

## Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

# EARLY BIRD

August 20, 2005

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### *Department of Defense Releases*

**Hastert Joins Chorus Calling For Sub Base To Be Saved**

**U.S. House speaker one of highest-profile backers**

New London (CT) Day  
By Anthony Cronin

The speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives is calling on the federal base-closure commission to overturn a Pentagon plan to close the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, saying there are no real cost savings associated with its shutdown.

House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, a Republican from Illinois, also said that closing the submarine base would “eliminate a center of excellence for undersea warfare” in which

Congress has invested hundreds of millions of dollars over the past decade.

The letter, released Thursday, from Hastert to Anthony Principi, chairman of the federal Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, was welcomed by those fighting the proposed base shutdown.

U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, along with Gov. M. Jodi Rell and U.S. Sens. Christopher Dodd and Joseph Lieberman, said Hastert's support raises more questions about the Pentagon's financial analysis of the shutdown. Simmons said Hastert's letter, along with those already sent to BRAC commissioners from other high-ranking national and military officials with no direct interest in the base, "adds yet another important voice in the growing movement against closing Groton."

Hastert told Principi that one of the strongest arguments against the base shutdown is recent data that calls into question the Navy's claims of substantial costs savings if the base's fleet of fast-attack submarines and related commands were moved to naval bases in Kings Bay, Ga., and Norfolk, Va.

Connecticut officials fighting to keep the base open say the shutdown would cost the nation \$641 million over a 20-year timeframe, in stark contrast to Navy claims of savings of as much as \$1.6 billion. "As a fiscal conservative, I cannot support a base closing that does not provide taxpayer savings," Hastert told Principi in his two-page letter.

Sub base supporters also were buoyed on Thursday by a supplemental Pentagon report to the BRAC commission that admits that a "synergy" exists between the Electric Boat shipyard in Groton and the nearby submarine base.

The report, prepared by the Undersecretary of Defense's infrastructure steering group, said "the synergies between New London and Electric Boat are recognized; however, the overall cost

savings of the recommendations (to close the base) cannot be ignored."

The supplemental report also said that the "loss" of the synergy that has developed between the submarine builder and submarine base was considered in the Navy's analysis and was "deemed both manageable and acceptable given the projected savings."

The Pentagon report said the Groton base shutdown would provide \$1.58 billion in overall savings over the next 20 years. It says the Navy would still retain two fast-attack ports on the East Coast (Kings Bay and Norfolk) and says that even after closing Groton the Navy could accommodate more fast-attack submarines than the size of its current fleet.

John Markowicz, chairman of the local Subbase Realignment Coalition, said this latest Pentagon report to the BRAC commission is the first time the synergy argument has been acknowledged. Local base supporters, along with Rell and members of the state's congressional delegation, have criticized the Navy for proposing to close the Groton base and break up a shipbuilding relationship that has taken decades to build between EB and the nearby sub base.

Markowicz said the Navy also hasn't acknowledged what costs would be related to moving the sub base away from the shipyard, which local supporters say should be a key argument against closing the base. EB officials said earlier this week that the base closing could affect at least 1,500 employees who work in Groton on sub-related repair work. They have also said that the proximity of the base has resulted in overhead-related savings of about \$50 million on an annual basis.

Hastert's letter to the BRAC commission also said he has witnessed more than \$120 million in congressional funding earmarked for the Groton base since his election to the top post in 1999. "Our nation's taxpayers would be ill-served if these investments in our national security are wasted," he said.

"I firmly believe that including Naval Submarine Base New London in the 2005 BRAC round would weaken our homeland and national security while providing no savings to our nation's taxpayers," Hastert said. "I urge you to remove (the base) from the BRAC closure list," he said.

### National News Articles

#### **Base-closing foes focus on Congress as panel prepares list**

Congress Daily

By Megan Scully  
April 19, 2005

After a four-month flurry of coast-to-coast travel and in-depth study of military installations around the country, the Base Closure and Realignment Commission will make their final decisions next week during four days of lengthy deliberations.

The fate of nearly three dozen major military bases and thousands of jobs is on the line, as lawmakers and an army of hired guns mount a final campaign to reverse the Pentagon's recommended closures.

