Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY BIRD

May 24, 2005

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Base Closure Commission to Visit 20 Bases
The Associated Press
Matthew Daly
May 23, 2005

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WASHINGTON -- The commission reviewing the Pentagon's recommended base closings will travel to 20 bases this week to learn more about military installations slated to be closed.

The nine commissioners will split into small groups to tour 20 sites in 11 states between Tuesday and Friday. The states are Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Oregon, Utah, Virginia and Washington.

"The site visits are the main forum by which our commissioners and our staff learn the details of what military activities are really happening at the base, how the Department of Defense recommendations would affect the installation and whether base closure criteria were applied correctly," Anthony Principi, chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, said in a statement.

Commissioners "have a lot of hard work ahead of us and not a lot of time to do it," added Principi, a former U.S. Veterans Affairs secretary. "Each site visit will be packed with detailed briefings, discussions with base personnel and tours of the key facilities."

The nine-member panel, known as BRAC, has pledged to visit all bases slated for closure or major realignment under a plan announced May 13 by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. The plan would close 33 major bases and downsize 29 others, saving an estimated $48 billion over 20 years.

As a practical matter, groups of two or three commissioners will visit each base, preceded by an analyst who will compile detailed information on the site, its staffing and military function.

For instance, commissioners James Bilbray and Philip Coyle are scheduled to visit Portland International Airport on Tuesday. The airport is home to an Air National Guard Base slated for a drastic downsizing.

Oregon lawmakers say the plan to transfer 452 civilian and 112 military jobs from the Portland base _ as well as remove its 23 active planes _ could leave the region vulnerable to attack.

Similar complaints have been made by lawmakers across the country.

Earlier this month, the military suggested pulling the Army's Armor Center and School from Fort Knox, Ky., and adding an Infantry Brigade Combat Team and other units coming home from overseas. This would shift Fort Knox's historic focus away from heavy armor to war fighting.

"They're really checking the Army's homework," said retired Brig. Gen. James E. Shane, executive director of Kentucky's Commission on Military Affairs.

The commission has until Sept. 8 to present its recommendations to President Bush. In past years, about 85 percent of base closures recommended by the Pentagon have remained on the BRAC list.

The panel has scheduled a series of public hearings on the plan this summer.

Base Closing Panel Head Weighs Pentagon Plan

Reuters
May 24, 2005

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The commission with veto power over the Pentagon's base closure and cutback plan will weigh military capability more heavily than potential economic damage as members start visiting bases this week, its chairman said on Monday.

Anthony Principi, who heads the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, said Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's plan to close 33 major installations and cut jobs at hundreds of others shows a strategy that would move toward a more mobile, flexible and effective military.

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``I think you can certainly understand the strategy as you look at their proposed realignments and actions, that clearly they're moving in that direction," he told Reuters in an interview.

He said the military needs the capability to move quickly to deal with emerging threats and foster better cooperation between the Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines and the reserves, he said.

``This round (of closings) is more about realignment. It's more about jointness -- seeing if a base can accommodate more than one service to enhance our joint readiness and war-fighting capability," Principi said.

The Pentagon's recommendations on May 13 dealt a hard economic blow to many communities across the country, who are expected to try to convince the commission to spare them when it holds regional public hearings starting June 7. Prior to the hearings, the commission embarks this week on visits of 20 bases.

The panel has the power to add or subtract bases from Rumsfeld's plan. Its list will be sent by September 8 to President Bush, who must accept or reject it in its entirety but can make no changes. If accepted, he will forward it to Congress, which can approve or reject it but can make no changes.

The panel can expect a particularly vigorous defense from New England, the hardest-hit region with proposed closures of a nuclear submarine base in Groton, Connecticut, at a cost of 8,460 jobs and a naval shipyard in Portsmouth, Maine, Naval Shipyard, at a cost of 4,510 jobs.

Principi said he does not believe politics played any role in the proposed closures in the largely Democratic region, saying it was prompted by capacity cuts in the nuclear submarine fleet.

``The question is, where should that capacity be?" he said. ``That's what the commission needs to look at."

The Pentagon wants to move the submarine fleet to Norfolk, Virginia and King's Bay, Georgia. The Groton base escaped a proposed closure in a 1993 round of base closures.

Principi, who was secretary of Veterans Affairs in Bush's first term, worked on the 1993 closings round as a legal counsel to the Senate Armed Services Committee.

The Naval Academy graduate, who commanded a Mekong delta patrol boat unit in Vietnam, said he was ``very sensitive" to economic development issues, but the commission needs to examine how each base fits into the military's goals.

``You just can't look at one base and make a decision that that should come off the list or stay on the list, you have to look at how it interacts with other bases," he said. ``That's going to make our work challenging."

Base-Closing Panel to Visit Northwest

The Associated Press
Matthew Daly
May 24, 2005

WASHINGTON — The commission reviewing the Pentagon's recommended base closings will travel to 20 bases this week — including three in Oregon and Washington — to learn more about military installations affected by the plan.

The nine commissioners will split into small groups to tour 20 sites in 11 states between today and Friday.

Panel members are scheduled to tour Portland International Airport — home of a threatened Air National Guard Base — today, before heading to Eastern Oregon on Thursday to visit the Umatilla chemical-weapons depot near Hermiston.

The panel also will visit McChord Air Force Base, south of Tacoma, tomorrow.

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Other states where visits are scheduled include Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, North Carolina, Utah and Virginia.

"The site visits are the main forum by which our commissioners and our staff learn the details of what military activities are really happening at the base, how the Department of Defense recommendations would affect the installation and whether base-closure criteria were applied correctly," Anthony Principi, chairman of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC), said in a statement.

