Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 12, 2005

The Honorable Anthony J. Principi
Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission
2521 South Clark Street, Suite 600
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Chairman Principi:

We are writing in response to the BRAC Commission's July 1 request for clarification pertaining to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's recommendation to close Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. As the elected representatives of the state of Hawaii, we would like to provide you with our shared view on the consideration of the closure or realignment of Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard as an alternative to the Secretary's recommendation.

As the Commission continues to ascertain the validity of the justification used for closure and realignment of military facilities as recommended by Secretary Rumsfeld, it is our considered judgment that the Secretary did not "substantially deviate" from the BRAC criteria in not closing or realigning Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.

We note that the first element in determining military value criteria is "the current and future mission capabilities and the impact on operational readiness of the total force of the Department of Defense". The recommendation to expand operations at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard must be viewed as consistent with this primary tenet.

The overwhelming strategic value of Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard is clear. Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard is the largest ship repair facility between the west coast and the Far East and homeport to 29 ships. It plays an irreplaceable role in maintaining the Navy's fleet readiness and defense capabilities. If closed or reduced in capabilities, these ships would, in some cases, have to transit to the east coast for maintenance. This action could severely impact the Navy's readiness and homeland defense capabilities.

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The Navy has stated that closing or reducing the size or scope of Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard would be detrimental to its strategic objectives to have ship maintenance capabilities located near fleet concentration areas. In addition, the realignment of Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard would have a negative impact on the quality of life of our sailors and their families. Families would have to be uprooted and relocated to the mainland for long term maintenance, a costly and unnecessary upheaval. Sailors would be forced to deploy without their families for short duration maintenance which would then reduce the time available to perform their mission.

We believe that a review of the available minutes and data used by the Department of the Navy and the Department of Defense clearly demonstrates that a well thought-through decision process was applied which appropriately weighed both financial estimates and military judgment, including the input of Navy leadership both in Washington and in the Combatant Commands.

With our many years of experience in the Congress and on the Armed Services Committees and the Defense Appropriations subcommittee we can assure you that Congress did not intend to make the Base Closure and Realignment process simply an exercise in accounting. Instead, the recommendations must temper a desire to achieve efficiency with the overarching need to meet military requirements. Our review of the relevant data provided with the Department's recommendation concludes that the Navy and DOD took the proper steps to ensure that both sets of factors – financial and military – were considered in an appropriate manner.

We would suggest the Commission consider the following quotation from the November 18, 2004 meeting of the Industrial Joint Cross-Service Group where various shipyard closure scenarios were discussed:

"Closing Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard was determined to have little merit for somewhat different reasons. If the depot work were moved, the dry docks would still have to remain open to serve the intermediate level maintenance work on the ships home ported at Pearl Harbor. Mr. Wynne noted that with the utilization rate of these submarines, sending them on a trip to the west coast for maintenance would reduce their readiness…. In addition, Pearl Harbor is in a forward position where its strategic value exceeds any benefit of mainland maintenance efficiencies."

We recognize that the numerical military value of the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard was evaluated as marginally lower than that of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. However, this score does not take into consideration military judgment. The Department of Defense and the Navy also recognize that the scope of work performed is not always the same among its shipyards and depends, for example, on the condition of each submarine. Furthermore, Pearl Harbor is a full service shipyard, with a single management structure that oversees both intermediate and depot maintenance. It repairs and maintains all classes of navy ships while the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard performs depot maintenance only on submarines. These factors make numerical comparisons of capabilities, cost efficiencies, and value challenging.

In the coming months, the Defense Department will re-examine its force structure requirements in the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). It is widely believed that the QDR will recommend increasing forces in the Pacific to meet the potential threats in the region, thus increasing the requirement for maintaining a forward deployed full-service nuclear capable shipyard. We urge the Commission not to make recommendations on base realignments today that would preclude our ability to respond to future threats and upset the balance between operational forces and support structure in the Pacific.

As noted by the Commission on Overseas Bases, "looking beyond today, we cannot rule out sometime in the next quarter of a century the emergence of a more traditional great power competitor, possibly in our zones of interest in Europe and East Asia. If that occurs a force posture and base structure optimized for predominantly asymmetric threats emanating from the arc of instability may not be able to stay ahead of and ultimately contend with a global rival bent on direct confrontation with the United States.

"These considerations lead us to observe the absolute necessity to consider both strategic and operational requirements in tandem with budgetary investments. Consider the need to shift an additional aircraft carrier and attendant forces to the Pacific, a move that the Commission recommends."

We respectfully submit that this judgment is appropriate for use by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission as well.

Established almost 100 years ago, Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard continues to meet the challenges of today. Each year the Shipyard is called upon to provide valuable emergency services to our naval ships throughout the Pacific region. This capability would be lost if Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard were to be reduced in size and scope. Also lost would be the capability to dry-dock nuclear aircraft carriers at Pearl Harbor, as well as the Navy's goal of maintaining dry docks for aircraft carriers on both coasts and in the central Pacific. With the likelihood that an additional aircraft carrier will be assigned in the Pacific, the requirement for dry-docking a carrier will only increase.

We offer these points to add to the record of support for Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard. If need be, we would all testify in favor of maintaining it as a full service shipyard that is well suited to meet the nation's defense needs in the Pacific today and into the future.

We urge the Commission to support the recommendations of the Department of Defense, the Navy, and our regional combatant commanders and retain Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard.

Aloha,

Daniel K. Akaka

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UNITED STATES SENATOR

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