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• **Gov. Dennis Daugaard Governor of South Dakota**



Last month I attended the winter meeting of the National Governor's Association, which is held in Washington, D.C., each year. Gathering with governors from around the country is useful for gleaned ideas and best practices, and I have made attending a priority.

As I have in previous years, while in Washington, I scheduled several meetings at the Pentagon with senior Air Force officials to express South Dakota's strong support for Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City.

After Ellsworth narrowly escaped closure during the 2005 round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), leaders throughout South Dakota began discussing ways to provide additional support for the base. In 2009, I assisted in the formation of the Ellsworth Development Authority, which provides direct support to the base by promoting economic development; facilitating land transfers, including reducing incompatible structures from the Accident Potential

Zones surrounding the base; and coordinating with local governments and private entities to promote the health and safety of those living at Ellsworth.

This multi-faceted mission is unique in the country, and in 2012 its efforts earned the Ellsworth Development Authority "Defense Community of the Year" honors from the Association of Defense Communities.

Recently, the authority coordinated the construction of a "mock village" to provide new training opportunities for the B-1 Bomber crews stationed at Ellsworth. This training area, a joint project between the authority, Air Force and the South Dakota National Guard, cost around \$50,000 to construct and was completed this past summer. Since then, the Air Force estimates that this South Dakota-based training facility has saved more than \$1 million in training costs because pilots can fly shorter distances to conduct training exercises.

This project is just one of many activities that the authority has undertaken in recent years and that I have highlighted in meetings at the Pentagon.

Air Force officials are noticing South Dakota's strong support for Ellsworth. With the Department of Defense now requesting that Congress authorize another round of BRAC in 2017, the value of entities like the Ellsworth Development Authority is higher than ever.