

2005 BRAC COMMISSION REGIONAL HEARING

AFTERNOON SESSION

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 2005

1:30 PM

106 DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, D.C.

SUBJECT: EAST COAST MASTER JET BASE/NAVAL
AIR STATION OCEANA

COMMISSIONERS PRESIDING:

ANTHONY PRINCIPI, CHAIRMAN;

JAMES BILBRAY;

PHILIP COYLE;

ADMIRIAL HAROLD GEHMAN, U.S. NAVY (RET.);

JAMES HANSEN;

GENERAL JAMES HILL, U.S. ARMY (RET.);

GENERAL LLOYD NEWTON, U.S. AIR FORCE (RET.);

BRIGADIER GENERAL SUE TURNER, U.S. AIR FORCE (RET.);

SAMUEL SKINNER

CHAired BY:

ANTHONY PRINCIPI

WITNESSES:

GOVERNOR JEB BUSH (R-FL);

CAPTAIN JOHN LEENHOUTS, UNITED STATES NAVY (RET.);

JOHN CRAIG, FORMER F-18 HORNET PILOT;

ADMIRAL STAN ARTHUR, UNITED STATES NAVY (RET.);

ADMIRAL ROBERT NATTER, UNITED STATES NAVY (RET.);

JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA MAYOR JOHN PEYTON (R)

SENATOR BILL NELSON (D-FL);

SENATOR MEL MARTINEZ (R-FL);

REPRESENTATIVE ANDER CRENSHAW (R-FL);

REPRESENTATIVE CLIFF STEARNS (R-FL);

GOVERNOR MARK WARNER (D-VA);

STEVE MONDUL, DIRECTOR OF SECURITY AND EMERGENCY SERVICES,

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION;

VIRGINIA BEACH MAYOR MEYERA OBERNDORF (D);

DELEGATE TERRY SUIT (R-VA);

REPRESENTATIVE THELMA DRAKE (R-VA);

DCN 11517

CAPTAIN GRANFIELD, UNITED STATES NAVY (RET.);

SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN (R-VA)

CERTIFIED

MR. PRINCIPI: (In progress) -- hearing of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission. This afternoon the commission will hear sworn testimony that will assist us in reaching a decision on an East Coast master jet base for the Navy. The commission is mandated to consider whether the Department of Defense substantially deviated from the statutory BRAC selection criteria and the force structure plan in failing to recommend closure or realignment of an installation.

On July 19, 2005, the commission voted in accordance with the process established by law to consider whether failure to recommend closure of NAS Oceana and move East Coast naval aviation to another base constitutes such a substantial deviation.

There are eight statutory selection criteria. However, the DOD and this commission are required to give the most weight to the four criteria measuring military value.

There are few military values higher than the safety and proficiency of the men and women who accept the responsibilities and the risks of service in our armed forces. Naval aviators landing high performance aircraft on a carrier deck should be able to practice that maneuver realistically before they face the unforgiving environment of a career at sea. If conditions at a

naval air station compromise the quality of training operations, then continued operation at that base compromises military values. Testimony in prior commission hearings confirms the existence of serious encroachment issues compromising the military value of training and operations at NAS Oceana. These issues are of critical importance in assessing the impact of this BRAC round on operational readiness and training.

However, I must make it very clear that the commission, collectively and individually, has not reached a decision. The commission's goal is to ensure our Navy provides Atlantic Fleet naval aviators with a location and condition for training, whether at NAS Oceana or at another location like those they will face when they fly and fight while deployed.

The commission must explore every possible option to ensure the best possible opportunities and environment for naval aviation operations and training, and sometimes compromises can be mitigated. This hearing will contribute to the commission's assessment of the options and costs of moving the installation or leaving it as is and trying to mitigate the problems.

We are directed to the maximum extent feasible to base our decisions on certified data and sworn testimony. Today we will hear sworn testimony from Governor Bush and representatives of the Florida delegation, as well as the Virginia delegation, later this afternoon, on possible alternatives that we should explore. That

testimony will become a part of the body of evidence considered by the commission on August 24. Our deliberations and decisions on that day will be based on force structure and military value and other selection criteria. No other factors will be considered.

At this time, I ask our witnesses to stand for the administration of the oath required by the Base Closure and Realignment Statute. The oath will be administered by Rumu Sarkar, the commission's designated federal officer.

MS. SARKAR: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

(The witnesses were sworn.)

MS. SARKAR: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. PRINCIPI: Thank you. Well, again, welcome, Governor and members of the delegation. We have allotted one hour for this, your testimony. I'd very much appreciate it if you could adhere to that time limit, as we need to get on with other business. Thank you.

You may proceed, sir.

