Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY BIRD

September 30th, 2005

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Refinery Bill Moves Ahead Despite Protests by Democrats

Oil Daily
30 September, 2005

Gaining rapid support and momentum from two hurricanes, but weathering a storm of criticism from Democrats, a House of Representatives panel approved by voice vote legislation that seeks to increase US refining capacity by rolling back key air pollution rules, expediting permits and designating new refinery sites.

The legislation was cobbled together and passed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee in less than a month, prompting accusations from Democrats that it was being rammed through without adequate debate.

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Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY BIRD

October 3, 2005

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When BRAC Comes Calling
Governing Magazine
William Fulton
October 2005

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Nothing is more political or emotional than base closures. But in the end, how much does it really matter?

My local military base is going to take a hit. Ten years ago, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission reversed itself and spared the two installations that make up Naval Base Ventura County here in Southern California. This time around, we weren't so lucky: BRAC is moving 2,000 of our 16,000 jobs to Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake--from the coast to the high desert some 200 miles away.

For the moment, we are grateful that we still have most of our jobs and that BRAC did not also move another 1,000 jobs to China Lake, as we had feared. Still playing defense, our local BRAC committee continues to assert that in both weapons testing and construction battalions, we do the job well here--cheaper and better than it can be done anywhere else.

Similar scenarios are being played out all across the country because of the latest set of BRAC decisions. And it's nothing new. We've spent almost half a century--since President Kennedy came into office in 1961--closing and reorganizing all the bases we opened during World War II. Yet winning or losing still stirs up intense emotions, not unlike the emotions we all witnessed last July when London won the 2012 Olympics over Paris.

Even the satirical Web site Brokennews.com got into the BRAC act, reporting that the secretary of defense was going to consolidate all U.S. military bases into a "megabase" in the desert Southwest that would become the 51st state under the name of "Rumsfeldia." (When a reporter pointed out that the site was actually in Mexico, Brokennews.com reported, the secretary supposedly replied, "Yeah, so?")

In other words, nothing is more political or emotional than base closures. But in the end, how much does it really matter?

Since the first BRAC round in 1988, we now have almost 20 years of experience in assessing the impact. There has been a lot of research done. And the conclusions are pretty clear: The impact of a base closure isn't nearly as severe as everybody thinks. And it's a lot less severe in a suburban area than in a rural one.

Most politicians would probably resist these conclusions, but they make sense. The modern American economy is a pretty fluid thing. Individual businesses and business sectors ebb and flow constantly. The closure or cutback of a large military base is going to cause temporary job losses, but it also leaves behind a cadre of skilled civilian workers--and, possibly, some attractive facilities besides--that local economic development experts and business leaders will know how to exploit. If talent is the most important raw material these days, then a military base makes for terrific mining.

Suburban areas, in particular, are aswim with a large talent pool that is constantly circling around a vast group of businesses and economic opportunities. The whole point of living in, say, an inner suburb of Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Seattle or Washington, D.C., is to use the vast regional job pool as an employment safety net. One job goes away, another one pops up, especially for talented folks on the higher end of the economic ladder.

And California's experience in the 1990s suggests that the most precious asset unleashed by base closures is perhaps the scarcest one of all: land. The state suffered dozens of base closures during that time, but most closures freed up large chunks of real estate strategically located in expensive and land-poor older suburbs. The sudden availability of that land has been critical to the state's ongoing success. There would be no California State University, Monterey Bay, for example, if there were still a Fort Ord.

Rural areas are another matter, of course. The presence of a military base in a rural town creates a kind of "factory town" effect. There are few other options, so almost everybody works at the base where employment is steady, pay is good and income flows into the town from the outside. And because land is abundant in rural areas, putting Department of Defense property

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on the market probably makes things worse rather than better--the opposite of suburban locations.

This is not an argument to close all the suburban bases and keep all the rural bases open. Despite the politics and the emotion and the lobbying, we must never forget that the purpose of a military base is not to keep a local economy afloat but to help defend the country. Economic development practitioners aren't dummies, which is why, during the BRAC era, they have increasingly tailored their arguments toward this goal--Base X helps secure the peace because of location, talented workforce, sunk cost, efficiency and so on. This is a neat trick. But the neatest trick is to find civilian markets for the skills, products and services your local base has created--before BRAC ever comes around.

Steer displaced workers to new jobs

Managing Today's Federal Employees
October 1, 2005

Opportunities are available to those who seize them

The latest round of Defense Department base realignments and closures could displace thousands of federal employees and managers. But reductions in force, downsizings and transfers are nothing new and certainly not limited to the DOD.

As affected DOD managers gear up for BRAC implementation, there are resources available to help them and their employees find new jobs within the department and within the federal government. Many of these same resources can help other managers and federal workers facing similar circumstances.

Mike Mahoney, manager of the staffing group in the Office of Personnel Management's Center for Talent and Capacity Policy, said managers facing a RIF, downsizing or removal action have three primary resources - the human resources office, the agency's human capital officer, and the OPM Web site. HR is management's primary resource and is generally involved with helping supervisors figure out the various rules and placement options for the affected staff members. The human capital officer and the OPM Web site can provide additional information to answer any questions a manager might have.

Local priorities

The federal government has four major programs to aid displaced civil servants - the Reemployment Priority List, the OPM Interagency Placement Program, the Career Transition Assistance Plan, and the Interagency Career Transition Assistance Plan. In general, these programs require federal agencies to consider displaced federal workers for jobs before outside applicants.

The RPL and CTAP focus on reemployment within the employee's agency, while the OPM IPP and ICTAP cover employees seeking reemployment in other agencies. Each program has its own rules but is available to all qualified employees.

Pam Galemore, an OPM HR specialist, said the programs apply to most federal employees who are downsized, but they do not guarantee reemployment. Rather, the programs are akin to veterans' preference - they move qualified applicants to the top of the selection list. So if a displaced employee applies for a job he's not qualified for, the placement programs won't help him land the position.

In addition, if a displaced employee and veteran are vying for the same job, the agency has the right to choose the veteran instead of the displaced worker, she said.

An employee's willingness to relocate to another part of the country can also improve his chances of finding a new job, but it could cut off his priority placement privileges.

According to Galemore, only employees who stay within their commuting area receive priority placement privileges. Employees who apply for positions in other parts of the country do not necessarily have this benefit - even with their

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own agency. While agencies can extend those rights to displaced civil servants, it is not required.

However, Galemore and Mahoney agreed that an employee increases his chances of finding a new job the more flexible he is about relocating - simply because the employee will have far more positions to choose from.

