

Remarks on Horsham JII and House Bill 111 and SB 48

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House Transportation Committee – May 28, 2009 – Horsham Twp

Thank you Chairman Markosek, Chairman Geist and the Transportation committee for coming to Horsham Township for this hearing. I truly appreciate the time and consideration you afforded the legislators of this area and their constituents. As many of you know, and have heard me repeatedly say, there is no issue of more paramount importance than the future of the Willow Grove NAS JRB in the district I represent. That is why I thought it was important for you to see where Willow Grove sits relative to the community. I also thought it was appropriate for you to hear all the relevant views on the issue.

Enactment of HB 111 or SB 48 is nothing short of guaranteeing the future of Horsham and the surrounding communities. Today I join with my colleagues in renewing our call for the state to enact legislation that will offer protection to the citizens of Horsham and greater community. The legislation Senator Greenleaf, Rep. Murt and I are proposing is vital to ensure that we will never see or hear flights that do not fit with the mission of national defense, homeland security or emergency preparedness.

Since the base was announced as a target of closure by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission many resident having been living in a pall; uncertain of what the future will bring. For four years people have been living in fear that the fabric of their community will be destroyed if their worst nightmare happens: unchecked flights and development. The idea of planes coming in at all hours is the ultimate community destroyer.

Please allow me to give you a little history of the base to provide context before I get into the details of the bills. We are proud of Willow Grove's unparalleled history in aviation – almost as long as there have been airplanes there's been something here at

the base. In 1926 Harold Pitcairn established an airfield where the base is located. While there he developed the autogyro, a forerunner to the helicopter, which was so momentous that it was recognized by aviation's most prestigious award, the Collier Trophy in 1930. The machine was half plane and half helicopter. He also started a mail service that eventually became Eastern Airlines. Pitcairn's contribution is so important that if you go to the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum you will see one of Pitcairn's Mailwing planes hanging from the ceiling. Amelia Earhart, the aviation pioneer, also flew out of there. Matter of fact the book on Horsham has her picture on the cover. Finally, we must remember the role Willow Grove played in training our pilots through a number of wars. Today the base still hosts the 111th which flies the A-10s, their most recent mission in Afghanistan saved many lives. We truly can look at our guard unit with pride. However, in 2005 the Base Realignment and Closure Commission slated portions of the base for closure, while many disagreed with the decision, it allowed for new innovative thinking. The field that Harold Pitcairn started has made history once again with the establishment of the Horsham Joint Interagency Installation or HJII. It is the first of its type anywhere in the U.S. and now Congressman Alcee Hastings of Florida proposed legislation for other homeland security bases to be established across the US from recently BRACed bases. This concept is an adaption that came out of the recommendations of the September 11th Commission which calls for greater cooperation at all levels of inter and intra-government in preparing and responding to Homeland security issues.

Our homeland security needs have evolved over the years and the base should evolve with it. As our enemies change tactics we must have the agility to respond. The lessons of 9/11 reveal our superior military numbers and technology are not always enough. Likewise, our failures as a nation to adequately respond to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina highlight the need for greater integration of our nation's resources. We need a new vision that consolidates our military, homeland security and emergency response assets to create a synergy as we combat emerging threats with shrinking resources.

Under this scenario, HJII could be a center of excellence, providing the critical training and coordination needed to combat terrorists and others who wish to do us harm. This hub could have strategic anti-viral stocks, in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control, allowing us to quickly respond to an epidemic outbreak or biological warfare. Most recently we were reminded how a pandemic virus could quickly spread with the H1N1 virus – which infectious disease experts are looking at with wary eye for the fall.

It is because of the potential to make America more secure, and quite frankly my family, that I believe in the concept. Governor Bob Casey was famous for asking: what did you do when you had the power? I hope to say I played a role in saving American lives.

I want to quickly add a great vision does not equate to a great implementation plan. That is why it is important for the local legislative delegation, working with the local government to step in and say how our community ought to look. There are a number of questions the locals have and they should be answered. We should be working hand and hand with the state to make this HJII the best base it can be. My support for the base's concept has never been a blank check. I have never supported and WILL NEVER support any concept that includes commercial or cargo flights. That is why I worked with Horsham Township in crafting HB 1487 last session and worked with them to strengthen it this year in HB 111. And just like last term passage of our legislation is once again my top priority.

But why is this legislation necessary? Hasn't the Governor said time and again that he doesn't support an airport? He has but in a year and half he will be an ex-governor. What then? Whoever the next governor will more than likely want to keep the base for our homeland security; it is too great of an asset to let go. We need to hold the next governor to the standards of usage we expect.

Some are quick to point out there is already a federal law that is clear on the issue – no flights outside the mission. In a briefing legislators had a few months ago we learned the law is already working. The program manager of the HJII was approached by a

discount airline to use the space with \$100M in potential revenue. It was immediately rejected because their proposal was outside the mission and the federal law clearly bans the use of commercial flights. However, any legislation can be repealed. That is why we need to have the belt and suspenders approach to ensure that if the federal legislation is repealed it will still be in full effect at the state level.

Furthermore, our legislation offers further clarity to the appropriateness of who is an allowable tenant or associated user who can appropriately use the runway. Any future use of the runway should be clearly and narrowly defined. The last thing any of the residents want is an operation on the base under the auspices of supporting the mission of the HJII but really does not have a stake in our national defense, homeland security, or emergency preparedness having unlimited access to the runway. This is a concern I have heard numerous times and this legislation speaks to that concern. And this really is the crux of the whole debate as it stands today. Let me be clear: if you are not making the U.S. a safer place to live you've got no business setting up shop at the HJII. And our legislation spells that out. I understand this base could be a real cash cow, even if we could make a ton of cash we should not let just anybody in. It's all about quality of life. HB 111 and SB 48 makes that clear. The legislation states:

[T]he property shall be used by the Pennsylvania National Guard, Department of Defense components, Federal, State and local government agencies and associated users to **perform** national defense, homeland security and emergency preparedness missions.

And it further defines Associated Users as:

Nongovernmental organizations and private entities **performing** the national defense, homeland security or emergency preparedness missions of the installation, which are tenants of the installation under lease, license or other similar access or use agreements.

As I have said over and over again no citizen or ratepayer should have to pay more taxes for the base to be here. And no business should be exempted from paying taxes or following the local zoning and ordinances. Fairness is the rule here, no advantages or disadvantages – an even playing field is all we ask. Again HB 111 and SB 48 spell that out by saying that:

[A]ssociated users of the installation shall pay local taxes, including real property taxes, and shall comply with local land use ordinances and regulations.

There are a number of other issues that must be addressed and worked out between the local governments and the state but they are outside of the scope of our legislation and discussion here.

Now that SB 48 was referred to the Transportation Committee a couple of weeks ago I ask you to bring that legislation to a vote so we can at long last put the community's concerns to rest.

So in closing, the residents of Horsham are patriots who have willingly sacrificed for the sounds of freedom. They are proud of the role the base has played in making our country safer and most want it to continue its tradition. But they do not want any usage that does not honor the history of the base. Furthermore, they cannot be asked to have their quality of life further diminished. It must not happen. I am asking you as my colleagues to join us in making sure it does not happen.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the committee.