Lynn, Miller, and Saddler.

SJR 20-RELOCATION OF 18TH F-16 SQUADRON

[8:10:24 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMPSON announced that the only order of business would be SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20, Relating to Eielson Air Force Base and the strategic importance of retaining the 18th F-16 Aggressor Squadron in the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

[8:11:03 AM](#)

ANNA SORENSEN, Staff, Senator Joe Paskvan, Alaska State Legislature, presented SJR 20 on behalf of the Senate State Affairs Standing Committee, sponsor, on which Senator Paskvan is Vice Chair. She paraphrased the sponsor statement, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

The United States Air Force has recommended the relocation of the 18th F-16 Aggressor Squadron from Eielson Air Force Base located in Interior Alaska. Senator Paskvan, along with countless other Alaskans, believe [sic] that this is wrong.

This move will have dramatic impact on the Fairbanks and Interior Alaska economies, and will reduce the operational capabilities at Eielson, making it vulnerable in future [Defense Base Realignment and Closure Act (BRAC)] rounds. This is detrimental to our entire state. The benefits and strategic importance of Eielson AFB now and into the future far outweigh any negligible savings achieved by the transfer of the F-16 squadron.

Eielson is at the forefront of protecting the United States interests in the Pacific Theater and serves a critical function in reinforcing the region. It helps to secure important oil infrastructure, including the Trans-Alaska Pipeline and the refineries located in Interior Alaska. The Trans-Alaska Pipeline supplies a significant portion of our nation's energy needs. Eielson AFB also has adjacent access to the largest joint air and land training range and the largest unrestricted airspace in the United States. This area has minimal airspace congestion and is well-suited to perform operations for live-fire exercises and unmanned vehicles that are critical to 21st century combat capabilities.

Further, Eielson has a large fuel storage capability and a runway capable of handling the armed forces' largest aircraft year around. Movement of the 18th F-16 Aggressor Squadron puts Eielson AFB at risk. This base has served America's interests for decades and because of its location, should continue to serve America's interests. The base has access to unique training grounds, fuel storage, ample housing for servicemen and women and their families, and provides critical support for joint training exercises. During the 2005 base closure and realignment rounds the strategic and economic importance of Eielson was proved. Just as the community-at-large, elected officials, retired military personnel, and business leaders spoke in support of Eielson seven years ago, this resolution seeks to remind the President and the Air Force that the F-16s should stay at Eielson AFB.

[8:14:02 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE MILLER recalled the Pentagon, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), was requested to provide actual economic numbers regarding the amount of savings expected from the relocation, and he asked whether that information has been received.

MS. SORENSEN related her understanding that it has been difficult to obtain information from the U. S. Air Force ("Air Force") regarding the decision it is making. At this time, there is a decision-making group visiting Eielson AFB and Fort Richardson that is collecting information for analysis.

8:15:02 AM

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN noted that the Air Force is alleging the move is to save money, and he questioned the basis for this. He asked how moving the F-16s to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER) from Eielson AFB would save money.

MS. SORENSEN said part of her concern is that there would only be minimal savings at best, because there is less adequate housing for families at JBER. In addition, there would be the need to regularly transport all of the F-16s back to Fairbanks for training, which is quite expensive. She related that the Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) and Senator Paskvan do not believe there would be any savings.

REPRESENTATIVE LYNN surmised returning to Eielson AFB for missions - considering the price of jet fuel - would be pretty expensive.

MS. SORENSEN said yes.

8:16:48 AM

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER expressed his support of the base and the value of the F-16 squadron and its mission. In fact, the legislature has taken steps in support of all the bases in the state. He said he supported the intent of the resolution and asked why it is important to have a specific resolution for Eielson AFB.

MS. SORENSEN explained that because a decision-making group will soon visit Eielson AFB, the sponsor felt it was important to show specific support for the base as it "seems to be their target at this point."

8:18:05 AM

LUKE HOPKINS, Mayor, FNSB, stated that Fairbanks has a group of citizens - which includes staff from the Alaska Congressional Delegation - who question the validity of the proposed move of the F-16s in terms of the cost savings. His experience during base reallocation and closure (BRAC) proceedings in 2005 was that work by the community brought forward different numbers in cost savings and operational expenses than were presented by the BRAC commission. Mr. Hopkins said issues raised by the community have not been adequately apprised and cost estimates from officials have not been released. Although it is unclear, Mr. Hopkins warned there may be intent "to BRAC" Eielson AFB in 2013, even though its location holds geographical strategic importance in the new Pacific/Asia defense strategy. He advised that the Fairbanks group will continue to ask questions and work with the congressional delegation, acknowledging budget concerns, but questioning the savings from moving the F-16 training squadron to Anchorage. Mr. Hopkins urged the passage of SJR 20 as fast as possible.

[8:21:36 AM](#)

CO-CHAIR THOMPSON, upon determining no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony.

CO-CHAIR THOMPSON observed that the proposal is also devastating to the military families of the 1,500 active military members who would be moved to JBER; for example, there is not enough housing. In addition, he estimated between 200 and 300 of the transferred military families own homes in Fairbanks and the sales of these homes will cause prices to plummet. He pointed out that - unlike the circumstances during a BRAC transfer - the federal government will not purchase the mortgages of families who are transferred.

[8:22:47 AM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE SADDLER moved to report SJR 20 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying zero fiscal notes. There being no objection, SJR 20 was reported out of the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

[8:23:13 AM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 8:23 a.m.