While qualified employees have a right to utilize the priority placement programs, agencies do have some control over the process. DOD, for example, maintains its own Priority Placement Program to help employees find work within the department. Employees who sign up for the program are given priority privileges for jobs within their commuting area, as well as at other DOD facilities if positions are not available locally.

Mahoney said other agencies provide training and career services to help affected employees find new work within their organization or outside of government altogether.

Being proactive is key

A DOD spokeswoman declined to comment on the proposed base closings until a final decision is made, but noted that the department has set up a Web site to keep its federal workers informed about the BRAC process and provide resources to those who become displaced.

One of the DOD's helpful hints for employees is to be proactive in their job searches. While the placement lists help, employees should take it upon themselves to seek and apply for positions within federal government, state and local governments and the private sector.

So whether the separation is caused by a base closing or a RIF, managers can help their employees and themselves by becoming familiar with the priority placement programs. In the end, it's up to the individual to take advantage of programs.

Local News Articles

Future of submarine base reason to celebrate

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Groton, CT)
October 3, 2005

Calling it a "national treasure" supporters of the U.S. Naval Submarine Base on Sunday celebrated their efforts that ultimately removed the base from the Pentagon's closure list and saved thousands of jobs.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell was among the dignitaries at the rally held at the Nautilus Memorial just outside the sprawling base. She helped spearhead the months-long campaign that persuaded the Base Closure and Realignment Commission to keep the base open.

"This is truly a day of celebration," Rell said. "We had a pretty good team to make good things happen for southeastern Connecticut."

The bipartisan contingent that went to bat for the submarine base included the governor, commissioners of nine state agencies, members of Congress and local leaders. The base also drew the endorsement of former President Jimmy Carter, who served on submarines in Groton during his time in the Navy. His backing drew criticism from some in his home state of Georgia where many of the Groton submarines and jobs would have been relocated.

Commissioners voted in August to remove the base from the closure list saying it didn't make sense to close down a facility where sailors are trained alongside employees of the nearby Electric Boat shipyard, which builds the submarines. The closure would have affected nearly 8,600 Connecticut jobs. A similar effort in 1993 headed off another BRAC recommendation to remove submarines from Groton.

"This is a very special moment but we are not going to rest on our laurels," said U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn. "This should be preserved like a national treasure and a national asset so the Navy should look at other uses."

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U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-Conn., and Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., also addressed the crowd of about 120 people. The patriotism on the bright early fall day was punctuated by music from the Fitch High School band.

President Bush on Sept. 15 endorsed the commission's recommendations that closed 22 major military bases and reconfigured 33 others. The report will become final in 45 days unless Congress acts to reject it in full. In previous rounds, lawmakers never have rejected reports, meaning communities probably have little hope of a reprieve for their bases.

"I am so proud that this is now and always will be the submarine capital of the world," Simmons said. "We do well when we work in a bipartisan fashion. We are almost always successful."

20,000 more Md. jobs forecast;
Civilian workers in base realignment will challenge resources
The Baltimore Sun (Baltimore, MD)
Phillip McGowan
October 1, 2005

The national military realignment will attract at least 20,000 private jobs to Maryland on top of the more than 6,000 government positions already estimated, state officials said yesterday.

Such an influx of jobs will demand an unprecedented upgrade of infrastructure that will cost several billion dollars, they said.

Including public and private workers and their families, Maryland Planning Secretary Audrey E. Scott said, during the next six years 60,000 people could settle in Central Maryland, much of which is already grappling with issues of growth.

Leaders representing Maryland at every level said the state faces its most difficult challenge in recent history to build new schools and houses, upgrade roads and extend mass transit to accommodate the growth, while maintaining the quality of life for those who are already here.

"People who are coming to this area want to know three things: Where is my child going to school? Where will we live? How will I get to work?" said Harford County Executive David R. Craig, a Republican.

Many of the transportation dollars will be expected to come from the federal government, but state and local officials are preparing to bear the increased burden of paying for new schools and police and fire protection.

The realignment will occur over the next two to six years - time that officials said they will use to develop comprehensive plans and a precise price tag.

"We need to get funding to everyone who needs it," said Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski, a Democrat.

At a meeting in Crownsville of representatives of the state's military installations, attended by Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., his Cabinet and some of the state's congressional delegation and county leaders, officials also spoke of the need to expand the capacity of the state's colleges and universities to train future generations of high-tech workers.

The two epicenters of expansion are Fort Meade and Aberdeen Proving Ground. Fort Meade is expected to get about 5,300 government jobs; APG, about 2,200.

But only in recent weeks have state and military officials begun to fully grasp the number of private workers likely to follow.

At APG, because of the likely expansion of weapons research and testing, officials put the overall number of private and government workers at close to 20,000.

"That's nearly double [the population] of what comes onto the post today," said Col. John T. Wright, APG commander.

At Fort Meade, where intelligence operations are expanding around the headquarters of the National Security Agency, military officials put

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the number of government and private workers at close to 15,000.

The job gains related to the base realignment and closure process - known as BRAC - are independent of other additions at APG, Fort Meade and other military installations.

For example, the NSA is hiring 7,500 workers through 2009 to expand its counterterrorism operations. Many of those hires are expected to be placed at Fort Meade.

Aris Melissaratos, secretary of the Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development, said that as many as three privately employed workers could be hired for every new NSA employee to support surveillance operations at the spy agency.

The proposed realignment of jobs to Maryland seems assured, as a federal commission largely kept intact the Pentagon recommendations affecting the state when it sent the national realignment package to President Bush Sept. 8. He approved it, and Congress has until the end of October to vote on it.

The state repeatedly pointed to its pool of educated workers - among the deepest in the nation - and the space to accommodate those jobs and the related influx of private contract workers as reasons Maryland was the right place to fortify military operations.

"You make promises and make people believe you will be the best host for guests from other states; maybe you over-promise, but then you deliver," Melissaratos said.

Some of the heavy lifting is already being performed.

At Fort Meade, Army officials are fine-tuning a three-decade master plan to accommodate nearly 5,300 jobs coming there, mostly in defense and information technology. That plan calls for using two golf courses at the center of the 5,400-acre post to house federal agencies that require greater security.

Officials there said the 400-acre open space could handle at least 20,000 workers.

Proposals also call for expanding mass transit. The state revealed this summer that it was developing plans to extend the Washington-area Metro's Green Line to Fort Meade and on to Baltimore-Washington International Airport, a project that could take two decades to finish and cost more than $2 billion.

As part of a $286 billion multi-year transportation bill that Congress passed this summer, about $12.5 million was set aside to upgrade Route 175 from the Baltimore-Washington Parkway to Route 170.