Commissioners "have a lot of hard work ahead of us and not a lot of time to do it," added Principi, a former U.S. Veterans Affairs secretary. "Each site visit will be packed with detailed briefings, discussions with base personnel and tours of the key facilities."

The nine-member panel has pledged to visit all bases slated for closure or major realignment under a plan announced May 13 by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. The plan would close 33 major bases and downsize 29 others, saving an estimated $48 billion over 20 years.

As a practical matter, groups of two or three commissioners will visit each base, preceded by an analyst who will compile detailed information on the site, its staffing and military function.

In Oregon, commissioners James Bilbray and Philip Coyle are to visit Portland International Airport today. The airport is home to an Air National Guard Base slated for a drastic downsizing.

Oregon lawmakers say the plan to transfer 452 civilian and 112 military jobs from the Portland base — as well as remove its 23 active planes — could leave the region vulnerable to attack.

Similar complaints have been made by lawmakers across the country.

In Washington state, the Pentagon plan would create a joint base of Fort Lewis Army Base and the adjacent McChord Air Force Base in Pierce County. Management of the two would be consolidated at the Army post.

Fort Lewis would gain 230 employees, while McChord would lose 567.

The commission has until Sept. 8 to present its recommendations to President Bush. In past years, about 85 percent of base closures recommended by the Pentagon have remained on the BRAC list.

The panel has scheduled public hearings on the plan this summer, including a June 17 hearing in Portland. No public hearings are scheduled in Washington state.

Pentagon visit leaves Pensacola disappointed

The Associated Press
May 24, 2005

PENSACOLA - A group of local officials and other boosters came away from a visit to the Pentagon disheartened about the chances of preventing two Pensacola-area Navy bases from losing 1,579 jobs, mostly well-paying civilian positions.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has proposed various moves to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that would result in a net loss for Pensacola Naval Air Station and Saufley Field.

The 50-member Pensacola group last week asked Pentagon officials about the odds of saving those jobs.

"They said there is hope, but not much," said Escambia County School Superintendent Jim Paul.

That won't stop the Military Regional Oversight Committee from appealing the proposal to the BRAC Commission at a July 12 hearing in New Orleans.

"I may not agree with the loss, but I understand why they made those decisions," said Escambia County Commissioner Marie Young.

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Military officials told the delegation that moving the Naval Education and Training Command, headed by a three-star admiral, to Millington, Tenn., would eliminate redundancies through a merger with the Bureau of Naval Personnel already based there.

"It's hard to overcome that," said Gulf Breeze Mayor Lane Gilchrist. "They're not going to change their minds easily."

The Navy also wants to move education and training support personnel at Saufley to Millington, and its Officer Candidate School from the naval air station to Rhode Island. A military accounting and payroll office at Pensacola also would be closed.

Yet another move would send about 400 technicians and mechanics from Pensacola to nearby Eglin Air Force Base as part of a training program for the new Joint Strike Fighter, which will be used by the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.

Local News Articles

Federal Agencies Eyeing Walter Reed Site

The Washington Times (Washington DC)
Tom Ramstack
May 24, 2005

Walter Reed Army Medical Center is likely to become the offices of a federal agency, such as the Department of Homeland Security, under procedures that the U.S. Army plans to follow to dispose of the property.

"I think the fact that it would be well-secured and set back from the road are certainly valuable assets for that kind of a federal agency," said Sandy Paul, vice president of Delta Associates, an Alexandria real estate research firm. "I'm not going to say it would be perfect, but I think it would be considered."

Homeland Security's operations have been spread among federal agencies throughout the area since Congress created the department after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. A former naval base called the Nebraska Avenue Complex, near American University, is serving as its headquarters.

"The Department of Homeland Security will remain at the Nebraska Avenue Complex for the foreseeable future," agency spokeswoman Valerie Smith said.

Under realignment procedures, Walter Reed would have to be closed within six years.

If no federal agency claims the site, the 113-acre campus would be turned over to the District for charitable purposes, which real estate executives said would be unlikely because of its value for urban development.

A final option is to sell the property to private developers or the District.

Walter Reed would be consolidated into the planned Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on the grounds of the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda under a Defense Department plan announced last week to close or reduce 62 military bases and "realign" hundreds of other facilities.

"It's like any federal property -- it's offered up to federal agencies first," said Glenn Flood, Defense Department spokesman.

If Homeland Security takes the property, it would end several years of speculation over whether the agency would move to the campus of St. Elizabeths Hospital or a new site that would be built in Northern Virginia.

"Homeland Security has been thinking about consolidating at some point in the future," said Joe Delogu, director of the federal services group for Spaulding & Slye/Colliers, a Washington real estate services firm. "Walter Reed could present a unique opportunity for a group like that."

Behind its iron bars, the Walter Reed campus features the main hospital, a military barracks,

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the National Museum of Health and Medicine, a hotel, more than a dozen brick support buildings and open space with trails and trees.

D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams told editors and reporters at The Washington Times last week that it would be "good to have a federal presence on that site."

He also said he would be interested in using the hospital campus as a "mixed-use, multipurpose site."

However, he said any decisions on using the property depend on the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which is scheduled to give its assessment of the Defense Department's recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8.

Mr. Bush is supposed to accept or reject the recommendations by Sept. 23. If he accepts them, Congress could modify them before the Army disposes of any property.

"We're really early in the process," Mr. Williams said.

The Army plans to follow procedures similar to the General Services Administration in disposing of the property, Mr. Flood said.

First, a notice would be published in the Federal Register giving federal agencies an opportunity to claim it.

If no federal agency wants the property, the District would get the next chance for ownership.

The 1987 McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act would require that the District get an opportunity to use it for charitable purposes.

Title V of the act says federal agencies must make "surplus federal property," such as buildings and land, available to states, local governments and nonprofit agencies to assist homeless people.

They also could use it for other charitable purposes.