Letters supporting individual installations are pouring in from disparate advocates,

including House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., and former President Carter, who have written letters pressing the commission to save Connecticut's massive New London Submarine Base. Carter served in the Navy's submarine force.

Meanwhile, personal meetings with commissioners and staff are winding down, as consultants take to the phones and e-mail to make their final arguments.

But states will be shifting targets from the commission to Congress in the weeks to come. After the commission files its final report to the White House by Sept. 8, the president is

expected to approve the list and forward it to Congress, which has 45 days to pass a joint resolution to disapprove the recommendations in their entirety. Connecticut lawmakers said this week they see growing support among members to vote down the list. Others are more skeptical, pointing to minimal support for previous attempts to disapprove previous base-closure lists. Still, with all the money and time invested, the fight to save bases will continue through the fall.

"I doubt there's going to be any let-up," said Dan Else, a national defense specialist at Congressional Research Service.

Any hope of passing the joint resolution of disapproval could hinge on getting support from Senate Armed Services Chairman John Warner, R-Va., consultants and analysts said. Warner helped write the base-closure law and is a long-time advocate of paring the military's excess infrastructure, but he opposed the commission's decision last month to add the Master Jet Base at Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia to the list for consideration.

"He is the linchpin of this whole thing," said a BRAC consultant. "If he cries foul, with his credibility, people are going to say, 'I think there's something wrong here.'"

In the last several weeks, Warner has criticized the commission for not making public discussions between BRAC commissioners and Pentagon officials concerning Oceana. He also has argued that the independent panel overstepped its legal authority when it began to evaluate moving the jet base to Cecil Field in Florida. If he carries those arguments to the Senate floor, "potentially, there might be some traction," said Barry Rhoads, a lobbyist and base-closure consultant. "Obviously, he's a big dog."

Senators also still must consider an amendment to the defense authorization bill that would postpone base closures until most troops return from Iraq and the Pentagon completes a series of sweeping reviews under way. The amendment is

sponsored by Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., whose state stands to lose Ellsworth Air Force Base. Similar language failed this spring in the House, but Thune said earlier this month that its success depends on the composition of the list. "It seems we will have a higher level of intensity" than before the commission completed its work," Thune said. He added that he will continue to support the amendment, even if the commission opts to save Ellsworth because "the rationale ... makes sense," he said.

## **Base Closing Proposal Faces Final Inquiry**

By LIZ SIDOTI

The Associated Press

Saturday, August 20, 2005

The Pentagon is getting its last chance to persuade an independent commission not to change Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's sweeping proposal to close or downsize hundreds of U.S. military bases.

In a rare weekend hearing, top Defense Department officials were to testify Saturday before the nine-member panel charged with reviewing the proposal.

The panel holds a series of meetings next week to vote on whether to accept or reject each part of Rumsfeld's massive plan. He has proposed shutting down or at least reducing forces at 62 of the country's largest bases and hundreds of smaller military facilities to save money and streamline the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

At least some changes to the proposal are likely. Previous commissions \_ in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 \_ changed about 15 percent of what the Pentagon proposed, and analysts expect history to repeat itself this year.

Anthony Principi, the commission's chairman, has pledged not to "rubber-stamp" the proposal, and his panel has signaled that it's worried about several parts, all of which were expected to come up at Saturday's hearing.

Topping that list is the Air Force's restructuring of the Air National Guard. It would close or

downsize 30 facilities where Air Guard units are stationed and leave units with no planes to fly in many of those cases. Commissioners worry about the impact of the plan on homeland security.

The panel also has expressed concern that the recommendations will leave the Northeast unprotected. On the Pentagon's chopping block are two major New England bases \_ the submarine base at Groton, Conn., and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine. Forces at the Naval Air Station in Brunswick, Maine, would be drastically reduced.

In addition, panelists have questioned the Pentagon's claim that it will save \$48.8 billion over 20 years if the proposal is enacted. They point to a report by Congress' Government Accountability Office that found upfront costs will total \$24 billion and disputed the Pentagon's projected savings.

## **Defense Dept. Stands Firm**

Portsmouth Herald

August 20, 2005

The Department of Defense has sent a letter to the chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission reiterating the department's reasons for supporting the closure of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine.

The 92-page letter, sent to Anthony Principi Tuesday, outlines the department's realignment and closure recommendations for military facilities nationwide.