At Aberdeen, officials are expecting the biggest expansion to the Army installation since World War II. To handle the arrival of at least 10,000 private workers, representatives for Harford, Cecil and Baltimore counties have created a joint marketing effort to accommodate defense contractors in each of those areas.

Harford officials said the influx will demand a better road system on Interstate 95 and U.S. 40, along with increased bus and rail service.

Wagoner citizens discuss uses for armory
Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (Muskogee, OK)
Chris Pryor
October 1, 2005

WAGONER - When the Oklahoma National Guard turns the lights out for the last time at a Wagoner armory, chances are good that the 67-year-old building will fall into the hands of local residents.

At a meeting Wednesday night, residents and officials discussed what should be done with the building when the Guard moves out under a base realignment plan.

Some recommended moving the Wagoner city offices into the building. Others thought a senior citizens group could make the best use of it.

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But above all, the building, which through age has become part of Wagoner, will not be torn down, said Gary Corey, 51.

"I think it'd be good for them to keep it around," he said. "Somebody can use it. ... Pass it down, it looks really well built."

Under the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure plan, Guard armories across the state are going to close, combine their forces with the reserve forces, and create seven armed services centers in Oklahoma, said Rep. Wade Rousselot, D-Okay.

When the armory closes, law permits local government to take control of it, he said. The City of Wagoner and Wagoner County are discussing which entity should assume care, he said.

The armory was built by the Works Progress Administration in 1938, Rousselot said, and about 50 National Guard engineers use the building intermittently.

"They want the community to have the choice of what to do with the armory," Rousselot said. "In some fashion, it will be used by the community."

The plans for the armory are in initial stages because the Guard may continue to use the building until 2011 until the implementation of the BRAC plan, said Wagoner City Superintendent Larry Morgan said.

"There's a lot of opportunity and a lot of options and really a great deal of discussion before anything's decided," he said. "It could be as long as five years (before the base closes)."

Ruth Ross, who said she has lived in Wagoner all 81 years she's been alive, is happy to know the building will be saved.

"Every building gets old," she said. "It's part of Wagoner."

Wake-up call for region's bases
The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)
October 1, 2005

Whatever happens to Oceana Naval Air Station, this won't be the last time another state comes sniffing around after Virginia's military installations.

Florida, should it win Oceana's jets, will soon return for one or two carriers that call Norfolk home, lobbying in Washington, at the Pentagon, in Tallahassee.

If Virginia learns anything from this year's Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission, it should be that it must protect itself from the predations of better-prepared states.

Florida clearly treated the prospect of snatching Oceana's jets as an economic opportunity of the first order, while Virginia seemed both aghast and surprised by the prospect. Worse, it was caught napping and was forced to play defense.

That must change.

The military and federal government represent an enormous part of the Hampton Roads economy. More important, these people are neighbors, friends and family -- they are our community.

And Hampton Roads institutions take that for granted. Politicians may constantly talk about their support for the military, but no organization has begun the sort of concerted regional effort necessary to protect the thousands of federal jobs all across Hampton Roads. To protect the jobs of our neighbors, friends and family.

That same institutional incoherence on Oceana also harms Hampton Roads' ability to react to changing political and economic realities, and to attract transportation dollars from Washington, or Homeland Security grants, or money to protect our ports.

The area has entities that can help coordinate the uncoordinated efforts across the region and the state. The Hampton Roads Partnership -- an

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organization made up of political, business, labor and education leaders -- already advocates a regional approach to regional problems. And this is nothing if not a regional problem that will require a regional solution.

There may be other organizations that could take the lead. But time is of the essence. Hampton Roads was rolled by Florida because it wasn't prepared, because it was complacent. Forty-eight other states noticed that.

Communities aren't shy about asking for what they need and what they want. They can't be. Instead, they lobby and campaign and cajole. They educate and enlighten. They work.

With the Navy fleet shrinking and the priority given to joint operations, the competition for shrinking defense dollars will only increase. Making the case for Hampton Roads should be easy. But somebody's got to actually do it.

Who crowded whom around Oceana?
The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)
Jon W. Glass and David Gulliver
October 1, 2005

VIRGINIA BEACH -- An analysis of city property records confirms what many residents and city officials have long argued: Hundreds of homes in the highest-risk areas around Oceana Naval Air Station were built before it became an air base and before Navy flight patterns exposed some neighborhoods to potential jet crashes.

The findings, critics said, raise questions about the fairness of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission's ultimatum that the city and state must condemn and buy homes and businesses in Accident Potential Zone 1 around Oceana, or lose the base's jets.

A new city report also shows that more than 3,400 houses, apartments, duplexes and mobile homes lie in APZ-1 - nearly twice as many as the 1,800 the city initially estimated.

It could cost the city about $400 million to buy those homes, according to the city assessor.

The Virginian-Pilot's analysis of city records contradicts the BRAC panel's finding that most of the development raising safety concerns around Oceana was approved by the city over the Navy's objections.

Instead, critics say, it appears that the Navy's evolving missions at Oceana have encroached on many existing homes - not the other way around.

While the City Council has a history of ignoring Navy concerns, dating to the mid-1970s, most of that development was approved in high-noise zones, not in accident-potential zones.

"It was not quite the way it was represented by the BRAC Commission," Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf said this week.

She said the BRAC demand that Virginia Beach condemn and clear out existing homes "was from left field. It was like a comet falling out of the sky and hitting us dead center."

The Virginian-Pilot analyzed the age of houses in APZ-1 using city real-estate assessment records and a city report that lists every address of residential property in the zone.

The city report, given to the City Council before Tuesday's meeting, showed a little more than 3,400 dwellings in the zone . It appears that the difference between that figure and the city's original estimate is the addition of 1,907 multi family units in about 15 complexes, most of them rental units, including part of the 448-unit Latitudes complex.

Besides the apartments, the new count includes 1,117 single-family homes and town houses, 336 duplex units and 48 mobile homes.

If Virginia Beach accepts the BRAC panel's ultimatum, the city would have to eliminate part of its affordable-housing stock, the analysis shows. The list of homes in APZ-1 included at least some of the buildings at Atlantis Apartments and Friendship Village.

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Many home owners in APZ-1 said they were drawn to the neighborhoods because of moderate prices. They said they couldn't find something comparable in Virginia Beach if they are forced out by the city.

"Right now, there just isn't enough available housing to take care of the need that would be created," said John Wade, a real estate agent who owns a single-family home assessed at $240,000 in Cheltenham Square, one of the highest-priced neighborhoods in APZ-1.

