

March 28, 2007

Washington, D.C. - Congressman David Price (NC-04) today urged the Navy to come back to the drawing board with North Carolina officials to find an alternative site for the Outlying Landing Field. In a letter to Navy Secretary Donald Winter, Price wrote that he hopes the Navy will move quickly to avoid a confrontation over the authorization and funding of the OLF as Congress weighs the Navy's request. Price is a member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Price's letter further states the Navy's selected site in Washington County "is not a viable option for an OLF because of the threats it would pose to Navy and Marine pilots and aircraft, to local communities, and to the surrounding environment." The letter cites the broad-based opposition to locating the landing strip in proximity to the world renowned Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, including objections from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The text of the letter follows.

March 28, 2007

The Honorable Donald C. Winter

Secretary

U.S. Department of the Navy

1000 Navy Pentagon

Washington, DC 20350

Dear Secretary Winter:

I am writing to urge you, in the strongest possible terms, to reject Site C as your preferred location for the North Carolina Outlying Landing Field (OLF) and to initiate discussions with the Governor of North Carolina, the North Carolina congressional delegation and the congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and other key stakeholders to identify a mutually agreeable alternative that will better serve our military.

As you know, I have expressed ongoing concern about the Navy's plan to construct an OLF at the location identified as Site C in Washington County, North Carolina. I can say without hesitation that the citizens and elected officials of North Carolina welcome the Navy's decision to build an OLF in our state. I can say with equal certainty, however, that Site C is not a viable option for an OLF because of the threats it would pose to Navy and Marine pilots and aircraft, to local communities, and to the surrounding environment.

The Navy has repeatedly characterized its decision to construct an OLF as a necessity for "force protection." Site C would seem to be incompatible with that goal given the significant Bird Aircraft Strike Hazard (BASH) risk, which indicates that there is a very real possibility that Navy and Marine pilots operating at Site C will lose their lives due to bird strikes. In fact, military BASH analysts have identified Site C as one of the locations with the highest BASH risk in the country. Even the Navy's Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) characterizes the BASH risk as "moderate to severe." That level of risk is simply unacceptable, and it is unwarranted given the availability of other low risk sites.

The Navy also has failed to mitigate the impact of the OLF on the local community. As currently envisioned, the OLF would force dozens of farmers to plant less profitable crops or sell land that has been with them, in many cases, for generations. North Carolina's Agriculture Commissioner estimates the proposal would cost local farmers an estimated \$6 million in revenues. Moreover, an OLF at Site C would undermine another valuable component of the local economy; namely, the tourism drawn to the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge which Site C abuts. There are other sites which would have a more acceptable impact on agribusiness and on tourism.

I am also concerned by the Navy's failure to consult with state and local officials about the siting decision, despite urgings by federal courts and the Congress. North Carolina Governor Mike Easley has announced his adamant opposition to Site C, stating that "the draft SEIS shows [that] the Navy remains unwilling to even fully consider reasonable alternatives." Such a statement leaves no doubt that the Navy has failed to live up to obligations to consult with state and local stakeholders on a viable location for the OLF.

In addition, Rep. G.K. Butterfield (whose district includes the Washington County Site C location), State Senate President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight, State Speaker of the House Joe Hackney, State Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, the Washington County Board of Commissioners, and Mayor Brian Roth of Plymouth, NC (which is adjacent to Site C) all have voiced their opposition to Site C. This strong opposition at the state and local levels calls into question the viability of the Navy's plans to move forward with Site C.

Finally, the Navy appears to have ignored the input of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) about the impact of the proposed OLF at Site C on the surrounding wildlife habitat. As you know, the Navy used FWS as a "cooperating agency" in the preparation of the SEIS, a designation that requires it to incorporate FWS analysis to the full extent practicable. The Navy does not appear to have complied with that requirement. FWS Director Dale Hall recently testified at a public hearing that "we are concerned that the conclusions the Navy has drawn are more definitive than the data can support...We continue to note that other sites in North Carolina have been identified within the Draft SEIS where the proposed OLF could be constructed, with far fewer risks to the resources we are charged with managing." The Navy can avoid creating a tradeoff between the needs of the military and our environmental protection laws by selecting a site that the FWS and other environmental stakeholders can support. .

Mr. Secretary, it is my deep hope that, working together, we can avoid a confrontation over the Navy's request for funding and authorization to move forward with construction of an OLF at Site C in Washington County, NC. I have every reason to be confident that we can identify a site for the OLF that all stakeholders can support and that will not compromise the Navy's mission.

I appreciate your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

DAVID PRICE

Member of Congress

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