If the District fails to find a worthwhile function for the campus, the Army could seek bidders to buy it at fair-market value. The bidders could include private developers.

"Within six years, it has to be done," Mr. Flood said. "We don't want to be a landlord of vacant property."

Base closure could complicate cleanup soil contamination

Aberdeen American News (South Dakota)
May 23, 2005

Base closure could complicate cleanup

Soil contamination has cost $61 million at Ellsworth

The Department of Defense says it will continue an environmental cleanup of jet fuel, solvents and other contaminants at Ellsworth Air Force Base, even if the base is closed as the department has recommended.

Ellsworth is a Superfund site. Over the past 10 years, the cleanup ordered by the Environmental Protection Agency has cost the Air Force $61 million.

"The Air Force and the Department of Defense are liable," Pentagon spokesman Glenn Flood told the Rapid City Journal.

There is a long list of contaminants, most of them released into the environment decades ago.

Low-level nuclear waste left over from atomic weapons and small amounts of mustard agent already have been removed. The most prevalent pollutants are petroleum products, including jet fuel and lubricants, and chlorine-based solvents such as trichloroethylene, or TCE, which can cause cancer.

The rest of the cleanup likely will take

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Ellsworth: Contamination extends into private land

decades and could cost additional tens of millions of dollars, according to Air Force documents.

The EPA put Ellsworth on its "National Priorities List" in 1990. The Superfund designation included groundwater and soil contamination at 20 sites throughout the base.

The contamination also extends to private land southwest and east of the base.

Ellsworth was on the Defense Department's base-closure list released May 13. Now the future of the base is up the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, the White House and Congress.

In September, Ellsworth will undergo its second five-year EPA review. Remedies are already in place at all 20 of the hazardous sites.

"That's a major milestone," EPA project manager Jeff Mashburn said in a telephone interview from Denver.

Ellsworth is exclusively a B-1B Lancer bomber base, but it opened in 1942 as an Army Air Corps training base for B-17 bomber crews.

The based closed briefly after the war, then reopened as a Cold War base, hosting a succession of missiles, heavy bombers and air tankers.

Almost all of the contamination happened between 1942 and the early 1970s, said Del Petersen, chief of environmental restoration at Ellsworth.

The Air Force began its environmental investigation in 1984, with soil and water sampling and an archive search that included historic photos.

Pictures of gas trucks refueling B-17s revealed the sites of old fuel spills.

Atomic Energy Commission records led investigators to low-level radioactive waste, such as rags used to clean parts for nuclear weapons.

Written records even documented how the Army Air Corps had buried radium-painted, glow-in-the-dark instrument dials.

Governor Says He'll Fight Navy Base Closings

While Pensacola stands to lose more than 1,500 military-related jobs, nearby Eglin Air Force Base would gain more than 2,200 positions.

Miami Herald (Miami, FL)
May 24, 2005

PENSACOLA, Fla. (AP) -- Gov. Jeb Bush said Monday that he will fight to prevent two Pensacola area Navy bases from losing 1,579 jobs, mostly well-paying civilian positions, although local officials were disheartened after a visit to the Pentagon last week.

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has proposed various moves to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that would result in the net loss for Pensacola Naval Air Station and Saufley Field.

Bush met with military boosters in Pensacola to begin developing a strategy to save the jobs here.

"We're going to fight," Bush told reporters. ``I think we have a great case here in Florida."

He cited state legislation passed to support military families, Florida's efforts to prevent development from encroaching on bases, a solid workforce and a superior quality of life.

Bush's visit here follows a trip to the Pentagon by 50 Pensacola boosters who asked about the chances of keeping the jobs.

"They said there is hope, but not much," said Escambia County School Superintendent Jim Paul.

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That won't stop the Military Regional Oversight Committee from appealing the proposal to the BRAC Commission at a July 12 hearing in New Orleans.

"I may not agree with the loss, but I understand why they made those decisions," said Escambia County Commissioner Marie Young.

Military officials told the delegation that moving the Naval Education and Training Command, headed by a three-star admiral, to Millington, Tenn., would eliminate redundancies through a merger with the Bureau of Naval Personnel already based there.

"It's hard to overcome that," said Gulf Breeze Mayor Lane Gilchrist. ``They're not going to change their minds easily."

The Navy also wants to move education and training support personnel at Saufley to Millington and its Officer Candidate School from the naval air station to Rhode Island. A military accounting and payroll office at Pensacola also would be closed.

Another move would send about 400 technicians and mechanics from Pensacola to nearby Eglin Air Force Base as part of a training program for the new Joint Strike Fighter, which will be used by the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps.

While Pensacola will be the biggest net loser in Florida, Eglin would be the state's biggest winner with 2,218 new openings.

U.S. Aid Urged For Belvoir Plan

Fairfax Cites Transportation Needs of Proposed Expansion

The Washington Post (Washington DC)
Jacqueline L. Salmon
May 24, 2005

The Fairfax County Board of Supervisors voted yesterday to request federal funds to help pay for road improvements and other transportation upgrades around Fort Belvoir, which is expected to gain more than 18,000 jobs under a Defense Department plan to shift workers in the Washington area.

The federal government "can't just say, 'Good luck. You're going to have to handle it,'" said Gerald E. Connolly (D), chairman of the Board of Supervisors, at yesterday's meeting.

County planners are scrambling to figure out how to accommodate the massive shift in workers that would result from plans to close and realign military bases nationwide.

Nationally, the plan would eliminate 180 military installations with the goal of saving nearly $49 billion over two decades.

Locally, the Pentagon wants to move more than 18,000 workers to Fort Belvoir in southeastern Fairfax County, close Walter Reed Army Medical Center in the District and give up more than 4 million square feet of leased space in Alexandria and Arlington and Fairfax counties as workers are moved elsewhere.

