

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 12, 2004

Dear Members and Families of the 129th Rescue Wing, and Members of our Community,

I've just learned that the Air National Guard has forwarded a Program Change Request (PCR) to the Secretary of the Air Force, James Roche, seeking his approval for moving the 129th Rescue Wing from Moffett Federal Airfield to Castle Airport.

I remain strongly opposed to moving the 129th RQW and many of my House Colleagues have joined me in this effort. While I'm deeply disappointed that the National Guard Bureau (NGB) has moved the proposal forward to the Air Force level, I believe that if the Secretary of the Air Force allows a full and independent review of the proposal, he will reach the same conclusion as I have relative to the merits of retaining the 129th RQW at Moffett.

Since my visit to congratulate each of you for your extraordinary service to our nation on July 12, 2003, we've worked exceedingly hard to bring critical information to the decision makers in response to the plan put together by the previous California National Guard Adjutant General.

The following is an important timeline, beginning with the stunning news on June 26, 2003, that official slide presentations were being made to Air Force officials in Washington, D.C. and to some of you at the Unit later that year stating, "no community opposition" as well as "Congresswoman Eshoo no longer opposes move." We learned since the discovery of the slides that blatant misinformation surrounding the proposal to move the Unit was pervasive and persistent.

You're aware that on July 8, 2003 my colleagues and I send a letter to Secretary Roche outlining our concerns. We received a response from the Air Force acknowledging our letter. On September 4, 2003, I send a letter to Secretary Roche thanking him for his follow-up and renewing our concerns that the proposed move would adversely affect costs and unit readiness. We've worked closely with Dr. Scott Hubbard at NASA Ames and on September 23, 2003, he then sends supporting documentation and a follow up letter to his January 10, 2003 communication to Col Williams of the 129th RQW reiterating a strong desire to negotiate a long-term use agreement for Moffett. I'm very grateful to Dr. Hubbard and his team for their extraordinary cooperation.

On September 29, 2003, Lt Gen James responds to my September 4th letter to Secretary Roche and in his letter he states for the first time that most of the members of the unit do not wish to move.

On October 7, 2003 I send a response to Lt Gen James, reminding him that the opposition to the move by local communities and elected officials was misrepresented by official Air Guard statements, pointing out the incorrect financial projections by the Air Guard.

On October 20, 2003, I meet with the Chairman of the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, raising questions and concerns over the projected numbers for the proposed move.

On November 17, 2003, Lt Gen James responds to my October 7th letter with some clarifications, but a continued lack of detail to the questions outlined relative to a host of critical issues including cost, recruiting, retention, and readiness.

On November 20, 2003, my colleagues and I meet with Lt Gen James in Washington, D.C. and present a series of pointed questions about the California Air National Guard's Cost Comparison Study and the proposed move.

On November 25, 2003 I send a follow-up letter to Lt Gen James, with a written copy of my questions and concerns.

On December 11, 2003 the Air National Guard schedules a briefing for me and my colleagues in Washington, D.C. while Congress is not in session. We ask that this be rescheduled, yet the Air National Guard moves ahead with the briefing anyway. On January 15, 2004, the Air National Guard responds to the questions posed in November and the responses do little to fully address questions about cost. They in fact raise new questions about personnel retention and operational response time.

On January 22, 2004, my colleagues and I send a letter to Lt Gen James, informing him that the responses are inadequate and we request a new meeting.

On February 4, 2004, we send a follow-up letter to Lt Gen James, asking him again to fully address our specific concerns about inaccurate cost projections associated with the proposed move.

On February 27, 2004, NASA Ames sends a new letter to the 129th RQW offering them full control and guaranteed low operating costs for the 129th RQW's portion of Moffett.

In March 2004 we receive letters supporting the 129th RQW at Moffett from the U.S. Coast Guard, Lockheed Martin, and Space Systems/Loral.

On March 8, 2004 we send a letter to Chairman Lewis, updating him on the 129th RQW, and share new concerns about the lack of answers.

On March 17, 2004, my colleagues and I meet with Lt Gen James in Washington D.C. and present him with the unanswered questions from November, along with a list of new concerns about the economic viability of the move, the retention of unit members, and increases in operational response time.

On March 24, 2004, we send a follow-up letter to Secretary Roche, outlining unanswered questions and local support for the 129th RQW.

