

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 10, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding a pending Pentagon decision that we feel runs counter to our commitment to our troops and their families. We strongly urge you to ensure BWI remains the primary entry point for troops returning home from abroad.

We have heard that the United States Central Command is considering eliminating Baltimore Washington International Airport (BWI) as its gateway for military personnel and has already begun diverting flights from BWI to airports in Atlanta and Dallas. We believe this change would be a mistake as BWI is a superior facility and meets all of the concerns raised by the DOD that the facility lacks the necessary services and resources that our returning troops need. In fact, this airport meets and exceeds the needs of our men and women in uniform. We respectfully request that you do everything you can to continue to keep BWI as the nation's primary point of entry for troops returning from Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa. We strongly urge you to recognize how essential the airport, its workers, and the USO staff and volunteers are to making travel for our military personnel and their families as comfortable as possible. The systems in place work and we don't believe they should be changed.

In September 2003, the Pentagon started giving soldiers stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan two weeks of leave in the largest R & R program since the Vietnam War. Most soldiers on R & R or Emergency Leave travel through BWI Airport.

The State of Maryland spent \$1.1 million dollars for construction of the one-of-a-kind USO International Gateway Lounge. It is staffed by some of the most dedicated volunteers. BWI Airport has gone above and beyond the call of duty for our men and women in uniform. We know because many of us have been there. We have thanked the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines for their service to their country in Iraq, Afghanistan, and around the world. We have also thanked the energetic USO staff and volunteers who work around the clock to provide our troops with the comforts of home – anything from a clean shower to homemade snacks to a computer to communicate with loved ones. The USO Gateway Lounge hosts more than 250,000 military personnel and their families each year. The military travel program brings more than \$20 million to the state of Maryland each year. The businesses around the airport have reported a substantial increase in their sales as they help get the military personnel the products and services they need.

BWI Airport's close proximity to Baltimore and Washington makes it ideal for troop travel. It is located near Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Fort Meade, Walter Reed Army Hospital, the Pentagon, Bolling Air Force Base, Andrews Air Force Base, Ft. Myers, Quantico, the Capitol and the White

House. This makes it easy for the nation's civilian and military leadership to visit the soldiers and show their support and gratitude for their service.

BWI also sits on the I-95 corridor which allows families easy access to the airport and the surrounding community. In addition, BWI offers exceptionally low fares as a hub to Southwest Airlines and is close to two other large commercial airports, Reagan National Airport and Dulles International Airport. BWI is also served by Amtrak which provides transportation to hundreds of destinations from Florida to Maine including Richmond, Philadelphia, Boston and New York City.

While we understand the need for an airport with twenty four hour service, BWI does operate between the hours of 6:00am to midnight. The USO lounge is open 24 hours a day. We would invite the opportunity to work with the Department of Defense on its concerns with BWI to make the airport meet the needs of the troops and the Pentagon.

Again, we strongly urge you to remember that BWI Airport, its workers, and the USO staff and volunteers will continue to meet and exceed the needs of servicemen and women. This facility represents the best in America because it honors our troops, their families, and the efforts of hard working Marylanders.

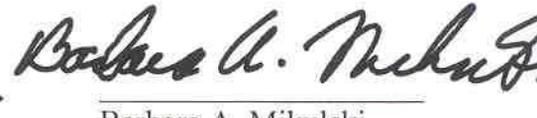
We cordially extend an invitation for you to join us at BWI to greet the returning troops and tour the facility at your convenience. Many of us have been to the USO lounge and met with soldiers returning and departing for Iraq. Not until we made that trip could we appreciate the full value of the special USO mission there.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

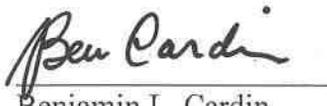
Sincerely,


C.A. Dutch Ruppertsberger
Member of Congress

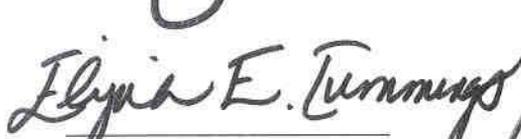

Paul S. Sarbanes
U.S. Senator

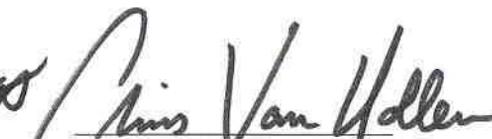

Barbara A. Mikulski
U.S. Senator


Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress


Benjamin L. Cardin
Member of Congress


Albert Wynn
Member of Congress


Elijah Cummings
Member of Congress


Chris Van Hollen, Jr.
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