At yesterday's meeting, Supervisor Penelope A. Gross (D-Mason) said the Defense Department will abandon 900,000 square feet of office space that it leases in the Skyline development along Route 7.

"While we are delighted that jobs will be saved in the county, it will leave large amounts of leased space empty," she said.

Connolly said he has asked the county's Economic Development Authority to analyze the impact of the Defense Department's recommendations on the county.

As part of the realignment, thousands of defense workers who ordinarily rely on public transit to get to their jobs will have to commute by car to Fort Belvoir.

County supervisors said yesterday that they cannot place a price tag on the transportation improvements needed around Fort Belvoir, which is served by a few congested roads. But they voted unanimously to ask the county's congressional delegation to seek funds for

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improvements along the Richmond Highway corridor, including road enhancements, extending Metro from nearby stations to Fort Belvoir and more bus service.

"We're not asking for all the bells and whistles," said Connolly, noting that the county has already sunk $55 million into improving Richmond Highway.

Rep. James P. Moran Jr. (D-Va.) said it would be difficult to get funding this year because the transportation appropriation bill for fiscal 2006 has been completed. Moran said he plans to seek funding next year to alleviate the costs to Fairfax and the expected congestion.

However, he said that because of financial constraints, "how much we're going to be able to get, I don't know."

In other business, the board rejected a proposal to have the county take over the management of trash hauling, which is handled mostly by private collectors. The vote was unanimous.

The proposal to have the county take charge of trash collection -- billing homeowners and arranging for trash collection with private haulers -- caused an uproar last year among homeowners and haulers. As a result, the Board of Supervisors appointed a 15-member task force in June to examine the proposal more closely.

Yesterday, the task force chairman, William Lecos, said the group recommended having private companies continue garbage collection in the county but meet certain standards, such as not collecting trash before 6 a.m. and responding to customer inquiries within a day.

Some supervisors questioned whether voluntary standards would have enough teeth.

Lecos replied that the fierce competition among trash haulers would mean that homeowners and homeowners associations could take their business elsewhere if companies failed to meet the standards.

Combined Research Is Sought For Brooks

San Antonio Express News (San Antonio, TX)
Sig Christenson, Express-News Military Writer
May 24, 2005

AUSTIN — The head of a San Antonio task force charged with saving local military missions said Monday he'll seek to create a joint aerospace medical research hub at Brooks City-Base.

The idea would salvage at least one critical military mission at Brooks, which stands to lose its entire Air Force footprint under the Pentagon's 2005 base closure recommendations.

But retired Air Force Brig. Gen. John Jernigan said it also would create a new joint medical mission with ties to Fort Sam Houston, which is to become a center of excellence for health research and training.

Under the plan, the Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine would remain at Brooks, and similar Army and Navy facilities at Pensacola, Fla., and Fort Rucker, Ala., could move to Brooks, creating about 500 research jobs.

"In my view, one of the crucial aspects for our national military strategy is air medical evacuation," he said. "So it makes no sense to me to move the school that teaches that away from the center of mass of where you're training other people."

Jernigan, head of the San Antonio Military Missions Task Force, raised the idea at a Texas Military Preparedness Commission meeting. It was the panel's first session since the closure announcement and was aimed at helping officials craft strategies to regain bases on the Pentagon's hit list or preserve missions that could be lost. The 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission is studying the list.

The planning commission's chief, retired Air Force Col. William Ehrie, told four dozen

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people from around the state that one in 10 closure recommendations was reversed in a 1995 round of closures. But he and Texas Secretary of State Roger Williams said a rigorous analysis of the Pentagon's data would make or break the case for communities.

"It's going to be an emotional issue," Williams said. "But we're not going to give them emotions, we're going to give them facts."

Brooks, Ingleside Naval Station and Red River Army Depot in Texarkana were ordered to close, costing their communities about 6,668 jobs. Corpus Christi Naval Air Station would lose another 1,000 workers in a major realignment.

Officials statewide lack crucial BRAC data, and few on hand Monday seemed to know how to fight the recommendations. But Ingleside City Manager Mike Rhea and former Corpus Christi Mayor Loyd Neal pointed to the Navy's role in safeguarding the heavily industrialized Texas Gulf Coast.

"That port ... can accommodate all classes of Navy ships, and what happens if something happens on the West Coast ports or the East Coast ports?" agreed retired Army Maj. Gen. Joe Robles, a San Antonian who served on the 1995 closure commission. "You have a backup."

Though still a work in progress, Jernigan's game plan is designed to save parts of Brooks' missions, rather than all of them and the site's 3,700 jobs. He won't fight the Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence's move to Fort Sam. But he could argue for keeping two research groups under Brooks' Human Effectiveness Directorate, due to move to Wright-Patterson AFB in Ohio.

Both he and Robles, chief financial officer for USAA, suggested that the highly educated researchers needed to make the labs work may not move to Ohio, complicating the new organization there.

A different argument will be needed to persuade BRAC to keep the School of Aerospace Medicine in San Antonio. Jernigan will contend that it makes more sense to bring the Navy and Army organizations here and create a joint center of excellence.

"It obviously makes sense to put it under one umbrella," Ehrie agreed, "especially with the medical synergy that you have going on at BAMC (Brooke Army Medical Center), Fort Sam and the current Brooks."

Sub base backers review strategy

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)
Ray Hackett
May 24, 2005

NEW LONDON-- "Substantially Deviated." Those two words were written Monday across the top of the pad of paper in front of Subase Realignment Coalition, Chairman John Markowicz.

That's the burden the coalition faces in preparing its case to reverse the Defense Department's recommendation to close the Groton submarine base.

