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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 10, 2016

COMMITTEES:

AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY

BANKING, HOUSING AND
URBAN AFFAIRS

HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

INDIAN AFFAIRS

SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Eliana Brown
Association of Defense Communities
2020 K Street NW, Suite 650
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Dear Ms. Brown,

It is my sincerest pleasure to strongly endorse Grand Forks, North Dakota, for recognition as one of the Great American Defense Communities (GADC) of 2016.

The greater Grand Forks community has long demonstrated exceptional support for its local military installation, and the past year has been a particularly remarkable year. Grand Forks exemplified the highest level of support in the four areas emphasized by the GADC program by ensuring ongoing community building and integration efforts, increasing community support and collaboration, creating new and innovative educational and employment opportunities, and boosting support for military families.

First, when Grand Forks had the chance to build up its community with greater integration between the military and civilian communities, it not only exceeded its support of previous years, it aimed for the sky—literally. Through an Enhanced Use Lease, Grand Forks County now leases 1.2 million square feet of land from the Air Force and subleases the land to a private developer, facilitating the creation of Grand Sky, the first commercial unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) business and aviation park in the country. After three years in the making, this unique public-private partnership has come to life and is helping create seamless opportunities for young entrepreneurs and industry experts alike – a setup the *New York Times* calls “a Silicon Valley for drones, in North Dakota.” Additionally, a Joint Use Agreement between the Air Force and Grand Sky will soon allow shared runway access for training and other activities that will enhance the Air Force’s remotely piloted mission.

Secondly, the Grand Forks community has demonstrated unparalleled support and collaboration through its numerous partnerships with the Air Force. The creation of a Community Partnership Initiative between the Grand Forks region and Grand Forks Air Force Base allows for the consolidation of a wide range of resources for both military and civilian benefit, including a joint fire department agreement, a shared public works support and training agreement, and shared services from emergency management to public transit to mosquito control.

Third, the Northern Plains UAS Test Site in Grand Forks County – which is one of just six sites in the country designated by the Federal Aviation Administration to promote UAS integration into the national airspace – is at the forefront of the ever growing UAS industry, and the Grand Forks community has been a tremendous partner for ensuring its success due in part to the

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educational and employment opportunities it promotes. The community paved the way for the designation of the UAS test site and the establishment of Grand Sky through the many assets it offers the UAS industry, including the University of North Dakota's UAS operations degree program, which is the first of its kind in the country; a partnership with Northland Community and Technical College, which offers certificates in UAS maintenance and imagery; and an incredibly active and engaged group of county commissioners, Chamber of Commerce members, and other local leaders. The community's steadfast support has played a pivotal role in helping put military, private, and commercial UAS into the national airspace.

Finally, the immensely caring and committed relationship that exists between the Grand Forks community and Grand Forks Air Force Base continues to serve as a strong family support element for local airmen and their families. For example, the Chamber's Military Affairs Committee organizes fundraisers, Military Appreciation Days at sporting events, awards programs, and support activities for servicemembers and their families. Additionally, several leaders in the community, including the mayor of Grand Forks, have been in close contact with my office to advocate for a new full-time Vet Center in Grand Forks to ensure military families have access to readjustment counseling and mental health services. Most importantly, constant coordination between base leadership and local civic leaders ensures the community and Grand Forks Air Force Base operate in lockstep to the benefit of both.

The level of support Grand Forks continues to show its local Air Force community is remarkable. I am proud of the teamwork this community has demonstrated, and I hope you will give every consideration to Grand Forks for recognition as one of the Great American Defense Communities. This would truly be a well-deserved honor.

Sincerely,



Heidi Heitkamp
United States Senate