The letter states the Defense Department still strongly endorses shutting down the shipyard, and dismissed arguments the Navy doesn't have enough capacity to absorb the work done at the shipyard at other facilities.

"Excess capacity increases each year as workload requirement decreases throughout the closure period," the letter reads. "In (fiscal year 2009), aggregated excess capacity will be greater than 17 percent overall in three

remaining shipyards.”

The letter said any risks in closing the shipyard would be “manageable,” and that keeping the facility open “would obligate the department to significant future costs.”

Retired Navy Capt. William McDonough, a former Portsmouth Naval Shipyard commander who now heads the Save Our Shipyard group, said the letter’s reference to the shipyard appears to be a final-hour attempt to sway commissioners who may be thinking about keeping the shipyard open.

“They’re trying desperately to get in there with the last word,” McDonough said.

McDonough said he’s concerned that commissioners will put more stock in the Defense Department’s opinion than in arguments made by shipyard supporters because the Defense Department is the supposed expert.

The commission is scheduled to vote on the closure and realignment recommendations beginning Wednesday. McDonough said he expects a vote on the shipyard by the end of Thursday.

The commission will forward its final recommendations by Sept. 8 to President Bush, who has until Sept. 23 to accept or reject the recommendations in their entirety.

### Local News Articles

#### **Former President asks BRAC to save Groton sub base (Hartford Conn.)**

Associated Press

By Pat Eaton-Robb,

Georgia's most famous submariner opposes the Pentagon's plan to close the Navy's submarine base in Groton and move many of those subs to Kings Bay, Ga.

Former President Jimmy Carter is very familiar with the facility. He attended submarine school in Groton in 1948 and was later stationed

there in the early 1950s. Carter sent a letter this week to Anthony Principi, the chairman of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, urging the commission to keep the Connecticut base open.

"Kings Bay could certainly be expanded to accommodate a larger contingent of ships and personnel, and this region would welcome the additional jobs that may be transferred from Connecticut," Carter wrote. "However, I am concerned about the adverse economic impact on the New London area, the abandonment of a huge installation of facilities, and, less quantitatively, a loss of some of the proud submariners heritage of our historic association with service and training in New London."

Carter, along with former Sen. Sam Nunn, was instrumental in getting a **base** established at Kings Bay. He is the only U.S. president to have served in the submarine force. Carter joined the service in 1946 after graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy and served for seven years. The Navy named one of its three Seawolf-class submarines after him.

U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn., called the letter a very important development in the fight to save the base.

"As far as I know, it is entirely unprecedented in the 17 years of the BRAC process for a former commander in chief to write to save a particular military base from closure," Dodd said.

Carter's letter was dated Aug. 15, two days before U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert wrote to Principi expressing a similar sentiment.

Hastert wrote Wednesday that he believes that closing the base would weaken national security and save no money.

"As a fiscal conservative, I cannot support a base closing that does not provide taxpayer savings," wrote Hastert, R-Illinois.

Carter expressed many of the same concerns.

"I don't profess to speak for other active and retired submariners, but I believe that, overwhelmingly, the consensus would be that

transferring the submarine forces from New London would be militarily deleterious," he wrote.

The BRAC commission's staff, who have been reviewing the Pentagon's recommendations, were expected to brief the commissioners on Friday. The commission is slated to vote next week on whether to remove any bases from the closure list, which must be on the president's desk by Sept. 8.

Dodd said he believes there 50-50 chance the commission will reverse the Pentagon's recommendations.

"I hear information one way and then information the other," Dodd said. "The rumors are flying, but it would be I think wrong to draw any conclusions based on what I've heard."

#### **Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) Releases letter to BRAC**

The Washington Post-Metro In Brief  
The District

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D.C.) released a letter yesterday to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that said the Pentagon has failed to show how closing Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the District will save money or avoid weakening homeland security in the nation's capital.

The hospital is on a base-closing list that will be taken up by the commission starting Wednesday. Its final report is due to President Bush on Sept. 8.

"The gridlock that crippled the nation's capital on September 11th . . . is the best evidence of why the distance to emergency care would matter in case of an attack," Norton said. She cited a congressional audit report stating that the Defense Department has failed to justify claimed savings or account for the cost of replacement facilities.

