

**Honorable Chairperson Buzzas, Vice Chair Juneau, Vice Chair Witt, honored members of the committee, and distinguished guest. My name is Joe Fletcher; I live in Great Falls, Montana at 3104 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue South. I am employed with the Great Falls Job Service Center as a Veterans Services Consultant which is sometimes known as a Local Veterans Employment Representative. This morning I am appearing before you as a private citizen as I have taken my personal annual leave to be here. The remarks I am providing are entirely my own personal thoughts and do not reflect in any fashion as those of my employer. I have not discussed this House Bill with my employer or my thoughts I am sharing with you today.**

**I am a retired member of the United States Air Force where I was privileged to serve my country for over 26 years. I am sure that many of you will find my comments very pro toward our military citizens and their families.**

**I encourage you to fully support House Bill 713. Today, I will strive to tell you why it is in the best interest of our state for your support of this very important bill. Without your support, and passage of this bill, our state will be unable to adequately showcase the positive things about our military units that are located throughout the state. This certainly includes Air and Army National Guard, Army Reserve, Coast Guard and Malmstrom AFB. As I speak today, many of these citizen soldiers, airmen and active duty folks have answered our Nation's call and are at this very minute in harms way. Many of them in doing so have uprooted their and their family's lives and have made great sacrifices for us. I am sure that all of us here today share a great deal of pride for the sacrifice these folks have made and pray for their safety everyday.**

**The upcoming "BRAC" also known as the Base Realignment and Closure Commission is scheduled to commence their assessment of military units to inactivate, scale down,**

**realign, or even close. This causes me great concern. The recommendations to the President by the BRAC will have a far reaching economic impact on many communities around the nation. Some of these will be our very own unless we as a state take a very proactive stand to convince the BRAC that our units serve a very vital link in the Nation's Defense and deserve to be left intact. The folks who serve in our military units around the state deserve nothing less than our full and complete support.**

**Every month, at Malmstrom AFB I am privileged to facilitate the Transition Assistance Program which is a 3 ½ day seminar designed to assist military personnel who are either retiring or separating from the military to reenter civilian life. This program has given me a unique opportunity to interact with military personnel and their spouses from around the state. I can tell you first hand that should their units be closed, relocated, or downsized, their lives would be changed for ever and that of their**

**community. Lastly, I am sure that some of you may remember what happened when Glasgow AFB closed some years ago. The community was hurt tremendously economically. One could say even devastated. I can relate to you in a very personal way that this is true. I was assigned to Amarillo AFB, Texas in 1967 and was there until just a few weeks prior to its final closing in 1968. As the date came closer for the gates to be locked, the active duty Air Force personnel were reassigned to other locations around the world. The local town, Amarillo began to take on the appearance of a ghost town. The main business district was one of the most depressing scenes I have ever witnessed. Over 65 percent of all businesses were boarded up with plywood and closed. In the residential areas of the city, the same occurred there; you could drive down a street and see house after house that was boarded up with plywood. Honorable members of this committee, we do not need this in Montana. In closing, I urge you again to support House Bill 713. Your support will assist in insuring**

**our installations remain safe from being  
devastated by the BRAC. Thank You for  
your kind attention. May God bless each of  
you, our state, and this great nation of ours?**