"I think it looks like 1993 again," Markowicz said Monday after the first coalition meeting since the sub base made the closure list. "Only we have less time because the Defense Department has yet to release all the data. It's an uphill struggle. But in 1993, we made that case. And right now, we're engaged in trying to repeat that."

Markowicz said there is a "one in 10," chance of success. In the past, 85 percent of the recommendations were upheld.

U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, told the coalition Monday he hopes to accompany BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony Principi and commissioner Lloyd W. Newton when they tour the base June 1. The coalition also hopes Principi and Newton will visit Electric Boat in Groton and possibly conduct a "community meeting" with the coalition.

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Principi said Monday site visit arrangements were being worked out and he didn't know whether there would be time other stops.

"Each site visit will be packed with detailed briefings, discussions with base personnel and tours of the key facilities at the installation," he said.

The coalition will meet weekly not to prepare its case to present to BRAC commissioners at a regional public hearing July 6 in Boston.

At Monday's meeting, Markowicz briefed the group about plans to refute Pentagon reasoning for closing the base. He declined to discuss specifics publicly.

"What I will say is that there appears to be some indication that Subase New London is not being treated as fairly as other facilities of similar size," he said.

According to Navy Department documents, the Groton base ranked 12th of 16 bases in military value. The Navy is recommending it be closed and its submarines reassigned to Norfolk, Va., and Kings Bay, Ga. The sub school would transfer to Kings Bay.

Connecticut is the hardest hit state in this year's BRAC round, with 8,500 direct jobs lost. A state study places the potential loss at closer to 31,500 when factoring in the ripple effect.

BASE CLOSURES: Maine congressional delegation tired of waiting for information from Pentagon

Blethen Maine Newspapers (ME)
Bart Jansen
May 24, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Members of Maine's congressional delegation expected to get more information about proposed military base closures today, but said it isn't soon enough.

Lawmakers complained that the Pentagon's slow response will make it harder to contest plans to close Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery and take more than 2,400 jobs from Brunswick Naval Air Station.

"It's what we call state-of-the-art foot-dragging. It's a regrettable failure," said Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine. "It raises immediately the question about how did you arrive at these conclusions if it's so difficult to turn over this information that was used to make these decisions."

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine and a member of the Armed Services Committee, said she expects the Pentagon to release more documents today. But if the material is incomplete, she will use all her influence for a larger release, she said.

"It simply isn't fair and it contradicts the plain letter of the law for the Pentagon to be slow-walking this material," Collins said. "I think the Pentagon will come forth with some additional materials. But I think they will dribble it out and if they're slow in giving it to us, it makes it tough for us to build the case."

Maine and New Hampshire congressional delegations -- including Reps. Tom Allen and Mike Michaud, both D-Maine -- are scheduled to meet Friday with Anthony Principi, the chairman of the nine-member commission that is reviewing Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommended base closures.

Principi has said the commission won't rubber-stamp the closure list, so bases could be added or removed. While a commission majority can remove a base from the list, seven members must agree to add a base.

At least two commissioners are scheduled to tour Portsmouth and Brunswick on June 2 and 3, and a regional hearing about the recommendations is scheduled July 6 in Boston. The commission must give its final list to President Bush by Sept. 8. Bush and Congress can then either accept or reject the list in its entirety.

"We need to be completely prepared," Collins said.

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Rumsfeld has proposed closing the Kittery shipyard and moving half the active-duty military staff of the Brunswick Naval Air Station to Florida. In all, the state stands to lose 7,000 military and civilian jobs.

Pentagon officials had promised to provide the supporting documents to the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission by Friday, but they didn't arrive. Elected officials from states affected by the proposed closings hope to use the documents to poke holes in the Defense Department's rationale and overturn the recommended closings.

Portsmouth stands to lose 4,510 jobs as its functions are sent to Norfolk, Va. Brunswick would lose 2,420 jobs -- about half its work force -- as its planes are moved to Jacksonville, Fla. Two other closures would cost the state 354 jobs at the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in Limestone and seven jobs at the Naval Reserve Center in Bangor.

The initial closure list and supporting documentation estimated the Pentagon would spend $448 million to close the Kittery yard and save $128 million annually within four years. For Brunswick, the Navy expects to spend $146 million to realign the base before saving nearly $35 million a year starting in four years.

Lawmakers encourage support for base plan

They say state leaders need to back proposal
Baltimore Sun (Baltimore, MD)
Childs Walker
May 24, 2005

Maryland business and government leaders need to be vocal in support of Pentagon plans to realign the nation's military bases to help counter political opposition that will not end until the fall, two area congressmen told a gathering of business owners yesterday.

Reps. Benjamin L. Cardin and C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger said the plans - which include bringing about 5,300 new jobs to Fort Meade and 6,600 to the state overall - will face wide challenges from elected officials in states that are losing jobs. President Bush is scheduled to submit his final list of base closings and expansions to the Pentagon in November.

Elected leaders from Connecticut to Alabama have fiercely criticized the proposed closings of 180 small and large bases. But Maryland officials have pointed to the virtues of realignment, saying the shift of jobs to Fort Meade recognizes the growing importance of intelligence and technology in modern warfare.

"We thought that any objective review would be good news for us," Cardin said at the meeting of Anne Arundel County business owners that was held in Odenton.

Ruppersberger said that when he took office, he saw widespread fear among colleagues about impending base closings. But he said he was never nervous.

The process "is really about being efficient," he said. "And our facilities are providing significant support for what we need in the war against terrorism."

Both congressmen acknowledged that many of their colleagues are unhappy and will be fighting to shift some of the jobs from Maryland to other states. Cardin, who recently announced a U.S. Senate bid for 2006, said Maryland will compete with states such as New Jersey and Kentucky that would lose large bases under the Pentagon's plans.