On April 23, 2004, Gen James writes to me at the request of Secretary Roche in which he states he is moving the PCR ahead, without addressing the specific questions raised.

The California Air National Guard commissioned a Cost Comparison Study by Mead and Hunt two years ago to evaluate the long-term costs of remaining at Moffett or moving to Castle. This study, which has been used as the principal data source to justify the move, is full of inconsistencies and poorly-supported financial projections. Projected capital costs at Castle are unrealistically low. The hangar they propose to use at Castle is fifty years old and in need of extensive repairs. The tower is not in working order and will cost millions to bring up to code. The consultants program-in zero dollars for expected shared service costs and they use a fourteen-year-old report on the pavement conditions of the runway.

The numbers used in the study for retaining the unit at Moffett are highly misleading. There are \$44 million in unexplained capital costs projected for Moffett. Estimated annual costs to the unit increase six-fold over twenty years, despite a very reasonable long-term proposal from NASA Ames which would keep operating costs for the 129th RQW at levels originally proposed in 1993, plus inflation. A new initiative offered by NASA Ames would drastically reduce the millions of dollars in fire protection costs projected for the 129th RQW each year.

Added to the above is a loss of credibility to the taxpayer for the Air Guard if the unit moves. Congress appropriated, at the request of the leadership of the California Air National Guard, a new, state-of-the-art \$16 million hangar which opened in July 2002 for the 129th RQW.

The Air Guard now states that the key reason for moving the unit is the issue of retention of unit members. However, the average retention rate over the past six years for the 129th RQW has been 87.83%. The national average retention rate has been 89.76%. This indicates that the 129th RQW has enjoyed a retention rate of less than 2% below the national average over the past six years, even during some of the lowest unemployment in local Silicon Valley history. This does not signal a significant inability to retain unit members. In fact, it demonstrates quite the opposite.

The proposed move will have a negative impact on the unit's response time to its operations in the Bay Area and out at sea in support of the U.S. Coast Guard. The Coast Guard Command states:

Coast Guard HH-65s are normally limited to operations 100 nautical miles or less offshore, depending on weather. With their (129th RQW) aerial refueling capability, the 129th RQW's HH-60s are able to go 600 nautical miles offshore and conduct a hoist and return. They (129th RQW) are the only long-range offshore helicopter capability between San Diego and Astoria, Oregon. In addition, we work with the 129th Rescue Wing to deploy Para Rescue Jumpers out of Coast Guard or Air Force C-130s placing trained medical personnel on scene thousands of nautical miles offshore. The 129th Rescue Wing is an invaluable resource that the Coast Guard does not possess, allowing us to provide

urgent medical care far offshore. The mid-California location of the 129th at Moffett is ideal for responses up and down the west coast.

-Letter from Rear Admiral Kevin J. Eldridge,
Commander of Eleventh Coast Guard District,
to Rep Anna Eshoo, dated February 10, 2004

My colleagues and I have requested time to meet with Secretary Roche as soon as possible to discuss the matter before any final determination is made. This decision will have a lasting impact not only on the Bay Area but also on you, the members of the 129th Rescue Wing and your families. You have served above and beyond the call of duty and you've made it clear that you do not want to relocate to the Central Valley and that you will not remain with the Unit if it moves.

I fully recognize that there are two factors surrounding this decision... political factors and the substantive facts. From the outset of this process I've sought to flesh out the substantive basis for moving the 129th or retaining it at Moffett Field. Despite continued attempts to have the critical issues of costs, retention and other issues answered, they have not been addressed.

I want to underscore to each of you my ongoing respect for your work and how much you and your families have been asked to sacrifice. Many of you have served overseas multiple times. Many of you have children attending schools in our community and you and your spouses have employment in the Bay Area. So many of you own homes here and a number of you live on base at Moffett. You have my 100% commitment to continue to do everything I possibly can to promote the merits of allowing you to remain in the Bay Area with a community who couldn't be prouder of you.

I've requested Secretary Roche to provide the answers to the issues I've raised and which have been left unaddressed during this protracted ordeal. My constituents and the members of the 129th deserve no less.

Should you have any questions, let me hear from you. You can [e-mail](#) me, or feel free to contact me at my District Office, 650-323-2984.

Sincerely,

Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress