

2005 BRAC COMMISSION REGIONAL HEARINGS

MONDAY, AUGUST 8, 2005

1:06 P.M.

MONTEREY MARRIOTT HOTEL  
350 CALLE PRINCIPAL  
MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA 93940

STATES TESTIFYING:  
CALIFORNIA, ALASKA, COLORADO

COMMISSIONERS:  
COMMISSIONER JAMES BILBRAY  
COMMISSIONER PHILIP COYLE  
COMMISSIONER HAROLD GEHMAN  
COMMISSIONER JAMES HANSEN  
PRESIDING COMMISSIONER:  
COMMISSIONER PHILIP COYLE

ACTING CHAIRMAN COYLE: Good afternoon, I'm

Commissioner Philip Coyle and I will chair this Regional Hearing of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission. I'm also pleased to be joined by my fellow Commissioners Bilbray, Gehman and Hansen for today's session.

We've had wonderful support from the City of Monterey for this hearing. And I want to especially thank Congressman Sam Farr, who was very helpful. Of course, the Honorable Leon Panetta, City Manager, Fred Meurer, and Mayor Dan Albert. They all have just made this visit quite special.

On July 19th, this Commission voted to consider closure or realignment of eight installations that were not included in the Defense Department's recommendation. We took this action not because we have determined that we need to close more bases than the Secretary of Defense recommended, but because we want to make the best possible closure or realignment decisions consistent with the criteria established by law.

Our job as an independent commission is to render a fair judgment on the Secretary of Defense's recommendations. In a limited number of cases, we cannot make that fair assessment without first being able to make direct comparisons between installations that are part of the Secretary's recommendations and similar installations

study slated to begin in Galena. The State of Alaska had begun the disbursement process for this project study; now we wait. The model for this project had included the energy consumption of Galena's FOL. Safer, cheaper energy for all with the added benefit of a major reduction in the cost of living for our community.

As you are all aware, Galena's FOL is closer to northern and western Alaska than any other air base. We keep hearing of these wonderful new F-22s that will be stationed at Elmendorf in Anchorage. God bless America for having the capacity to still build the best in the world. This also gives us pause as we consider our future conflicts. Our opposition will also have faster airplanes and longer ranges. Time will become even more critical, not less so.

Galena, built as an air fighter town, understands the Air Force philosophy that states that speed equals life. In this day and age, it applies to our national defense now more than it ever did. You trained our nation's best and brightest young people to become air superiority fighters.

"Tigers in the sky" is what they called themselves when they came to Galena. They came to Galena to serve our country on the northern front, to defend America and to buy time. The Tiger Freeway, which cuts through the middle of our town, leads to what was Campion Air Base. In honor and

respect to these brave souls, it will always be Tiger Freeway.

We have heard how closely tied we are to Fairbanks. We respectfully have to disagree. Because of our location, Galena is, and always was, an air fighter town. Commissioner Bilbray and Commissioner Coyle, when you flew into this FOL in smoky conditions, in the last fifteen minutes of your flight, had an air emergency occurred, Galena would have been the only paved airport that could safely capture your airplane in about 300 miles. Now imagine our land in seven months of winter. Dark, 40 below, and an ice pond.

Gentlemen, we have first-hand experience from living here. We can say unequivocally that the military chose wisely when they put Campion Air Base in Galena. We know why the military did not recommend our FOL for closure. Our location is vital to all trans-Alaskan air travel. Whether for a civilian passenger airline crisis, national emergency, or if Elmendorf goes to an alert status, Galena has been there for any American planes. Our air fighter squadrons have the safety net of Galena's paved airport and barriers, and we wish the best and safest alternative for our air forces. You have that now in Galena.

We have many stories of local people coming to the rescue of airmen who have been caught out in our environment