The city report did not examine the number of businesses that could be affected by the BRAC ruling. Some commercial uses in the accident-potential zone are compatible with the Navy's mission at Oceana, including some industrial and manufacturing companies , said City Planner Tom Pauls.

City Assessor Jerry Banagan estimated that the residential property listed in the report could carry a price tag of $397 million, but that estimate is not official.

"I'd say that's still a conservative figure, and that if we had to buy it, it would cost more," Banagan said.

The Pilot's analysis of the city's list of homes examined 1,284 single-family and duplex properties.

Based on city property records, 405 of those houses - or nearly one-third - were built by 1952, the year that the Navy officially designated Oceana as an air station. It was an airfield during World War II.

More than half of the homes in APZ-1 - 737 of them - have been in place since 1975, when the Navy first began developing noise and accident-potential zones around Oceana to discourage incompatible development, city planners said.

Many of those houses, in such 1970s-era neighborhoods as Cheltenham Square and Nottingham Estates, were not in an accident-potential zone when built. They wound up in APZ-1 in 1998, after the Navy brought in F/A-18 Hornet fighter jets and revised the maps.

Samuel G. Reid, president of the Oceana Gardens Coalition Civic League, says an original subdivision plat of Oceana Gardens shows that residential lots were laid out in 1906.

"Most of the families were here first and go back generations," said Reid, who lives in a turn-of-the-century house there.

Residents, he said, have tolerated living next to Oceana as the base has brought in louder, high-powered jets, and they have accepted the risks of living in an accident-potential zone. Reid said home owners are suffering from the City Council's push to get the Hornets and, now, the Super Hornets based at Oceana.

"The City Council begged the Navy to get the Hornets up here, and nobody ever gave a thought to what was going to happen to the accident-potential and noise areas," Reid said. "Now, their decision has come back to haunt the homeowners."

Hal Levenson, a spokesman for Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise, said it makes no difference if houses were built before Oceana.

"Our position is that the BRAC, for reasons they felt were good and sufficient for safety and to facilitate training, felt that APZ-1 should be cleared of residential units," Levenson said. "No matter when those houses were built, they are in the areas most likely to experience a serious accident."

Levenson, however, said the group is opposed to condemning and buying homes in the zone, saying the cost would be "staggering."

The BRAC panel demanded that the city and state spend at least $15 million a year to buy out property owners.

Levenson said Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise favors moving the Hornets to the Navy's former Cecil Field near Jacksonville, Fla., then

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bringing a military use to Oceana that is less disruptive.

Oberndorf said the City Council is still weighing options, including a potential lawsuit, and has not decided whether to accept or reject the BRAC ultimatum.

Last week, the city hired a consultant to analyze the cost of losing Oceana's fighter jets versus the costs of complying with BRAC. The council approved spending as much as $50,000 on the study and set a deadline of Nov. 1 to complete it.

"We're trying to find a humane way to respond to the wishes of people who have lived in these neighborhoods for many, many years," Oberndorf said.

The findings

Nearly a third of the houses that the city would have to condemn and buy in order to comply with BRAC's demands predate Oceana's designation as an air station in 1952.

More than half of the homes in the highest risk zone were in place by 1975, when city planners said the Navy first began developing noise and accident-potential zones.The research

The Virginian-Pilot analyzed Virginia Beach property records and found that they contradict the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission's finding that most of the development raising safety concerns around Oceana was approved by the city over the Navy's objections.New data

More than 3,400 houses, town houses, apartments and mobile homes lie in the highest risk zone - nearly twice as many as the 1,800 the city initially estimated.

It could cost the city about $400 million to buy those homes.

Scientist aims to save Hanscom lab
Seeks takeover of research facility
Boston Globe (Boston, MA)
Davis Bushnell
October 2, 2005

A scientist at the Hanscom Air Force Base's research laboratory is making an 11th-hour appeal to keep the laboratory complex open through a takeover by an outside organization.

The Bedford air base itself was spared from the Defense Department's 2005 list of installations nationwide to be closed in the next two to six years. But plans to move the Air Force Research Laboratory's two operations and 233 researchers to bases in Ohio and New Mexico were included on the final base closure and realignment list approved by President Bush on Sept. 15 and sent to Congress.

The closings and other changes take effect early next month, unless Congress rejects the entire list, which observers consider unlikely.

Spearheading the effort to preserve the Hanscom research laboratory under a new operator is Edward E. Altshuler, a physicist at the laboratory and a member of the National Federation of Federal Employees, Local 1384.

"Many people know that Hanscom Air Force Base will remain open, but not a lot of people know that the research laboratory will be closed, resulting in many job losses," Altshuler said in a telephone interview.

Altshuler estimates, based on his conversations with lab employees, that only about 10 percent of the 233 researchers are willing to relocate to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio or Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico. Also, the operations of 20 to 30 laboratory contractors in the area would be hurt, he asserted.

The laboratory specializes in two areas of research: electromagnetic, or radar, applications, and geophysics, or the study of space, said Altshuler, who is doing antenna research.

In a Sept. 19 memorandum sent to Governor Mitt Romney and members of the state's congressional delegation, Altshuler outlined three proposals for keeping the research

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laboratory complex intact. Laboratory operations, he suggested, could be turned over to the University of Massachusetts; to a tri-service team of Air Force, Army, and Navy researchers; or to a federal laboratory.

Altshuler said he hasn't contacted UMass, military, or federal laboratory officials about his proposals.

So far, there has been limited response to Altshuler's recommendations.

Speaking for the Romney administration, Joseph Donovan of the Executive Office of Economic Development said, "We're reserving any opinion until we've had time to review the [Altshuler] proposals."

US Representative Martin Meehan, Democrat of Lowell, has written to the secretary of the Air Force and the chancellor of UMass-Lowell, asking them "to look into the feasibility" of Altshuler's proposals, said Matt Vogel, the congressman's chief spokesman.

In a written statement, Senator Edward M. Kennedy said, "The loss of jobs [at the research laboratory] is troubling, but I'm optimistic that the Department of Defense recognizes the high caliber of work done at Hanscom, and that the base will continue to grow, creating new jobs for the men and women" of the Air Force Research Laboratory.

That's also the thinking of the spokesman for the Massachusetts Defense Technology Initiative, a lobbying group co-chaired by Kennedy and Romney.

The breakup of the Hanscom lab is "an unfortunate development of a fortunate overall outcome -- the saving of the air base," said Cort C. Boulanger.

In the meantime, however, there could be "a break in the continuity of research" at the Hanscom laboratory, said Jack Carpenter, founder and chief executive of Visidyne Corp. The small Burlington company conducts research on remote sensing of the atmosphere for the Air Force lab.

