

In Light of Dept. of Defense Proposal to Retire Aircraft and Make Major Cutbacks at Military Bases, WNY Lawmakers Urge DoD to Keep Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station An Active Player In Nation's Air Force

NFARS Employs 3,500 WNY'ers & Pours Millions into Regional Economy –Base Is Too Critical to WNY & National Security For These Cutbacks

Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station Must Remain Active

Today, Representatives Slaughter and Hochul and Senators Schumer and Gillibrand called on the Department of Defense to keep the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NFARS) as an active and central player in our nation's Air Force. The lawmakers' push comes in light of a Department of Defense announcement on Thursday that it would seek to make major cutbacks at bases across the country in order to slim down the defense budget over the next decade. The Department's announcement highlighted Air Force plans to retire 65 C-130 aircraft cargo planes, like those at the Niagara Falls base, and also raised a longer term proposal to conduct two rounds of military base closures in the next several years. The lawmakers' letter to Secretary Leon Panetta highlighted that the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, with its 3,500 employees and an annual direct economic impact of \$168 million, is too critical to both the nation's military and Western New York's economy to be considered for cutbacks. Schumer, Gillibrand, Slaughter and Hochul are urging the Defense Department to preserve the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station's role as a major contributor to our national security, and to search for savings overseas, where the local economy will not be negatively impacted.

"We know how difficult defense cutbacks and BRAC Commissions are because of all the work it took in 2005 to save the base," said Congresswoman Slaughter. "The Niagara Falls Air Base is of immeasurable value to the Western New York community and a vital part of Niagara County's economy. I've said it before and I'll say it again, the Niagara Falls Air Base deserves to be the crown jewel of the Air Force. I've been proud to join my colleagues in conversations about the importance of the Air Base for Western New York and the United States military."

"The Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station serves as a crucial part of not only our national security, but the Western New York economy as well," said Congresswoman Hochul, a Member of the House Armed Services Committee. "As the sole military installation in Western New York and

the largest employer in Niagara County, the Department of Defense must protect this installation as a key asset in our military efforts. On behalf of my constituents and our local community, I will continue working with the Western New York delegation to ensure this base remains an integral part of our military's long-term strategic plan."

"Niagara Falls Air Reserve station is as critical to Western New York's economy as it is to our national security, and we will fight tooth and nail to keep this station in active duty," said Senator Schumer. "The Niagara Falls base is a critical player in our nation's military readiness and response capability, and provides security along our northern border, all while providing 3,500 jobs to Western New Yorkers and pouring \$168 million directly into Western New York's economy. These benefits are too massive to ignore, and that is why I'm joining the Western New York delegation in urging Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to avoid cutbacks in Niagara Falls."

"As the sole military installation in Western New York, we can't afford to lose Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station," said Senator Gillibrand, a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. "In addition to the many missions this base has conducted in Iraq and Afghanistan, they also come to our rescue here at home, especially in the wake of natural disasters that ravaged New York State last year. Closing Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station would devastate the local economy, undermine protection of the northern border, reduce our state's preparedness, all without providing projected savings."

Slaughter, Hochul, Schumer and Gillibrand's push to preserve the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station's critical role in our nation's security comes after the Pentagon released its budget Thursday, and revealed a proposal for major cutbacks at military bases across the country, and plans for additional rounds of Base Realignment and Closure Commission in the next several years. These measures, including a reduction in Air Force cargo planes, are aimed at reducing the Department of Defense's budget over the next decade. The Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station is home to 12 such airlift planes, which the Department of Defense is considering eliminating, and the base has been considered for closure in previous rounds of base-closures commission. Previously, however, efforts by federal lawmakers including Congresswoman Slaughter and Senator Schumer, in conjunction with those of local residents and NIMAC, highlighted that closing NFARS would not achieve projected savings and that it plays too critical a role in the nation's military mission for such cutbacks to occur.

The lawmakers highlighted in their letter to Secretary Leon Panetta that as the largest employer in Niagara County and a major presence in Western New York, the Reserve Station has an annual direct economic impact of \$168 million and over 3,500 jobs in Western New York. They

are therefore pushing to highlight as they have done in the past, that the Niagara Falls base is the backbone of the Western New York, and potential military cutbacks would be too harmful to the local economy, while not achieving satisfactory savings for the DOD.

The Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station has played a critical role in our nation's security in recent years, further highlighting the need for the Department of Defense to find its savings overseas or in ways that does not negatively impact the Western New York economy. NFARS is the single military installation in Western New York, providing support for our border region, the state and the country. Last year alone, NFARS conducted over 1,500 missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and also provided critical air ambulance and other life-saving services in response to Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee, and the earthquake in Haiti in 2010. Also, the base plays day-to-day roles in supporting Air Force requirements, missions and other operations overseas.

A copy of the lawmakers' letter to Secretary Leon Panetta appears below:

January 27, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta

Secretary of Defense

1000 Defense Pentagon

Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta:

In light of the Defense Department's (DOD) recently announced force restructuring, we write today to emphasize the importance of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NFARS), including the 914th Airlift Wing and 107th Airlift Wing. While we recognize the need for the DOD to cut costs, we believe that restructuring decisions must be strategically designed to ensure our regional and national security, while also recognizing the economic impact military installations have on our local communities.

NFARS is the single military installation in Western New York, providing support for our border region, the state and the country. In 2011 NFARS conducted over 1,500 missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Additionally, in recent years they have provided critical aeromedevac and resupply missions in response to Hurricane Irene, Tropical Storm Lee, and the devastating earthquake in Haiti in 2010. The base also continues to serve vital day-to-day roles in the Continental United States for Air Mobility Command in addition to supporting Air Expeditionary Forces requirements overseas, contingency operations and other missions associated with the projection of U.S. presence overseas.

At a time when our nation must work to reduce the national deficit, it is important that we identify the most efficient and timely ways to do so. As retired Air Force Chief of Staff General Fogleman stated in a recent article, the Air Force should leverage its Reserve and Guard Components more rather than less to achieve increased cost efficiencies.

Specifically for NFARS, it is important to note that past attempts to reduce NFARS footprint in Western New York have failed because it is not cost effective. In 2005, after an exhaustive examination of the facts, the BRAC commission concluded that it would take over a quarter of a century before the DOD would see any cost savings from closing NFARS. In fact, the BRAC examination demonstrated that alleged saving that would be achieved by closing Niagara was not accurate, and that the federal government would actually save money by keeping the local air base open. Since then, the Western New York delegation has worked assiduously to diversify and expand operations at NFARS, making the site even more valuable to the nation's and the military's mission than before. These new additions include a new training center, buildings to house the Military Entrance Processing Station, more sophisticated coordination between base operations and state-of-the-art firing range.

In addition to the NFARS' contributions to our national security, the base also serves as the backbone of our local economy. As the largest employer in Niagara County and a major presence in Western New York, the Reserve Station has an annual direct economic impact of \$168 million and over 3,500 jobs in Western New York. At a time when the President has made economic recovery a top priority, any cuts to NFARS would have a devastating impact on our

local community.

We strongly urge you to look for savings abroad within DOD that do not jeopardize troop safety or our nation's security before looking to cut vital installations, such as NFARS, at home. Thank you for your attention to this important matter, and we look forward to working with you during this process.