"Given the high military value of Walter Reed and the increasing uncertainty of [Pentagon] cost

and savings figures, it would be risky at best to shutter this flagship facility in the absence of proven cost and savings," she argued in the letter. "The best course would be to retain Walter Reed . . . at its current location, and pursue more cost-effective, incremental renovations."

#### **Norton says hospital is critical to military and national security (Washington, D.C.)**

Associated Press

Derrill Holly

19 August 2005

Final deliberations are expected next week on the fate of dozens of military facilities now on the chopping block. And District of Columbia officials spent Friday raising fresh concerns about the possible closure of Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, D-D.C., warned it could cost lives if there is a mass casualty attack.

"The distance to emergency care would matter in case of an attack," Norton said. She cited Walter Reed's critical role as an asset available to the Defense Department's Northern Command, established three years ago for homeland defense and civil support missions.

"Moving the hospital would place a huge hole in the obligation the federal government has placed on the District of Columbia," Norton said. While the city's nighttime population is about 571,000, it swells to about 2 million during the day thanks to commuters and other visitors.

Norton - the district's nonvoting delegate the House of Representatives - has called on Base Closure and Realignment Commission chairman Anthony J. Principi to reexamine cost estimates for closing Walter Reed, and the potential negative effect on the region's security. D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams has raised similar concerns.

Norton cited the presence of 200,000 federal employees, the White House, the U.S. Capitol and federal government leaders in the 61 square mile city as reasons for maintaining the hospital

at its present location.

The BRAC recommendations call for relocating the facility's functions to a unit within the National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda, Md. While the site is just three miles north of Walter Reed, Norton and others contend the distance in an emergency could be critical.

"Bethesda adds 50 percent to the distance, on some of the most clogged highways in America," said Norton. She favors phased renovation of the 96 year-old facility.

The 260-bed hospital offers blast, burn, biochemical and radiation treatment and an undisclosed ability to expand its overall capacity. Federal guidelines suggest that an additional 1,000 beds could be needed in the region in the event of a mass casualty event.

"Even if you could replicate it overnight, it erodes our overall ability to respond," said Robert A. Malson, chief executive officer of the D.C. Hospital Association.

"It's an irreplaceable facility," said Dr. Jeffrey A. Elting, DCHA's medical director, a retired Army colonel.

### **Panel deluged by letters urging that Maine bases be saved (Portland, Maine)**

Portland Press Herald

Bart Jansen

August 19, 2005

Worried that his family would have to pick up stakes and move from its home in Berwick if his father loses his job at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, 6-year-old Kyle Kruse sought to take his concerns to the top.

Kyle scratched out a message to President Bush in crayon, complete with a drawing of a submarine to represent the vessels that are worked on at the Kittery yard.

"Save our shipyard," he wrote. "I don't want to move and live in a cardboard box."

Kyle's letter was among 180,000 that have been

sent to the Base Realignment and Closure commission as it prepares to vote on which of the bases targeted by the Defense Department will be closed and which will be spared.

The voting, which begins Wednesday, is being watched closely in Maine, where the fate of Portsmouth, Brunswick Naval Air Station and the Defense Finance Accounting Service office in Limestone hangs in the balance.

Robert McNally of Old Orchard Beach wrote one of the hundreds of letters that focused on the Maine bases. McNally detailed the cost savings from repairing submarines at Portsmouth, the extra cost of replacing Brunswick flights with those from Jacksonville Naval Air Station in Florida and the operational costs of the Limestone office.

"Clearly the Navy's case for realignment of NASB and closure of PNS and the consolidation of DFAS activities has not been validated," he wrote.

Katharine Ainsworth Semmes of Scarborough, the daughter, widow and mother of men who served in the military, questioned putting "all your eggs in one basket" by closing Portsmouth and Brunswick. She said the decisions would concentrate too many resources in Norfolk, Va., and leave New England without immediate air response to a threat.

Semmes said her father, Rear Adm. Walden Lee Ainsworth, served as chief of naval personnel during World War II. Her husband, Vice Adm. Benedict Joseph Semmes, held the same post during Vietnam. And her son, Dr. Benedict Joseph Semmes, also served in Vietnam.