Fort Meade's expansion to bring boom, but at a price

Annapolis Capital (Annapolis, MD)
By DAVID E. LEIVA, Staff Writer
The expansion of Fort George G. Meade would pump an additional $1 billion a year into Anne Arundel County's economy, but would force the county and state to pay for costly upgrades to roads and schools, officials said yesterday.

Bringing the predicted 5,291 jobs to the west county Army post would require nearly $400 million in new construction over five years but the spending on salaries and contracts will raise the financial impact of Fort Meade to more than $5 billion annually by 2010, Col. Kenneth O. McCreedy, the post's installation commander, told a state military council made up of mostly civilians.

But Col. McCreedy, who took over at Fort Meade three months ago, tempered his remarks.

"This rapid expansion will not be without its challenges for our region," he said. "I am concerned with two areas: transportation and education."

It was the first meeting of the Maryland Military Installation Strategic Planning Council since the Base Realignment and Closure Commission and President Bush agreed on a plan that would make Maryland one of the key winners nationwide as other bases are closed. Congress has until mid-November to accept or reject the plan.

Local, state and federal officials, along with military alliances throughout Maryland, gathered in Crownsville yesterday to congratulate each other - and press state officials to fund the onslaught of an estimated 60,000 people expected to descend on Maryland over the next decade.

"The infrastructure demands, we can't do alone," County Executive

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Jane S. Owens said. "Local government is here to help, but we need your help."

Infrastructure costs would include $12.5 million to widen Route 175, a bus terminal to serve the post, an expansion of MARC service and extension of Metro lines north to bring NASA Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Fort Meade and Baltimore-Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport into the system.

"These are important endeavors with huge potential impact," said Col. McCreedy, who believes most workers will commute for the first couple of years before deciding whether to relocate.

In addition, he said, the educational needs would be paramount.

"I would like to change the largely undeserved reputation that Meade High School has (as) an inferior educational institution," he said. "In my view, it is imperative to send a clear message to those workers contemplating a move that the county is committed to lifting its schools to the front ranks; and Meade High School will be viewed as a barometer of that commitment."

The colonel said the school system's plan to expand the International Baccalaureate program to the high school and establishing a math and science magnet school would serve as "even more powerful commitment consistent with the highly skilled nature of the workforce at Fort Meade."<0x00A0>

Only 12 percent of the jobs headed to the Army post in Odenton will be military, with the remainder made up of high-tech, high-paying jobs for people who will need housing.

"All told, this BRAC represents a potentially massive influx of over 15,000 people into the Baltimore-Washington corridor," Col. McCreedy said.

Ms. Owens told state officials that 4,000 new homes are in the pipeline, but "that's not going to be enough."

Fort Meade would get the bulk of the new jobs. Aberdeen Proving Ground expects about 2,200 and Andrews Air Force Base is slated to gain 400.

U.S. Sen. Barbara Mikulski said the state was successful because it had a comprehensive plan at all levels and stuck with it.

"We won it on mission and merit," Ms. Mikulski, D-Maryland, said. "We won it on how we were going to serve the United States of America, how we were going to make it a safer country."

Two years ago, Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. appointed members of the council. It was charged with developing a coordinated plan to keep military installations open as the state prepared for BRAC.

"I am very confident we will be able to deal with success," he said.

Air National Guard units, including Springfield's, upset at being curtailed by realignment commission

Springfield News Sun (Springfield, OH)
October 1, 2005

If you take the air out of the Ohio Air National Guard, what's left?

That's one of several questions many are pondering as Congress mulls over the Base Realignment and Closure recommendations.

In Ohio, half the flying missions are scheduled to leave — Springfield and Mansfield are marked for realignment.

Toledo is set to receive some additional jets and jobs and Columbus to get Springfield's firefighters.

The recommendations become law unless Congress rejects them, probably before mid-November.

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The Air National Guard was targeted in this BRAC round, Retired Brig. Gen. Fred Larson said.

"Most Air National Guard units that we know of here in Ohio and other states are based on flying," Larson said. "People do that because they like to be associated with a flying mission."

Larson, who worked on saving the Mansfield unit, pointed to a historic tension between the Guard and the Air Force. Others noted that the Air Force wants to move into new jets quickly.

"The way the Air Guard and Air Reserve was handled was a travesty," U.S. Rep. David Hobson. R-Springfield, said.

That also leaves many wondering what the role of the Air Guard in Ohio will be, let alone what the guardsmen will be doing.

"Right now we have more questions than we have answers," said Col. Richard Lohnes, commander of the Springfield base.

Gut punch

The Mansfield 179th Airlift Wing remained confident of its value before the initial Pentagon recommendations were released in May. A closure recommendation came as a surprise.

"It was literally a gut punch," said Maj. Philip Brown of the 179th.

Springfield also was marked for realignment, with its pilot school, fighter jets and 291 direct and 149 indirect jobs leaving. Its firefighters will head to Columbus.

Wright-Patterson Air Force Base lost some missions, but overall gained or retained 5,900 direct jobs from the commission's recommendations.

The 180th Fighter Wing also is set to expand and receive more jets, but the fate of other units left Toledo base commander Col. Tom Schart with mixed feelings.

"We have very reserved feelings because our brethren in the state didn't come out too well," he said.

Then BRAC commissioners made Mansfield an "enclave," meaning the planes will leave but most jobs will remain in search of a new mission.

U.S. Rep. Michael Oxley, whose district includes the Mansfield base, said he was disappointed the commission didn't totally reverse the closure recommendation.

"It's also an opportunity," said Oxley, who wants to see a private shipping business at the airport.

The decision leaves the base wondering what it will do and with how many people, especially if it doesn't receive a flying mission.

"There are too many variables at this point," Brown said.

Springfield remains in a similar position.

The 178th Fighter Wing has pursued an intelligence mission, which Lohnes has said could grow to about 600 jobs. But he hasn't received authorization yet.

The National Guard Bureau and Air Force leaders are seeking missions for both bases.

The 5,000 Air guardsmen in Ohio will have jobs, even if the missions are different, said Maj. Gen. Harry Feucht, assistant Ohio adjutant general for air.

"We are the No. 1 priority for the Air National Guard to maintain our strength," he said.

Missions have evolved over time, Feucht said, and the Guard will continue to change.

The planes now have different capabilities than when he joined.

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"We will adapt," Feucht said. "We will be relevant in the new missions."

In the meantime, some worry the uncertainty might affect morale and hinder the strong recruitment and retention in Ohio.