"What we need to do is be supportive of the process," Cardin said. "We think it makes sense to consolidate, and we think it makes sense to consolidate services at Fort Meade."

Cardin encouraged business and political leaders to support the plan at a realignment commission hearing in Baltimore on July 8.

Local and state officials have reacted happily to the realignment news. Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens has spent the last few years promoting the county as a growing center

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for the defense industry. The expansion at Meade is a validation of that effort, she said.

The round of base closures will be the first in a decade. The Pentagon is recommending shuttering about 180 military installations, including more than 30 major bases. Nearly 30,000 jobs would be eliminated in an effort to save $50 billion over 20 years.

But the Pentagon's plans contained plenty of good news for Maryland, which would receive the second-largest net job increase of any state.

The state's largest bases, Fort Meade and Aberdeen Proving Ground in Harford County, would take in thousands of civilian personnel. And bases that were seen as vulnerable, such as the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in St. Mary's County, survived with few proposed cuts.

The news was not all good for Maryland. Bethesda could lose about 3,000 jobs if the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency consolidates several Maryland, Washington and Virginia offices into one future location at Fort Belvoir in Virginia. The Martin State Airport Air Guard Station, north of Baltimore, would lose 123 jobs, and its eight C-130J aircraft would be relocated to bases in California and Rhode Island.

Though some of the 5,300 jobs at Meade would be filled with transfers from other bases, the shifts would create high-paying positions that might be filled by area residents, the congressmen said.

"When you look at the history of these situations, a significant number of employees do not move," Cardin said. "So there are always opportunities in the facilities that get extra spots."

Cardin and Ruppersberger said the realignment would not only create on-base jobs but would bolster private-sector firms around Fort Meade and other bases.

"It brings us a lot of opportunities not just for the large companies but for smaller companies that are producing just remarkable technology," Cardin said.

Eight of the nation's 10 largest defense contractors have offices in Anne Arundel, and National Security Agency officials have spoken of developing a technology corridor between Washington and their headquarters at Fort Meade.

Both congressmen said they will work with local officials to create the school, road and housing capacity to accommodate a job increase. Anne Arundel officials say they are not worried about the influx because they have long expected Fort Meade to be a center for growth.

Ruppersberger echoed those thoughts, saying, "We still have a lot of open land on the corridor."

Some people at yesterday's meeting said area leaders need to find out exactly how many extra commuters will be going to the base.

"It would be useful to know how much we need to enhance the transportation options that are already here," said H. Walter Townshend III, president and chief executive officer of the Baltimore-Washington Corridor Chamber of Commerce.

Cardin and Ruppersberger said the realignment process is not far enough along for them to know specifics. They will seek more detailed breakdowns of likely commuting patterns for new employees, they said.

Could a favor for Thune save Ellsworth?

Sioux Falls Argus Leader (Sioux Falls, SD)
David Kranz
May 24, 2005

The White Horse Theory is prominent in the Ellsworth Air Force Base dialogue.

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It comes from mainstream Republicans and partisan Democrats. Even my nonpartisan friend at the bakery down the street says so.

The theory is based on a belief that President Bush won't let Sen. John Thune down.

With the help of the president, Thune will ride in to rescue the troubled military establishment, the theory goes.

Certainly, the White House appreciates Thune for clearing Tom Daschle's obstructing from its path. An unspoken reward for the new senator has been anticipated, and most certainly, the timing here would be perfect.

Thune has been doing some innovative things on his own in the Senate to try and help, including a bill to slow the pace of the closing process until more facts are known.

But a decision to remove Ellsworth from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's list would validate the influence Thune promised to voters when he unseated Daschle.

There is a potential flaw to that thinking, however. Highlighting Thune as the savior would be good for his political career, but it could be risky with Republicans nationally if Bush is seen as showing favoritism toward Thune.

If there is help for him, then what about Republican senators Olympia Snowe of Maine and Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania? They face tough re-election fights next year in states that took big hits on the base-closure list. So did Republican Rep. Rob Simmons' Connecticut district, making him politically vulnerable. They all need saving.

Snowe's Republican colleague in Maine, Sen. Susan Collins, gave Thune a plug last week, saluting his legislation to slow the process.

"Senator Thune has done us a great service by offering this legislation. Let me start by thanking you, Senator Thune, for your leadership," Collins said.

Historically, about 10 percent of the bases put on the list somehow find their way back to safety.

The uncertainty frustrates Rapid City residents, though.

Historically, Republicans can count on their votes, but some voters have questions now.

Why has the administration attempted to cut the farm program? Talked of power cost hikes affecting thousands of South Dakotans? Chosen to eliminate Ellsworth?

Just when West River voters think base closure won't happen, they think back to 2002 when real drought aid never came.

Finding their way

South Dakota Democrats are in need of a good pep talk. That's why Camp Wellstone will pitch its tent in Sioux Falls July 29-31 at the invitation of the local Grassroots Democrats group.

The camp is part of Wellstone Action, founded by Mark and David Wellstone, sons of the late Sen. Paul Wellstone, D-Minn. Their mission "is nothing less than to jump-start a new generation of professional organizers and grass-roots leaders who will run for office themselves."

This will be a nuts-and-bolts program on how to successfully win elections, says Bill Lofy, Wellstone communications director.

He says Daschle's defeat was a "wake-up call" to Democrats.

"People there know not anyone, not Native Americans, not anyone, can be taken for granted. We see that as a good thing," Lofy said.

Hard data must back up case for 131st, chairman says

St. Louis Post Dipatch (St. Louis, MO)
Phillip Dine
May 24, 2005

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WASHINGTON - The chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission indicated Monday that he is open to hearing arguments to save the 131st Air National Guard Fighter Wing at Lambert Field. But he said Missouri officials must come armed with facts.