"This is not economy, this endangers the country. It is shortsighted and foolhardy," Semmes wrote. "At a time of recruitment and enlistment problems, with an unpopular and divisive war with no honorable end in sight, think twice before you damage morale further and destroy our proud Navy institutions."

David Murphy of Lisbon Falls, a retired chief

petty officer who worked for 20 years at Brunswick, worried about how the community would cope with losing thousands of jobs and taxpaying residents.

"I pray that you will make the correct decision for the people of Maine, that it's a decision you can live with," Murphy wrote.

Kyle and his 9-year-old sister, Samantha, each wrote a letter. Their mother, Michelle Kruse, said Samantha was even able to hand a copy to the driver for one commissioner, retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Sue Turner, as she toured the shipyard.

Michelle Kruse said her family has been in Maine for nearly four years and would prefer not to move again. Although she has tried to reassure Kyle the family won't have to live in a box, the waiting has been difficult.

"I told him I'm sure that his dad would find another job - that we're not going to have to live in a box. He just looks at me and says we'll have to live in a box," Michelle Kruse said. "It's real scary."

### **Stevens: Galena closure likely**

Fairbanks Daily News - Miner  
Chris Talbott  
August 19, 2005

Sen. Ted Stevens predicted the Base Realignment and Closure Commission will vote to shut the Galena Forward Operating Location when it begins deliberations on the future of more than 60 major military bases around the country next week.

Galena's fate will be decided quickly once voting begins Wednesday. The additions made to the list last month by the commission are first on the schedule. Votes on Eielson Air Force Base and three other Alaska installations scheduled for closure or realignment won't be heard until later in the week.

"I hope (a Galena closure) leads to the conclusion to keep Eielson open, though I

predict they will enact some of (the Defense Department's) recommendations," Stevens said during a Thursday press conference in Fairbanks.

Galena's city manager agreed with Alaska's senior Republican senator when contacted Thursday night. Marvin Yoder has had a sinking feeling about Galena's chances since it was added to the closure list.

"For us, we kind of figured it was a real long shot, a real uphill battle from the time we heard the transcript of the July 19 hearing," Yoder said of the nine-member commission's unanimous vote to add Galena.

"Since then, the Department of Defense has sent a letter responding, saying they don't think the threat level is high enough to worry about and they don't see any security threat by closing Galena."

The U.S. Air Force spends about \$11 million a year operating and maintaining the Galena airstrip, a power plant and several buildings. The strip is used by F-15 fighter jets from Anchorage's Elmendorf Air Force Base for training and emergencies.

Yoder and other Galena officials believe the closure will devastate the economy of the Yukon River village of 700 that sits about 270 miles west of Fairbanks. Yoder has said as many as 100 jobs could vanish and the boarding and vocational schools' futures would be in doubt.

"We could lose a third of our jobs and if that happens, people are going to start leaving," Yoder said.

Stevens recently visited with three commissioners and phoned the other six to push the idea of removing Eielson from the list one last time. Department of Defense officials have proposed removing more than 2,800 military personnel from Eielson, which would likely cost the Fairbanks area thousands of jobs.

After next week's votes, which likely will run through Aug. 27, the commission has until Sept. 8 to forward the list to President Bush. He then has until Sept. 23 to approve or reject the entire list. If approved, Congress then has 45 session days to approve it.

While there has been a \$1.5 million effort to save Eielson, Galena has had a more meager campaign. Yoder and other city leaders testified before commissioners and lobbied the state and Fairbanks area leaders for help. And they've called an Aug. 25 meeting in Galena with the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce and have asked members of the Interior legislative delegation to attend.

"There are a lot of huge hurdles we have to cross if they close Galena," Yoder said.

Stevens said he agreed with the commission's decision to close Galena because reasonable cuts have to be made.

"It's a very serious question for us," Stevens said. "We have an enormous defense and we can't afford to keep around bases that aren't necessary for our current mission."

## **DOD takes final stab at shipyard**

(Portsmouth, New Hampshire)

Portsmouth Herald

By Emily Aronson

August 19, 2005

PORTSMOUTH - A week before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission votes on recommended military base closures, the Defense Department has issued a statement reiterating its reasons for supporting the closure of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

The 92-page letter, sent to BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony Principi on Tuesday, outlined arguments for each of the DOD's base realignment and closure recommendations.