The Springfield guardsmen have carried on their mission, Lohnes said, but they are concerned.

"When you stand around and talk and have a cup of coffee around the base, they are concerned and the questions are flowing," he said.

Some guardsmen might retire, Lohnes said, or transfer units rather than follow the planes.

"My gut feeling is in several years the Air Force will regret that tremendous loss of experience, not just pilots but the maintenance folks," Lohnes said.

Springfield and Mansfield have seen a few transfer requests, but not many.

The state office hasn't seen many either. They are communicating about the search for missions to stave off people leaving or transferring as the date the planes fly out nears.

"We're concerned about it," Feucht said.

Fungible?

The Pentagon's recommendation referred to Mansfield's troops as "fungible," or interchangeable.

That's not true, Brown said.

"A lot of these people have their own businesses in town, have their families in town," he said.

Lohnes agreed, saying many people join where they and their families live and work.

"We're community based," Lohnes said.

The decisions also have hurt the trust and cooperation between the Air Force and guard units, Hobson said.

"That is seriously damaged," he said.

The Ohio Air National Guard was one of the most effected by BRAC, Feucht said.

Hobson believes they were targeted and that the Pentagon didn't look at the bases' missions or cost effectiveness.

"What they looked at was, 'Gee, Ohio has too many flying units,' " Hobson said.

The BRAC commissioners tried to spread out the flying units across the states.

Going after the Air Guard was easier than hitting the active duty, Hobson said, and the Air Force is pushing its new fighter jets.

"They are so desperate to get into the F-22 that they just sold out the Air Guard and the reserves to get into this very, very expensive airplane," he said.

The Department of Defense stands by the BRAC process and believes it's fair, spokesman Glenn Flood said.

He couldn't comment further until Congress wraps everything up.

"The BRAC process has worked and is still working," Flood said.

Hobson has said he probably will vote against the BRAC list. Oxley said he "almost certainly" will vote no.

Oxley is pleased the BRAC commissioners voted to overturn a plan to close a Lima tank plant.

But the procedures bothered him, including the lack of input from the Guard.

"It was almost a sneak attack on the Guard by the Air Force," he said. "It left a lot of noses out of joint, including mine."

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Historically, the Air Force has wanted to merge with the Air Guard, Larson said, and take their planes.

"There has been periodic and continuous efforts on the part of the Air Force to get rid of the Air National Guard," he said.

Different questions, answers

The Ohio bases spent about two years preparing for BRAC, answering questionnaires the Air Force dubbed data calls.

The forms asked for base details, ranging from the length of runways to the size of hangars.

Some questions didn't fit Air Guard operations. Rather the criteria lent itself to how the Air Force works, Feucht said.

He pointed to a question about room for expansion.

Air Guard units often lease the land they need from municipal airports. Cities often have open room available for future expansion.

The data calls asked how much land they had in hand. That didn't allow for answers explaining the additional lease options.

Yet Air Force bases often own land, Feucht said, and have several unused acres on their property.

When ranked, many bases in the bottom third were National Guard, Feucht said, and many in the top 50 were Air Force.

"The questions were just different and they had to be answered different because we are different from the Air Force," Feucht said.

Response

The Ohio units often work together. The Mansfield wing can transport Toledo's pilots, some of whom have trained in Springfield.

The Toledo pilots in Springfield like that they don't have to uproot their families for training and can commute home on the weekends.

A few Springfield pilots aided Toledo on their mission abroad.

"They are a great resource," Schart said.

Toledo and Columbus, the 121st Refueling Wing, also work together.

At one time, the Toledo, Springfield and Columbus units also flew the same type of planes and worked on the same mission.

"There's a symbiosis that goes on," Brown said.

With that, he said the airlift planes need to remain in Ohio.

The governor or adjutant general won't have the ability to transport troops or supplies in the case of an emergencies, Brown said, without asking other states or the Air Force.

The Mansfield wing has flown nearly 40 missions in response to Hurricane Katrina.

Without the airlift, that rapid response could be jeopardized.

"If you don't get those supplies down to those people as quickly as we did, it's ultimately life and death," Brown said.

The firefighters from Springfield also are slated to head to Rickenbacker Air National Guard Base in Columbus.

That hurts their ability to respond to major fires in Springfield, Hobson said, as they recently did with a tanker fire on Interstate 70.

"Our ability to respond to disasters around the country rapidly and in Ohio will be lessened," he said.

The Ohio Guard is one of the best organizations around the world, Hobson said.

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"Our challenge with this BRAC is to figure out how we're able to maintain that wonderful level of performance in the past," he said. "It's a shame because a lot of it is a waste of money."

Ellsworth could get 700 jobs
Military financial services operation needs a home
Sioux Falls Argus Leader (Sioux Falls, SD)
October 1, 2005

RAPID CITY - Air Force officials are looking at Ellsworth Air Force Base as a possible location for a military financial-services operation that could mean the addition of more than 700 jobs, Rep. Stephanie Herseth said.

Although no decisions can be made until the Base Realignment and Closure Commission officially completes its work, a visit this week to the base by Air Force officials lays the groundwork, Herseth said.

Last month, the commission rejected the Defense Department's recommendation to close Ellsworth and move its 29 B-1B Lancer bombers to Dyess Air Force Base in Texas.

After the decision, members of South Dakota's congressional delegation and the Ellsworth Task Force said it was important to find ways to keep the base off future base-closing lists.

On Wednesday, Herseth met with Gen. Michael Moseley, the Air Force chief of staff, to discuss the possibility of locating the financial operation at Ellsworth and to lobby for additional missions, such as unmanned aerial vehicles.

"The entire congressional delegation agrees that it's not too early to talk about new missions," Herseth said. It is time "to build on the momentum" of the BRAC decision, she said.

Bruce Rampelberg, chairman of the Ellsworth Task Force, said the operation "would be a great opportunity for South Dakota."

Ellsworth is one of five sites being considered for the operation. The others are:

- Buckley Annex at the former Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado.
- Kelly USA, an aviation and industrial center that previously was home to the Air Logistics Center at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas.
- Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico.
- Hill Air Force Base in Utah.

About 110,000 square feet is needed for the facility, and it eventually would accommodate 775 people, according to information provided by Herseth's office. It would be required to house 50 to 100 people by March 2007 and would be operational by October 2008.

The processing center would include new employees and would draw personnel from other bases. Plans still are preliminary, so it is not certain how many civilian jobs such an operation could bring to the state, Herseth said.

"I'm just very pleased we're able to get a survey done," she said. "General Moseley and his staff recognize the value of Ellsworth Air Force Base."

