

July 26 2005 - Rep. Slaughter Contacts Homeland Security Department in Defense of Niagara Falls Air

Rep. Slaughter Contacts Homeland Security Department in Defense of Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station

Requests DHS Info on Pentagon's BRAC Consultation

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY-28), Ranking Democrat on the House Rules Committee, today sent a letter to the Secretary of Homeland Security, Michael Chertoff, in order to learn the extent to which the Department of Defense consulted with the Department of Homeland Security before making its initial recommendation that the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station be closed.

The BRAC guidelines mandate that the Pentagon take homeland security value into consideration before making its recommendations to the Commission.

However, in the letter, Rep. Slaughter informed Secretary Chertoff that several BRAC Commissioners had told her that no such consultation had occurred.

"I am deeply concerned that the Pentagon made a decision before it had all the facts. The considerable homeland security value of NFARS was clearly not taken into consideration when the BRAC list was put together. We hope the Department of Homeland Security can shed additional light on this important matter," said Rep. Slaughter.

Rep. Slaughter also highlighted the importance of NFARS to America's border defense and its ability to respond to threats to the north-eastern United States.

The text of the letter follows:

July 26, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff

Secretary

United States Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff,

I am writing to learn the extent that the Department of Defense (DoD) consulted with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) during the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process.

The BRAC Commission is required to assess each recommendation to ensure it meets the eight selection criteria set forth by Congress in P.L. 108-375. Criteria two, dealing with an installation's military value, reads: "The availability and condition of land, facilities, and associated airspace (including training areas suitable for maneuver by ground, naval, or air forces throughout a diversity of climate and terrain areas and staging areas for the use of the Armed Forces in homeland defense missions) at both existing and potential receiving locations.

According to Members of the BRAC Commission, for a military installation to meet this criterion, its homeland security operations must be evaluated. However, several Commissioners have suggested that DoD did not consult with DHS during the BRAC process. If this is true, then the DoD's BRAC recommendations are based on incomplete information, and do not meet the statutory requirements.

For example, the DoD has recommended closing the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station despite its strategic location to the northern border and critical support of homeland security operations. As you are aware, a number of security agencies train and house equipment at the base, including the U.S. Border Patrol, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. The installation has also supported the deployment of Army Guard helicopters assigned to the U.S. border. NFARS is the only staging area for homeland defense and disaster response in Western New York, and was instrumental in responding to the 9/11 attacks. The 107th Air Guard was the first Refueling Wing to fly Combat Air patrols over New York City.

Closing NFARS would severely damage DHS' ability to protect the northern border. Accordingly, I would like to know whether or not DoD consulted with DHS when deciding to close NFARS. Given that the BRAC Commission must report to the President no later than September 8, I ask that you provide me with this information as soon as possible. Thank you for your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Louise M. Slaughter

Member of Congress