Retired Navy Capt. William McDonough, a former commander of the Portsmouth Naval

Shipyard, said the section of the letter addressing the local shipyard appears to be a final-hour attempt to sway commissioners who are thinking about keeping the shipyard open.

"They're trying desperately to get in there with the last word," McDonough said Thursday. "They're trying to make sure the commissioner who is sitting there wrestling with the decision does not decide in our favor."

At issue, the DOD letter stated, is that "the commission is considering retention" of the shipyard "based on perceived Force Structure and capacity issues presented by congressional and community representatives."

"The Department of Defense strongly endorses the current recommendation to close Portsmouth Naval Shipyard," the letter concluded.

The department dismissed arguments made by congressional and community leaders that the Navy does not have excess capacity and that work currently done at Portsmouth cannot be absorbed by the remaining shipyards.

"Excess capacity increases each year as workload requirement decreases throughout the closure period," the department argued. "In (fiscal year 2009), aggregated excess capacity will be greater than 17 percent overall in three remaining shipyards."

The letter said any risks involved with closing the shipyard would be "manageable," and that keeping the facility open "would obligate the department to significant future costs."

Although the letter acknowledged that the commission is considering keeping the yard open, McDonough said he still feels "very apprehensive" about next week's hearings in Washington, D.C.

McDonough said he's worried commissioners will put more stock in the Defense Department's opinion than in the arguments made by shipyard supporters because the DOD is the supposed expert.

The commission hearings are scheduled for Aug. 24-26. McDonough said he expects the commission to vote by Aug. 25 on whether to remove Portsmouth from the base closure list. The commission's final recommendations will be sent to President Bush on Sept. 8

## **SEN. WARNER CHALLENGES BRAC ACTIONS**

Daily Press (Newport News, Virginia)  
By DAVID LERMAN  
August 19, 2005

The lawmaker says the commission doesn't have the authority to create a site to replace NAS Oceana.

Virginia Sen. John W. Warner waged another attack on the federal military base-closure commission Thursday, saying the panel has no legal authority to create a military installation as a replacement for Naval Air Station Oceana.

Laying the groundwork for a possible lawsuit, Warner said the commission had no power to take up a proposal by Florida officials to reopen Cecil Field near Jacksonville as a substitute for the Virginia Beach master jet base, which employs nearly 12,000 military and civilian workers.

The mission of the independent commission, Warner said, is to recommend closing or restructuring military bases that are no longer needed. But creating bases was never part of the panel's charter, he said.

If Oceana were closed and Cecil Field reopened, Warner said, "It would certainly have to be challenged.

"The commission was never, by law, given the mission to determine where on the East Coast a new jet base should be established."

The veiled legal threat issued by Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a principal author of the base-closing law, comes as a bold challenge to the Defense Base Realignment and Closure

Commission.

It voted last month to consider closing Oceana, despite Pentagon wishes to keep it open.

The commission, appointed by President Bush with input from Congress, thinks that it has the power to consider reopening Cecil Field as part of its "realignment" mission, spokesman Robert McCreary said.

In a letter to Warner earlier this week, commission Chairman Anthony J. Principi defended his decision to explore the Cecil Field proposal.

Florida officials will present their plan at a commission hearing Saturday in Washington, and Virginia officials will get a chance to defend Oceana.

"I respectfully submit that the commission is in full compliance with the law," Principi wrote to Warner.

"Further, the commission would be remiss in performance of its statutory duties if it did not thoroughly investigate what was formerly NAS Cecil Field as a potential East Coast receiving location in the event that NAS Oceana is closed or realigned."

Commission members have raised concerns about Oceana's future as a naval air **base** because of encroaching suburban development that critics say hinders flight training.

Navy leaders have said that they would ideally like a new master jet base somewhere along the East Coast but that Oceana remained the only viable alternative for the foreseeable future.

In a letter to Principi issued Thursday, Warner said he could find no legal provision or precedent from previous base-closure rounds that would permit the commission to establish a new military installation.

Cecil Field was closed in 1999, but Florida Gov. Jeb Bush has proposed reopening it, noting that \$133 million has been spent in recent years to

improve the airfield.

In a counteroffensive, the Virginia Beach City Council took steps this week to lessen the encroachment problem at Oceana. It bought a condominium site on Laskin Road for \$15 million and accelerated plans for more land purchases.

