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August 6, 2012

COUNTY RELEASES ECONOMIC IMPACT REPORT ON NFARS  
DOCUMENT CITES NATIONAL SECURITY, CALLS DOWNSIZING PLANS 'SHORTSIGHTED'

WHEATFIELD—Niagara County's government released a detailed report today that argues strenuously against proposals to eliminate an Air Force mission at the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, citing the "critical role" played by the base in national defense and homeland security.

The report, authored by the Niagara County Center for Economic Development, was prompted by a recommendation from Hyjek & Fix, LLC, a Washington, D.C.-based lobbying firm partially subsidized from county funds to lobby on behalf of the base. The report's analysis found an economic impact on the Western New York region of \$200 million annually—which would be put in jeopardy by any cutbacks at the base.

More critical, though, was the report's finding that any realignment at the base would "jeopardize national defense, military readiness, and homeland security" by eliminating the "first line of defense for threats against...international border crossings and major power suppliers."

At nine pages, the document is a dense listing of various military, homeland security missions and regionally-significant economic assets associated with the base—including the nearby Niagara Falls International Airport, which is jointly maintained by the air base and the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority.

"We've long argued in the most strenuous terms for keeping our base at current operating levels, but this report makes clear that the government should actually be increasing the use of this facility, in light of recent investments in base infrastructure," said Legislator David Godfrey, R-Wilson. "The Niagara Falls Air Base is also geographically critical—this is one of the busiest border crossings in the Western hemisphere, and the Northeastern U.S. is sorely lacking in certain national defense facilities that can be optimally sited there."

Godfrey noted proposals to construct a state-of-the-art C-130 flight simulator at the base were particularly noteworthy, given the need to train Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve personnel—and the lack of any similar facilities nearby.

"The C-130 is the backbone of our national defense. It is a vital national security asset precisely because it is a very adaptable airframe," Godfrey, a Marine veteran and a key county liaison to the Niagara Military Affairs Council, said. "And many of the units flying it are the reserve component—the folks in our National Guard and Reserve. They need flying hours, but they need simulator hours too. Right now, there are no facilities to train them anywhere in the Northeast."

Godfrey noted that county economic planners had reviewed the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission report and concluded that the factors that had convinced Defense Department planners to keep the air base operating then were still factors today.

"The report says, 'In 2005, after an exhaustive examination of the facts, the BRAC commission concluded it would take over a quarter of a century before the Department of Defense would see any cost savings from closing NFARS. In fact, the BRAC examination demonstrated the alleged savings that would be achieved by closing Niagara was not accurate, and the federal government would actually save money by keeping the local air base open,'" Godfrey cited. "Since then, a lot of money has been invested in improving the base."

County Manager Jeffrey M. Glatz, who worked closely with county economic planners in conducting the review that forms the basis of the report, indicated he had forwarded it to Hyjek & Fix this morning, before releasing it to the media at noon today. It is included in PDF format with this release.

"We stand by the most important assertion in the report," Glatz, a former Air Force Reserve officer, said. "The report says, 'The close proximity to the international border including two international airports, four international highway crossings, two international rail crossings, and two major hydro-electric generating power plants, emphasizes the critical role that NFARS plays in national defense and homeland security.' To propose reductions or eliminations of missions would be shortsighted and dangerous to national security and the Western New York economy."

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