

Washington, DC -- Federal, state and local elected officials called on the United States Air Force (USAF) on Friday for justification regarding the USAF's decision to suspend the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) Forward Training Mission at the Griffiss International Airport.

In a letter to Gen. John D.W. Corley, Commander of the USAF Air Combat Command, U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer, U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, U.S. Rep. Michael A. Arcuri (NY-24), NYS Senator Joseph Griffo, NYS Senator David Valesky, NYS Assemblywoman RoAnn Desitito, and Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente outlined their concerns with the USAF's decision to remove the AWACS training mission from Griffiss and requested a 60 day extension and an immediate meeting with USAF to discuss opportunities to maintain the mission in the future.

In their letter to Gen. Corley, federal, state and local officials stated, "At no point during the AWACS Forward Training site selection process and operational activities has USAF been in communication with congressional offices regarding AWACS training at Griffiss. Furthermore, we have yet to receive any justification from USAF officials regarding their decision to terminate the AWACS Forward Training mission at Griffiss."

Oneida County was selected as the Forward Training Site for the AWACS mission in July 2008. The USAF conducted a six month process to explore a Forward Operating Location for AWACS at Griffiss to conduct training of new crew members. USAF conducted their "validation concept deployment period" from mid-July to mid-September, and concluded to return in October and operate training flights. After weeks of training operations following the validation process, USAF is cancelling the AWACS Forward training mission without explanation.

Letter to Gen. Corley included below:

November 7, 2008

Gen. John D.W. Corley
Commander, Air Combat Command

205 Dodd Boulevard, Suite 100
Langley Air Force Base, VA 23665-2788

Dear General Corley:

We are writing to express our strong disappointment with the United States Air Force's (USAF) decision to suspend and cancel the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) Forward Training mission at the Griffiss International Airport (Griffiss), located in Rome, NY, on Friday, November 8, 2008.

At no point during the AWACS Forward Training site selection process and operational activities has USAF been in communication with congressional offices regarding AWACS training at Griffiss. Furthermore, we have yet to receive any justification from USAF officials regarding their decision to terminate the AWACS Forward Training mission at Griffiss.

The USAF conducted a six month process to explore a Forward Operating Location at Griffiss to conduct training of new crew members. USAF conducted their "validation concept deployment period" from mid-July to mid-September, and concluded to return in October and operate training flights. After weeks of training operations following the validation process, USAF is cancelling the AWACS Forward training mission without explanation. What is the justification for the USAF's abrupt and unexplained decision for cancelling the AWACS Forward Training mission?

It is our understanding that AWACS equipment and aircraft have not been removed from the Griffiss site as of Friday, November 7, 2008. We request that USAF continue the AWACS Forward Training mission for 60 days, and provide our offices the opportunity to meet and discuss with your staff the rationale for removing the mission from Griffiss, as well as the need to maintain those activities in the future.

As you know, the Griffiss Air Force Base was realigned following the completion of the 1993 and 1995 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commissions, which resulted in the loss of nearly 5,000 military and civilian jobs. Since that time, federal, state and local officials have been working diligently to redevelop the former base. The AWACS Forward Training mission provides the region with a significant economic boost in the form of revenue to local businesses.

We thank you for your prompt attention to our request, and look forward to a formal response as soon as possible. Please direct the appropriate members of your staff to follow up Mr. Al Candido, Chief of Staff in the Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr.'s office at 315-798-5800 or via email at acandido@ocgov.net .

Sincerely,

U.S. Rep. Michael A. Arcuri (NY-24)
Oneida County Executive Anthony J. Picente, Jr.
U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton
U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer
NYS Assemblywoman RoAnn M. Destito
NYS Senator Joseph Griffo
NYS Senator David Valesky

Cc: Maj. Gen. Herbert Carlisle, Director, SAF/ Office of Legislative Liaison
Col. George C. Carpenter II, 552nd Operations Group Commander

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