Warner's letter also reiterates Navy testimony that Oceana remains the military's preferred base for its naval warplanes.

Rebuilding Cecil Field would cost \$1.64 billion and would yield no savings to the Navy for more than 100 years, Warner said, citing Navy testimony.

Although Florida officials have pledged further improvements, Warner said, "State and local governments cannot guarantee that such promises will be delivered in the future, in which case the Navy will face a dilemma with no easy solution."

The fate of Oceana could be decided as early as Wednesday, when the commission begins voting on its recommendations.

A final list of bases will be submitted to President Bush by Sept. 8.

If he approves the list, it automatically becomes law -- unless Congress votes to reject the entire proposal. \*

#### THE BACKGROUND

\* Last month, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission proposed closing Oceana, despite Pentagon opposition.

\* The head of the commission suggested reopening Cecil Field in Florida.

\* Sen. John Warner, R-Va., disputed the group's authority to propose a new base.

#### **Va., Fla. to make closing arguments on Oceana**

The Virginian-Pilot  
Louise Hansen  
August 19, 2005

Officials from Virginia and Florida will make their best and probably last pitch Saturday afternoon to claim the Navy's sole East Coast master jet base.

Experts from both states are to testify in one-hour hearings before the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission beginning at 1:30 p.m. The hearings in Washington, D.C., will be televised live on C-Span.

A decision on whether the base will remain in Virginia Beach or will be relocated to Florida is expected a few days later, during the commission's final deliberations, scheduled for Aug. 24-27 in Arlington .

The commission placed Oceana Naval Air Station on the list for potential closure because it was concerned about suburban development around the installation. The BRAC Commission's list of closures is due to President Bush on Sept. 8.

Florida officials are seeking to reestablish Cecil Field outside of Jacksonville as a jet base. Military planners decided to close the installation in 1993, feeling that the base was under-used. Most of the strikefighters from Cecil Field were moved to Oceana.

Military operations at Cecil Field ended in 1999, and the property has since been used as a commerce park, mostly for airline-related industries. Florida Gov. Jeb Bush has offered to return the base to the military and improve roads and infrastructure.

U.S. Sen. John Warner, R-V a., said commissioners need to focus on the Navy's stated desire to keep Oceana open.

Commission chairman Anthony J. Principi has acknowledged that the decisions will be based

solely on sworn and certified testimony, which will be presented at Saturday's hearing.

"I think that's the key," Warner said in an interview Thursday.

Kevin Hall, a spokesman for Gov. Mark R. Warner, said the state is preparing a bipartisan effort to convince commissioners Oceana is the best place for a fighter jet base.

Gov. Warner cut short a European vacation to prepare and appear at the hearing, Hall said. U.S. Sen. George Allen and Rep. Thelma Drake, R-Virginia Beach, and Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf are also expected to attend the hearing.

The state will make a multi media presentation on the benefits of the Virginia Beach base, as well as rebuttal arguments to relocate the base, Hall said.

**Case for Oceana Move to Proceed; Florida can Heard On How It Would Meet Needs, J. Warner Told** (Virginia)  
Richmond Times Dispatch  
Paul Bradley  
19 August 19, 2005

The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission will go ahead with its planned public hearing allowing Florida to make a case for moving the operations of Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach to a Florida base.

In a letter to U.S. Sen. John W. Warner, R-Va., commission Chairman Anthony Principi brushed aside Warner's concerns that the hearing, set for tomorrow in Washington, violates the 1990 law establishing the military base-closing panel.

"The commission must explore every possible option to ensure the best possible opportunities and environment for naval aviation operations and training," Principi wrote. "Our hearing will contribute to that process."

Warner said last week that the hearing, by pitting one locality against another in a bidding

war, is "inconsistent with the straightforward assessment of the military value of Oceana."

Florida has offered to reopen Cecil Field outside Jacksonville, which was closed in 1999, as a replacement for Oceana, the Navy's East Coast Master Jet Base and a major economic engine in Hampton Roads. The base is home to about 230 fighter planes and more than 11,000 personnel.

Oceana was not on the list of bases that the Pentagon recommended for closure or realignment, released in May. But the panel took the unusual step of adding it last month, claiming residential development was encroaching on pilots' ability to train.