To overturn any recommendations made by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the commission must find that he "deviated substantially" from the various criteria set in law or from the Pentagon's force structure plan, commission Chairman Anthony Principi said in an interview.

While the commission will listen to general arguments about homeland security, showing clearly why a decision is wrong is likely to carry more weight with the nine-member commission, Principi said.

"We're bound by the law, and the law says, 'Mr. Chairman, commissioners, apply the criteria to the recommendations.' I would read the law, if I were the Missouri officials coming to make their case. I think every state should do its utmost to convince us an error was made," he said.

"They should do more than say a National Guard base is critical to our national security. I think they should do their homework; they should back that up with hard data to show that the secretary deviated substantially from military value or the other criteria."

In terms of Guard bases, the commission will look at such factors as whether a closing would affect operational readiness, land facilities and air space for training purposes, recruiting or the ability to mobilize troops for future military needs. If so, "then we should make changes," Principi said.

Rumsfeld's list, released May 13, spared Scott Air Force Base, but the 131st Wing is to be dispersed to Nevada and New Jersey. Illinois and civic groups spent almost $2 million hiring consultants to analyze data to reduce Scott's vulnerabilities while preparing for a possible appeal with the commission. Missouri did not do this, but the state's congressional delegation has since gone to bat for the 131st.

Asked whether Missouri would be better served now had it done this kind of work, Principi said, "I don't know if it's important to hire expensive paid lobbyists, but surely there are state officials who understand what is required and can make a strong case in support of their installations."

One avenue for such input will be the commission's hearing in St. Louis on June 7. The commission released its regional hearing schedule Thursday, a few days after Sen. Christopher "Kit" Bond, R-Mo., met with Principi.

Asked if that led to the hearing, Principi said, "I think the world of Sen. Bond. He was the chairman of my appropriations subcommittee when I was a Cabinet secretary (for veterans affairs). I was pleased to meet with him. He talked about the importance of the bases, the Air Guard, and asked me to have a regional hearing out in St. Louis. I took his request back and ... it made sense to do it in St. Louis."

Each of the 16 regional hearings will feature three to five commissioners. There will also be visits to about 100 military sites, offices or other facilities that lost jobs, including Wednesday to the Army Human Resources Command and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in the St. Louis area.

Blagojevich calls for release of BRAC data

Quad-City Times (Quad City, IL)
Ed Tibbetts
May 24, 2005

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich is calling on the Defense Department to release data Quad-City officials say they need to combat the government’s recommendation that Arsenal Island be realigned.

The governor says delayed release of the information is violating the base closing law and hampering local efforts just two weeks before

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regional hearings are to be held in St. Louis. Those hearings are seen as a critical juncture for communities seeking to overturn the Pentagon's recommendations.

Eleven days ago, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld proposed Arsenal Island be realigned, a move that would result in a net loss of about 1,600 jobs.

Quad-City leaders have criticized the decision, questioning whether it would save money and suggesting it likely will cost the government. However, those officials have been waiting for detailed data from the military so they can mount their defense. "We need it," Quad-City Development Group President Thom Hart said Monday.

"Without the data and modeling you have thus far failed to release, the impacted communities cannot adequately prepare for the upcoming regional hearings and base visits to highlight to the BRAC Commission the flawed reasoning by your Department," Blagojevich said in the letter to Rumsfeld, which was dated Monday.

A regional hearing is scheduled June 7 in St. Louis. That is where Quad-City officials will make their case. Before that, a commissioner and a staff analyst are expected to visit Arsenal Island.

The governor said the base closing law says the information should have been delivered a week from May 13, when Rumsfeld transmitted his recommendations to the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which is now reviewing the proposals.

The Pentagon disputed the governor's claim that the department is not following the law. Glenn Flood, a spokesman, said the department did, in fact, deliver the legally required material by the deadline, which he said was Monday, not May 20.

He added that the material yet to be delivered — such as answers to questions, known as "data calls" — is not subject to the deadline. That information is being reviewed to ensure no classified material is released, he said.

"We hope to have it very soon," Flood said, "hopefully this week."

Andrew Ross, a spokesman for the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, stood by the determination that the Pentagon is not following the law. "This is supposed to be an open and transparent process, but by not providing the bulk of this critical information, Gov. Blagojevich and everyone else is left in the dark, wondering how these recommendations were made," he said.

So far, failure to get the data is not critical, Hart said, but as the hearing draws closer, it will be more important. "I don't know that it's causing a problem, but we do think we need it to do a full analysis," he added.

The Pentagon's recommendations would ship four white-collar agencies off the island, the largest of them the Tank-automotive and Armaments Command, which employs 1,126 people on Arsenal Island. Those jobs would be sent to the Defense Supply Center in Columbus, Ohio, and Detroit Arsenal in Warren, Mich.

In addition, the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, Civilian Human Resource Agency and the northwest regional office of the Installation Management Agency, also would be transferred off the island.

Those commands employ 682 people. Transferring some depot maintenance functions off the island would result in a loss of 181 jobs from the Joint Manufacturing and Technology Center, according to the Pentagon. Those losses would be offset with the proposed transfer of 399 people to the island from the 1st U.S. Army headquarters operation at Fort Gillem, Ga.

The governor's office said it is pushing the Pentagon to release more information because it needs to know how manpower costs were calculated here, in Columbus and in Michigan. In addition, it is seeking the data the department

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used to rank the Arsenal's military value relative to other bases.

Documents the Pentagon released last week placed the Arsenal 12th out of 16 in terms of military value for inventory control points, a ranking that relates to the TACOM operation on the island. The Columbus inventory control point was ranked fifth and Detroit Arsenal, the location where most of the TACOM jobs would go, was ranked 11th.

Local officials have questioned the methodology used for the recommendation, saying it would actually cost the government millions of dollars to accommodate the hundreds of TACOM employees sent to Michigan. They also say the Detroit Arsenal is not as secure as Arsenal Island.