Herseth said South Dakota's track record with other financial institutions in the state makes it a good candidate.

"We've got a great work force that has a lot of experience in this area," she said.

"The best news is, regardless of what the site survey (for the financial management operation) concludes, Ellsworth is already at the forefront of General Moseley's mind."

Obama to oppose BRAC plan
Ed Tibbetts
Quad City Times (Quad City, IA)
October 1, 2005

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On Friday, U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., became the latest member of the Quad-City congressional delegation to say he opposes the recommendations of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, or BRAC.

Obama said he supports the goal of the base closing process. But in a statement, he said the commission's "haphazard process" and its decision to downsize the Rock Island Arsenal played a part in his decision.

"I cannot support the Commission's recommendations. I will oppose the recommendations if they come to a vote," the statement said.

Obama joins U.S. Sens. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, and Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, in saying they oppose the commission's report.

U.S. Rep. Jim Nussle, R-Iowa, is the only one of the delegation not to say how he would vote. U.S. Rep. Lane Evans, D-Ill., announced almost immediately after the decision that he would oppose the plan.

The commission voted to support Defense Department recommendations that would move three white-collar commands off the island, including the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, Tank-automotive and Armaments Command and the northwest regional office of the Installation Management Agency.

The panel voted to transfer some work to the Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center, as well as take some away. It also chose to move the headquarters of the 1st U.S. Army to Arsenal Island.

The net loss of jobs amounts to 1,060, according to the Quad-City Development Group.

President Bush sent the commission's report to Congress on Sept. 15. A measure to kill the plan in the House is expected to come up soon, possibly next week. If the House votes to kill the plan, it would go to the Senate, and the Quad-Cities' four senators sent a letter to the leadership Thursday urging a vote if that happens.

Most analysts believe the commission plan will survive. Congress never has rejected a commission's recommendations. Still, Harkin told reporters Thursday he isn't so sure the plan will sail through. "This thing could go down," he said, adding he has detected some disenchantment over the plan in the Senate.

If the BRAC plan does survive, Harkin said he will continue to try to reverse the Arsenal recommendations through his position on an Appropriations Committee that oversees defense spending. Many of the changes are expected to take several years to implement.

Opinions/ Editorials

Farewell, Fort Monroe

Newport News (Newport New, VA)
Nancy S. Petrine
October 1, 2005

In the article, "'You just salute and move on' from Fort Monroe," Aug. 25, Jim Peach certainly had it right when he said state and local politicians did not do enough to keep Fort Monroe open.

Even before Department of Defense recommendations were published, the politicos were speaking about the wonderful economic benefits that would derive from the development of Fort Monroe's attractive land. Anyone who thinks this is about saving money is delusional. A major office for Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and homes for no less than 12 general officers on the James River must be built at Fort Eustis. Nothing is as certain as death, taxes and the joint moneyed interests of politicians and developers.

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission took the public's attention away from Fort Monroe and generated interest in opposing the closing of Oceana Naval Air Station. However, the BRAC was certainly not going to say that Oceana was closed (although it did de facto

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close it) since it could not afford opposition from Sen. John Warner and Sen. George Allen. This, too, would scuttle the whole process.

Such is politics. The little man loses his business, a great and proud workforce and the fort is abandoned to developers. What Gen. Lee and the Confederacy could not accomplish, Warner and Mayor Ross Kearney have -- closed Fort Monroe.

Let's Hope This BRAC Process Is Never Used Again
Daily Press (Newport News, Virginia)
Rep. Randy Forbes
October 1, 2005 Saturday

In any realignment or closure process there are winners and losers. In the case of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Process, the 4th Congressional District of Virginia, which I represent, was a winner. In fact, my district fared quite well through the BRAC realignments, gaining almost 7,000 military positions and numerous other civilian support jobs. However, the process used was flawed.

This BRAC round was marketed to Congress and the American people with faulty and misleading estimates of savings. The Department of Defense originally claimed that the BRAC recommendations would save $47.8 billion over 20 years. These estimates were based, in part, on "savings" that were to be realized from personnel who would be eliminated due to bases being closed or units being realigned. However, the BRAC process does not eliminate personnel, only relocates personnel to other locations.

The actual savings from BRAC, based on the commission's recommendations, drop to $15.1 billion over 20 years. This is a considerably different figure than initially advertised and should cause some to think carefully before concluding that BRAC is a worthwhile endeavor. Many of us had argued this point when BRAC was first proposed. We are saddened that our fears were realized.

The savings issue becomes all the more important when considering how a wrong decision in BRAC could be all that more costly in the future. The BRAC process was accomplished before the Overseas Basing Commission Report and the Quadrennial Defense Review have been completed and fully digested by those experts who could make sound national security assessments and recommendations with such information.

This is exactly the reverse of the way the process should work. The Overseas Basing Commission Report and the QDR should inform the BRAC process, not the other way around. I fear that in the not-too-distant future that these reports may indicate that the BRAC process has made the wrong determinations with respect to some base closures and realignments recommended in this round of BRAC.

If this happens, it may be too late to change the BRAC recommendations and we may have to spend even more time and money to reestablish a base or capability that we thought was disposable in the BRAC analysis.

In addition, and perhaps most frustrating, the BRAC process, as I predicted at the outset, has been too political and the assessment standards applied unequally to some regions and installations but not to others.

Finally, I take exception to the basic premise of the Base Realignment and Closure process that allows nine non-elected officials to make major strategic and irrevocable decisions regarding our military infrastructure. These appointed officials should not be allowed to overturn the decisions made by our uniformed and civilian military leaders to whom we entrust our national security.

Why nine individuals, some of whom have no military experience, are a better judge of our military needs than our elected officials and thousands of career professionals in the Department of Defense makes no sense. We entrust the greatest fighting force the world has ever known to the hands of our military leaders

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every day and ask them to protect that force and use it to defend and protect our country.

I cannot support a process that then allows nine non-elected people who are politically appointed to tell those military leaders they are wrong and what they must do with their facilities.

The BRAC round completed in 2005 was untimely, overly political and marketed with misleading figures. This BRAC round, in retrospect, may cause us to make irrevocable mistakes when more thorough analyses such as the Overseas Basing Commission Report and the QDR are taken into account.

While it is tempting for a member of Congress who has gained much in the way of military personnel allocations through the BRAC process to ignore its faults, it is my hope for the nation that we will never use this process again in the future.

Forbes represents the 4th District, which includes Suffolk and part of Isle of Wight County, in Congress.