In a letter sent to Principi yesterday, Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, reiterated his stand that Oceana is the best place for the Navy to train its fighter pilots. Moreover, he said that the commission, should it move the program to Florida, would be taking an unprecedented step.

"I cannot find any provision in law, or any precedent in previous BRAC rounds, for the commission to use the BRAC process to establish a new military installation," Warner wrote. He questioned whether Florida officials could make good on their promise to spend \$300 million to reopen Cecil.

"Officials get elected and unelected," Warner said in a telephone interview. "You can't do business this way. When it comes to the national defense, you have to have absolute certainty."

**Utahns urge second look for Air Guard tankers** (Utah)  
Salt Lake Tribune  
August 19, 2005

Members of Utah's congressional delegation are urging the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to review a Pentagon recommendation to reduce the number of tankers in the Utah Air National Guard squadron, saying it was based on false data.

The Defense Department has recommended downsizing the Air National Guard squadron from 10 tankers to eight, while most guard squadrons are slated to grow from 10 to 12 aircraft.

In a letter to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, Sens. Orrin Hatch and Bob Bennett, and Rep. Rob Bishop said they believe the downsizing was based on an incorrect assumption that Utah doesn't have enough ramp space or facilities for 12 aircraft.

"This is simply not supported by fact. There is more than enough ramp space and room for 12 aircraft" at the Utah Air National Guard, they wrote.

The members of Congress asked the BRAC Commission to fix the mistake before the commissioners send their final recommendations, which must be sent to President Bush by Sept. 8.

### **Opinions/ Editorials**

#### **At week's end**

Capsules of commentary on recent events  
The Daily Press  
August 20, 2005

Did you hear about the new name for the Base Closure and Realignment Commission? Best known as BRAC, the federal commission will soon take on the moniker BRACO - the Base Closure, Realignment and Opening Commission.

Now, there's no truth to the previous sentence, but maybe there ought to be.

As Sen. John Warner notes: "The commission was never, by law, given the mission to determine where on the East Coast a new jet base should be established."

Yet the commission seems to have taken an activist role in getting Naval Air Station Oceana

in Virginia Beach moved to Cecil Field in Florida - a field shut down by a previous base closing commission.

The Navy has said it wants to stay at Oceana, at least for now, and Virginia Beach is moving aggressively - if belatedly - to address the encroachment issues that trouble the Navy.

Then again, maybe the commission simply wanted to send a loud and clear message to Virginia Beach that it was allowing too much development near Oceana. That's a message the Navy has been sending, and Virginia Beach has been ignoring, for a long time.

Whatever the case may be, Warner is now sending his own strong signal that if the commission does try to close Oceana, its decision faces a strong legal challenge.

Ah, yes, the whole purpose of establishing base closing commissions was to take politics out of the process. Seems now like the whole world is involved.

### **BRAC TRACKING**

Richmond Times Dispatch (Virginia)  
August 19, 2005 Friday

Officials with Virginia Beach and the Commonwealth ought to be commended for their plan to rein in development around Oceana Naval Air Station. They are doing the right thing in the right way.

Encroaching development ranks high among the reasons Oceana now faces an uncertain future. The Base Realignment and Closure Commission is considering whether to close Oceana -- a move that would be bad both for Virginia and for national defense -- partly because the base is being hemmed in. In reaction, the Virginia Beach City Council will seek to buy a six-acre site where a condominium project is in the works. Other efforts< irp15.7,10l>also will be made to buy 23 acres of land outside the base's main gate, and another \$161 million over the course of the next couple of decades might be used to purchase land from "willing sellers."

The emphasis on willing sellers merits particular praise in light of the recent Supreme Court decision on eminent domain in *Kelo v. New London*. That decision approved condemnation merely for economic development -- in essence, taking from the poor and giving to the rich. In the case of Oceana, condemnation would serve national security and be entirely justified. Yet condemnation never should be the first course of action.

No one can say whether the latest efforts will suffice to save Oceana from the chopping-block. Had they occurred several years ago, Virginia Beach and state leaders might not now be in panic mode. But they could not foresee that dubious reasoning would hold sway on the Commission, and are doing what they can to address it now. Here's hoping their efforts are not too little or too late.

**Additional Notes**