Opinions/ Editorials

UAVs and UABs
Unmanned Aerial Vehicles leave Grand Forks with a nearly Unmanned Air Base

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
Ryan Bakken
May 24, 2005

It sure was considerate of the Department of Defense to throw us a bone with this UAV thing. You probably know that the DoD plans a "realignment" of Grand Forks Air Force Base. Its plan at the base is akin to a tornado's "realignment" of your property when it takes your house, garage and vehicles but leaves the sandbox and a birch tree.

The realignment calls for the tankers and thousands of airmen to leave, and for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV for short) and hundreds of airmen to arrive. This decision comes from the same brain trust that recently sunk $300 million into base housing and is in the middle of spending $28 million on runways.

(In related news, the Secret Service is building a guesthouse at Camp David for when ex-President George Washington and his wife, Martha, visit.)

So, these UAV scraps are supposed to appease us. UAVs supposedly are the future of the Air Force.

They do sound amazing, like something you might see in "Star Wars Episode XXVII: C3PO and R2D2 Finally Hook Up." After all, UAVs:

• Don't require a human aboard.

• Shoot live video from 12 miles high.

• Can fly for 40 straight hours, covering 14,000 miles.

• Are operated by a computer from thousands of miles away.

These are impressive credentials. Making UAVs even more impressive are their names: Global Hawk and Predator. They're much more intimidating names than Sparrow and Anteater, for instance.

The idea is that Global Hawk and Predator will patrol the northern border, providing homeland security against terrorists, illegal immigrants, drug dealers and water flowing south from Canada.

The hope is that the Air Force will have more missions that require more UAVs. With the UAVs established, then the Air Force will add more missions -- and aircraft and personnel -- to the base.

So, the key for base survival is to find many jobs for the UAVs. The only fool-proof answer is to rent out the UAVs to others.

For what, you wonder? Well, here are five reasons right off the top of my head:

1. For prom transportation. Arriving at prom in a UAV would be way, way more cool than arriving in a limousine. And way, way less expensive than the dress.

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2. For surveillance at prom. This would eliminate the need for chaperones who might purposely humiliate their offspring.

3. For slicers to help them find their golf ball in the woods.

4. Two words: speed trap.

5. Drop Federal Express packages on lawns.

If you have your own ideas, send them off to the BRAC committee. Together, we can create more work for the UAV, ensuring that it won't be mere table scraps.

Pentagon's disaspora is a necessary evil
The Washington Examiner (Washington DC)
May 23, 2005

Friday the 13th probably wasn't the best day Virginia Gov. Mark Warner could have picked to try to assuage growing fears about the Pentagon's plan to relocate as many as 52,000 defense workers who now toil in 8 million square feet of leased office space in Northern Virginia. But what appears to be temporary bad luck for commercial landlords is a good long-term strategy for safeguarding federal employees.

In October, the Defense Department's higher security standards for leasing office space go into effect, which is causing more local anxiety than DoD's larger plan to close or consolidate more than 800 military installations nationwide.

That's because the new security standards include an 82-foot setback from a "controlled perimeter," shatter-resistant glass, HVAC cutoffs and a separate mailroom ventilation system in a collapse-resistant building. Mixed-use developments near Metro stations are now out.

Virtually none of the space the Pentagon now rents, predominantly in Arlington and Alexandria, meet such exacting requirements and commercial real estate experts say it would be extremely difficult and prohibitively expensive to retrofit existing buildings to the new specifications.

Virginia Congressman Jim Moran, D-8th, whose District includes DoD offices in Crystal City, Ballston and Clarendon as well as the Pentagon itself, claims that the new security regulations are "arbitrary." Certain details, such as how far the setbacks really have to be, are certainly debatable.

But there's nothing arbitrary about a clear-eyed plan to move as many defense workers out of the bulls eye as possible.

During the long lull between the Vietnam War and the Iraqi invasion, many people began thinking of DoD largely in terms of contracts, jobs and local economics - not national defense.

Current attempts in Congress to blunt the Pentagon's latest reassertion of its primary mission are vestiges of that mindset. But in an age of world-wide terrorism, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's decision to disperse defense employees makes a lot more sense from a security standpoint than concentrating them all in one place just to shore up local real estate values.

And while Washington and its close-in suburbs stand to lose more defense workers than any other metropolitan area, Gov. Warner correctly pointed out that these losses will be somewhat offset by gains in other parts of Virginia and Maryland. For instance, the Pentagon wants to invest $1 billion to serve the area's more than 400,000 active and retired military by building a new 165-bed hospital at Fort Belvoir and a 300-bed, world-class medical facility in Bethesda to replace the venerable Walter Reed Medical Center.

The base closures on the list were recommended by seven cross-service groups and will be reviewed by an independent, nine-member Base Realignment and Closings Commission.

Congress and the president must then either approve or reject the entire list as submitted. The

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Pentagon claims the consolidation will result in a net savings of nearly $49 billion over the next 20 years.

That's great, but as Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Mike Wynne put it, decisions to close bases were "data driven, with military value as primary."

That's the way it should be.

BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony Principi, a former secretary of Veterans Affairs who went through a similar process reorganizing the VA's hospital system, agrees. While "we always must be mindful of economic impact," Principi recently said, "national security always has to have the highest priority."

Unlike other parts of the country selected for base closings, Northern Virginia will still remain attractive to government contractors, non-profits, other federal agencies and companies happy to find space so close to Washington. And it will take up to 15 years before the relocation is complete, so things could be worse.

Any place that loses jobs in this massive reorganization will experience inevitable economic disruption, but that's not a sufficient reason to maintain a status quo that no longer makes military sense.

Additional Notes

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