GOV. BUSH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and we will try to also make sure that there's 20 minutes of questions and answers time as well. We appreciate the chance to make our presentation about Cecil Field. We believe the case for Cecil Field is a compelling one, both from the business perspective, as well as from the military value perspective.

I also appreciate the fact that you all are committed patriots. You volunteered somehow for being on the BRAC commission. I appreciate that a lot. It's a lot of hard work, and I appreciate the fact that this process, which is intended to take politics out of a very difficult decision-making process is the right one for our country, and I appreciate your service to our country.

With respect to the business case, I want to make five very quick points. One, the state of Florida and the city of Jacksonville's prepared to provide a clear base. That would be a base of clean title, to the Department of Defense, 17,668 acres with all the capital improvements. There have been \$133 million of additional capital improvements since 1999 when Cecil Field was closed.

The property, as valued by the city of Jacksonville, is \$1.66 billion. In addition to that, the state and the city is prepared to spend up to \$200 million to cancel all of the leases and relocate every lease that is on the base and, in the interim, the Navy would have the opportunity to do all of its construction in preparation of reopening Cecil Field.

Secondly, we are accelerating a \$130 million road project that would connect the front gate of Cecil Field directly to I-10 to the north. That is already in our work plan, and it'll be accelerated to be completed by 2009.

Third, the Florida Housing Corporation is committed to, and has already allocated, \$500 million in tax-exempt mortgage revenue bond proceeds for low-interest mortgage loans for affordable rental housing to support Cecil Field, and I intend to seek \$100 million of support in a special session this fall for additional incentives so as to assure that there is a robust public-private venture for housing, should Cecil Field be reopened.

Fourth, encroachment protection is something that the mayor and I have been working on long before the BRAC process -- and you'll have a discussion about that -- but we have a long history of protecting of our natural environment. The largest land purchasing programs in the United States are in Florida. Three hundred million dollars a year over the last 15 years have been allocated for this.

We have committed to making sure that the properties inside the areas, the noise buffer areas, will continue to be part of our strategic approach to purchase these environmentally sensitive lands.

In addition to that, we will prioritize these spendings. They're already in our prioritized ecosystem strategy of purchases, and we will continue to make sure that those purchases occur on a timely basis, as they have in the past.

And then finally, we are confident that we can meet the deadline that you would impose on us. We believe that we could

get this done within the six-year time frame required by the BRAC process.

I am now pleased to introduce to you Captain John Leenhouts, who is United States retired pilot, to continue our presentation.

CAPT. LEENHOUTS: Thank you very much, Governor. Commissioners, if you would please allow me to stand, and I'll give a presentation from the charted area over there.

First of all, it's very important for you all to understand who I am so that my credibility will be established. I know who you are, and so it's clear in your minds, I'm a retired 27-year veteran of the United States Navy. I was a commodore of the strike fighter wing for the last three and a half years that I was in the Navy. I have flown over 6,000 tactical jet hours, encompassing A-7 Corsairs, F-14 Tomcats, and lastly the F/A-18 Hornet. Of those, about 100 hours were flown in combat in Desert Storm. Additionally, I have extensive carrier landing experience and hold the record today for the most carrier landings in the history of the United States, with over 1,645 off of 16 different carriers.

So with that as my background, what I would like to impart to you is my perspective as a naval aviator in looking at what it's like to fly out of Oceana, which I did for over four years, and have flown out of there since 1975, and in the last two years of my Navy career, I did fly out of there exclusively.

If you'll look to my left, this chart on my left indicates a city map, Rand McNally, of Virginia Beach. Imbedded within that great population, the largest city in Virginia, is NAS Oceana. If you look to my right, you will see that Jacksonville, Florida, is set close to the coast as well, but to the west of it, in the wide open spaces, is what used to be Naval Air Station Cecil, now Cecil Field Commerce Center, as well as Outlying Field Whitehouse.

The circles that you are looking at indicate the five-mile range of the typical air traffic control zone in which airplanes operate in. Around those air fields, as we well know in Oceana, is an extensive amount of encroachment. The charts in front of me here, numbers three and four, will show you the difference -- not in the AICUZ -- because the AICUZ, as important as it is, which is the noise zone we equate to the 65-decibel level range, that at Oceana we have in excess of 145,000 people living in that, the real crutch (sic) of the matter is the accident potential zones.

At Cecil Field right now you have less than 10,000 people in the AICUZ 65-dB line, but when you get to the accident potential zones, you've got over 3,600 people living where the airplanes fly and operate right around NAS Oceana. At Cecil Field, you have zero. No one lives in the accident potential zones. No one. Additionally, in the APZs, you have schools and churches and commercial buildings around NAS Oceana. There are none of those in the APZs around NAS -- what would have been NAS Cecil Field.