The Guard is not a political asset
Charleston Daily Mail (Charleston, WV)
September 30, 2005

It is wrong for Gov. Joe Manchin to put the 130th at Byrd's disposal

THE venerable Sen. Robert Byrd is running for re-election. He has a powerful arsenal of assets at his disposal as he seeks a ninth term in the U.S. Senate.

The 130th Airlift Wing based at Yeager Airport is not one of those assets.

The C-130s whose presence Sen. Byrd is rightfully credited with helping to preserve in Charleston do not belong to the senator.

The West Virginia Air National Guard exists to serve West Virginians. It may not be turned into any politician's personal air force, and it may not be used as an asset in a political campaign.

Yet that is what the state's Democratic machine is doing. It is outlandishly wrong, and revealingly so.

As the Daily Mail's Kris Wise reported, Maj. Gen. Allen Tackett, the state's adjutant general, put a C-130 at Byrd's disposal in June, flying the senator from a base closure briefing in Charleston to Wheeling.

Byrd was keynote speaker at the dedication of the new Wheeling Federal Building. He also had a fund-raising dinner in Wheeling that evening.

Byrd's campaign manager, Ned Rose, also took that flight, paid for at the taxpayers' expense.

This is way out of line. It's a misuse of the Guard. But there is every indication it will continue.

Tackett, in uniform, joined Byrd on the platform when he announced his re-election campaign, and vowed publicly that he "will do anything necessary to support him" in next year's election.

Again, wrong. But it gets worse.

The senator also sent a taxpaid postcard to 270,000 residents in 10 counties of West Virginia where members of the 130th live and work.

The postcard features Tackett lauding Sen. Byrd for his role in saving the 130th from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Tackett said he did it to send a message to the thousands of National Guard members.

The adjutant general said he talked with Democratic Gov. Joe Manchin about the ramifications of taking an active role in Byrd's campaign. The governor apparently approved.

Tackett is out of line to use his power over the Guard members who report to him to support Byrd's campaign. The governor was out of line to approve it. Byrd was out of line to accept it.

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Democrats' use of the National Guard for political purposes sends powerful messages:.

The senator has been in office for so long that he has come to think of the state's assets as his own. The Democratic establishment, for its part, is willing to do anything to hold on to the power it exercises.

Those messages came through perhaps too clearly.

History lesson lost in BRAC closures
Asbury Park Press (Asbury Park, NJ)
Richard O'Shaughnessy
October 2, 2005

We still have not learned. On Dec. 7, 1941, we lost a major part of our navy at Pearl Harbor. One of our mistakes was that we had most of our eggs in one big basket. We said we learned and vowed never again to amass large portions of our armed forces in one place. Or did we?

Along comes the Base Realignment and Closure process, and once again we "consolidate" our protection in the name of efficiency and economy. Once again, we offer our potential enemy fewer and larger targets to aim at.

Anyone who thinks our enemies, and sadly some of our "friends," have not already targeted major military sites in this country, even if they do not yet have the ability to launch against them, is sorely mistaken. It is not unreasonable to assume that they are already entertaining changes inspired by the latest BRAC, even though final approval has not yet occurred.

It is still not too late for Congress to stop this insanity. Contact your senators and representatives. The Department of Defense has not been required to prove the savings they projected from previous BRACs. It's a safe bet that the Pentagon worries that it may be required to prove such savings were accomplished.

Remember the adage, "He who ignores history is bound to repeat it." We learned from Vietnam but are back in Iraq fighting under similar circumstances. It's a shame so many of our leaders don't read their history books.

If air base closes, it should become Maine's at no cost
Kennebec Journal (Kennebec, ME)
October 2, 2005

Talk about kicking a town and a state when they are down.

First, the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission votes in August to include Brunswick Naval Air Station on the list of military facilities recommended for closure.

Then, on Thursday, a Defense Department official visiting Brunswick says the federal government plans to sell the air station at fair-market value if it is closed.

He said federal, state and local agencies, as well as private businesses, could acquire parts of the 7,259-acre base, which includes two 8,000-foot runways, several buildings and plenty of open land.

The Navy has spent more than $100 million over the past four years on the facility, including building 126 housing units, a 500-bed barracks, a new control tower and a six-bay hangar, as well as resurfacing the runways and many other improvements.

Despite all of that, the plan to sell Brunswick Naval Air Station is absurd. It flies in the face of what the Department of Defense has done most often with military installations that have been taken out of service.

Instead of trying to turn a quick profit on the facility, the federal government should turn it over -- at no cost -- to the town of Brunswick or the state.

During his visit last week to Maine, even Wayne Arny, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy, said that many military installations have been turned over to states or local communities following earlier rounds of base closures.

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But that will not be the case this time, at least if federal officials have their way, according to Arny, who is responsible for the Navy's installations and facilities.

We think this is ridiculous. So does U.S. Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, who plans to introduce legislation that would remove the requirement that the Brunswick air station, the last active-duty airfield in New England, be sold.

A spokesman for Snowe said the Republican senator's proposal would give Brunswick or the state the option of taking ownership of the facility for free.

We applaud Snowe's efforts and hope that Republican Sen. Susan M. Collins and Reps. Thomas H. Allen, D-1st District, and Michael H. Michaud, D-2nd District, are also pressing to have the air station be made available at no cost.

Arny's announcement came as a surprise to many in Brunswick, Augusta and around the state, who expected that Maine would get the sprawling base for free if it closes -- likely to be between 2009 and 2011.

But now Arny has made clear that the Navy does not want to give it away. Instead, he said his goal is to have a buyer or buyers lined up by the time the base shuts down, presuming that happens.

"Why should we wait 10 or 15 years to transfer ownership of the base?" Arny said. "Our goal is when the last sailor leaves Brunswick, we'll be able to hand the keys over to the new owner."

We like the idea of handing over the keys. But those keys should be going to the host community or the state, as was done when the Defense Department closed Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, N.H., in 1991 and Loring Air Force Base in Limestone in 1994.

Much of the land at Pease and Loring has been -- or is being -- developed to create business and industrial parks that have attracted private employers, including some from the aviation industry.

The federal government should encourage the same sort of enterprise and job creation in Brunswick. But to do that, it would have to give -- not sell -- the air station to the town or the state.

It is not yet certain that Brunswick Naval Air Station will close. It becomes official if Congress does not overturn the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's recommendation by Oct. 30 -- 45 days after President Bush approved the list.

If Congress accepts the list, operations at Brunswick would cease. The state, meanwhile, would lose one of its largest employers (4,863 military and civilian personnel), which contributes more than $187 million to the annual economy -- including $115 million in salaries.

Those would be blows for Maine that would only be worsened if the federal government tries to make some quick money by putting the air base on the block.

Additional Notes

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