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NORTHWEST FLORIDA DEFENSE COALITION EMBARKS ON WASHINGTON DC

(Okaloosa County, Fla.) May 20, 2010 – Over 50 community, business and government leaders from Okaloosa, Bay, Walton, Santa Rosa and Escambia Counties joined forces under the umbrella of the Northwest Florida Defense Coalition recently for the organization's annual Washington DC Fly-in. The visit, hosted by northwest Florida Congressmen Jeff Miller and Alan Boyd, marked the 5th consecutive year the five-county group has traveled together to the nation's Capital to press local and national Congressional and Pentagon leaders for support of the nine military installations located between Pensacola and Panama City.

According to a 2007 study conducted by the UWF Haas Center for the Florida Defense Alliance, the Regional Economic Impact of defense spending in NWFL exceeds sixteen billion dollars per year and accounts for over 200,000 jobs throughout the area averaging \$78,000 in salary.

Prior to the creation of the Northwest Florida Defense Coalition, each county military support organization would travel separately to Washington and meet with government and military leaders, frequently overlapping on the calendars and sometimes carrying separate, disconnected messages. Five years ago, Representative Miller urged the groups, including the Okaloosa County Economic Development Council's Defense Support Initiative (DSI), to combine forces and travel together. By working together on issues of common interest across the five counties, the Coalition has enjoyed greater clout and access and is better able to present a regional message that emphasizes the military's regional impact and addresses issues of mutual concern such as preservation of the Eglin Gulf Range, regional airspace, transportation and energy.

Much of this year's discussion centered around the status of the F-35 at Eglin AFB and the F-22 at Tyndall AFB, with the group pushing for additional information regarding production and basing decisions and timelines. In a very timely fashion, the NWFL group also carried a unified position opposing expanded oil drilling in the Gulf. The organizations have held this position for years, and now had an unfortunate, but very real example of how disaster can disrupt the Gulf and, potentially, the military missions conducted on, under and over the Gulf.

Participating along with Representatives Miller and Boyd were Florida Senators Nelson and Lemieux and other members of Congress from Florida, Alabama, and Tennessee. Military leaders included the Deputy Principal Executive Officer for the F-35, the Assistant Secretary of Air Force Acquisition, the Director of the Test Resource Management Center in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology & Logistics), and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Air Force for Installations.

Attendees also heard from a panel comprised of the Military Legislative Aides for Senators Nelson and Lemieux and Representatives Miller and Boyd. A longer looking forecast of future DOD budgets and possible future BRACs was offered by the General Counsel of the national Association of Defense Communities.

Each county group also conducted several separate targeted visits with members of Congress and the Pentagon as well as other federal agencies to address county or base specific matters. A Congressional Reception for approximately 75 DC and local officials, sponsored by InDyne, Inc., was held in the U.S. Capital Visitor Center. Additional sponsors for the various events also included BAE Systems and JACOBS Technology.

Members of the Northwest Florida Defense Coalition include the Okaloosa DSI, the Bay County Defense Alliance, Walton County and TEAM Santa Rosa Military Affairs Committees and the Military Affairs Department of the Pensacola Area Chamber of Commerce.

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