



## Board of Commissioners

**Bob Rost**  
Grand Forks, ND

**Dave Engen**  
Northwood, ND

**Cynthia Pic**  
Niagara, ND

**Kimberly Hagen**  
Grand Forks, ND

**Mark Rustad**  
Grand Forks, ND

Tom Ford  
Grand Forks County  
PO Box 5726  
Grand Forks, ND 58206-5726

RE: SB 2240 A BILL for an Act to provide an appropriation to the department of commerce for the base retention grant program.

Dear Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee,

My name is Tom Ford, and I am the Grand Forks County Director of Administration. Thank you for inviting me to be here today on behalf of the Grand Forks community. I am grateful for the opportunity to tell you about what we have been doing and the positive results achieved in growing military, interagency, and commercial missions at Grand Forks Air Force Base (GFAFB).

Grand Forks enjoys an enviable relationship with the Air Force, and particularly with the service members and their families at GFAFB. The partnerships we have forged have positioned GFAFB as a model for the “Base of the Future” not only for the Air Force, but also for other military services such as the ND National Guard, Space Development Agency, and Test Resource Management Center.

Grand Forks has received numerous national awards recognizing its support of GFAFB, and the ND National Guard such as the Abilene Trophy and the Great American Defense Community award, chosen from a field of over 150 military communities nation-wide. Grand Forks continues to be recognized by senior military leaders and other military communities as the model to emulate.

We have worked diligently with the 319<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Wing at Grand Forks AFB to improve quality of life for airmen and their families. The Grand Sky Enhanced Use Lease provides GFAFB with flexible funding to be spent on any number of improvements that could not otherwise be accomplished if relied on annually appropriated funding.



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Grand Forks is committed to improving its quality of life based on the Air Force's 2021 Support of Military Families report. While GFAFB ranked in the top third of installation communities, quality of life remains a priority as mission and basing realignment decisions factor in these criteria. The Grand Forks community continues to strategically meet with Air Force leadership to assess local quality of life, military support, and economic development goals.

In 2021 it was announced that GFAFB would be the Air Force's center of excellence for Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance (ISR) with future ISR missions to be housed at GFAFB. Funding has yet to be allocated, however, and priorities and initiatives can change quickly in the military. Grand Forks finds it imperative to increase national awareness that GFAFB, Grand Sky, UND, and Grand Forks community partners are international leaders in military technology and UAS development. Grand Sky, which has garnered \$65 million in capital investment, is the nation's first commercial UAS and aviation business park located on leased GFAFB land. The Space Development Agency (SDA) announced, and has begun outfitting space, on GFAFB for its first-ever ground operations and integration center. From GFAFB, the SDA will operate and control multiple-layer satellite operations for Tranche 1 (T1) of the National Defense Space Architecture.

Another Department of Defense Agency, the Test Resource Management Center (TRMC), is setting up operations on Grand Sky. Here, TRMC will convert Global Hawk aircraft to aid in hypersonic missile testing. The Range Hawk program will utilize 24 Global Hawk aircraft to conduct hypersonic weapons testing, and other future weapons development globally from Grand Sky and GFAFB.

This success and progress could not have been possible without the total dedication of the community, the relentless support of our CODELL, the Governor and of course, all of you. Moreover, we are focused on creating synergies and opportunities for all North Dakota military installations including the Fargo Air National Guard and Minot AFB. The Fargo Guard has capabilities that can augment the active-duty missions at Grand Forks and guardsmen are already being deployed to support security forces at Minot AFB. The Air Force is increasingly relying on National Guard and Reserves to augment end strength and optimize the "Total Force". The ability of the Fargo Guard to support additional UAS missions and possible tanker or bomber



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missions in the future is critical when Air Force decision makers look at where to bed down these missions.

In fiscal year (FY) 2021 military organizations employed 14,092 people and created about 3,843 indirect jobs in North Dakota. Annual payroll for military employees is approximately \$767.1 million and indirect salaries are approximately \$202.8 million. The military also has direct expenses for construction, services, materials, equipment, and supplies of \$188.2 million. Total military economic impact in North Dakota for FY 2021 was estimated at \$1.16 billion (*Figures are from the North Dakota Military FY21 Economic Impact Analysis report prepared by NDNG*).

North Dakota has always understood the importance of supporting those who serve and has supported the communities of Minot, Grand Forks, and Fargo in past legislative sessions. The mission has always been and will continue to be to maintain our military excellence and increase our competitive advantage for the North Dakota National Guard while maintaining missions for Minot AFB and Grand Forks AFB.

The communities of Minot, Grand Forks, and Fargo have raised local private and public funds and continue to support military efforts in each community. However, after two sessions without funding and additional challenges facing each community, there is a need to restore community military funding with enhanced investments to prepare North Dakota for modernization of ND's military installations and to further ensure the strategic and adaptive competitiveness of military bases in North Dakota.



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The communities of Minot, Fargo, and Grand Forks are committed to working diligently together and alongside the State of ND to ensure that we continue diversifying our state's economy through economic diversification projects such as Grand Sky and the Sentinel Program, and by recruiting and supporting our citizen soldiers and active-duty service members.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Grand Forks Community.

Respectfully,

Tom Ford  
Director of Administration