

Congressman Larson Dismayed by BRAC Grounding Connecticut

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 26, 2005

Congressman Larson Dismayed by BRAC Grounding Connecticut's Sole Flying Mission

HARTFORD - Congressman John B. Larson pledged Friday to carry on the fight to keep the Connecticut Air Guard flying following the BRAC commission's approval of the Pentagon's recommendation to strip its 15 A-10 Warthogs.

The commission's decision is difficult, but it is not necessarily fatal, Larson said. We will take it to the next round, exploring all available options. I stand squarely behind Gov. Rell and the attorney general in their pursuit of legal action to maintain the presence of Connecticut's A-10 Warthogs, and will help in any way they ask.

Governors in states that faced elimination or substantially downsizing of aircraft units, including Gov. M. Jodi Rell, warned that such moves were illegal without their consent. Connecticut's suit will follow ones filed by Pennsylvania, Illinois and Tennessee. Friday, a federal judge ruled in favor of Pennsylvania's suit concluding that Pentagon does not have the authority to substantially alter the guard without the governor's consent.

Larson acknowledged that he was surprised by the commission's decision. Several commission members had echoed concerns expressed by the Adjutant Generals Association of the United States that leaving states without flying missions would compromise homeland security, recruitment and disaster response to emergencies such as floods and forest fires.

At the commission's behest, the adjutant generals had drafted an alternative proposal consolidating some units but retaining aircrafts in each state. The commission's decisive vote only two days earlier to strike Submarine Base New London from the closure list had further buoyed hopes.

Frankly, I'm stunned. Obviously, I knew this could happen, but I was optimistic given the commission's interest and responsiveness.

Friday's vote endorses retiring or sending all aircraft to a base out of state.

The combat-ready Flying Yankees date back to World War I. The unit has been an active participant in the war on terrorism. It was awarded the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award following a highly successful Operational Readiness Inspection in the fall of 1999.

This is not a case of win one, lose one, Larson said, referring to the saving of the sub base. Each was fought on its own, compelling merits. The most painful aspect of this decision is that it serves no greater purpose. The commission really got it wrong on this issue. It may only discourage talented people who want to serve their state and their country from answering that call.

While the air guard is losing its planes, the base will remain open.

The commission has until Sept. 8 to send its recommendations on closures and realignments to the President. He will have until Sept. 23 to accept or reject the recommendations in their entirety. If accepted, Congress will have 45 legislative days to reject the recommendations in their entirety or they become binding.

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