

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

May 28, 2005

Department of Defense Releases

[BRAC 2005 Comes at 'Perfect Time' to Help Army 'Reset'](#)

[Defense Officials to Make More BRAC Data Available](#)

National News Articles

[Hastert Casts Rare Vote To Defeat Measure Paring BRAC](#)

[Senators seek probe of base closing timetable](#)

[Winners in 2005 base closing round celebrate gains](#)

[Base Closings Will Be Fair, Bush Tells Naval Graduates](#)

[Military Must Adapt, Bush Tells Graduates Base Closings Are Cited As Boost to Efficiency](#)

[Money Wasted on Unneeded Bases, Bush Says](#)

[Bush: base closings painful but crucial](#)

[Military Must Adapt to Terror Era, Bush Says](#)

[Senators Seek More Data on Base Closings](#)

[Pentagon to Release Data on Base Closings](#)

[Veterans feel abandoned over cuts in medical benefits](#)

[Base Closure chairman cancels Tuesday Willow Grove visit](#)

[Air Force wants to strip planes from Air National Guard](#)

Local News Articles

[Proposed Va. Job Shifts Assailed Civil Servants Might Quit Under Base Plan, Officials Say \(Virginia\)](#)

[Pepper Worried About Defense Exodus \(Virginia\)](#)

[Shut bases could get nuclear waste A \\$15.5m funding plan allows for reprocessing \(New England, Conn. Maine\)](#)

[Gov.'s Group Vows to Fight Base Closings in State \(California\)](#)

[N.J. town rallies against closing \(Ft. Monmouth, NY\)](#)

Herseth wants answers from defense officials (South Dakota)

State team to visit Georgia Navy base (Groton, Conn)

Center would combine Guard, Army Reserve resources (Iowa, South Dakota)

Congressmen look to Saxton for guidance in keeping Monmouth open (New York)

Additional Notes

N/A

Department of Defense Releases

BRAC 2005 Comes at 'Perfect Time' to Help Army 'Reset'

American Forces Press Service
Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample, USA
May 27, 2005

The 2005 Base Realignment and Closure recommendations could not have come at a better time as the Army begins realigning units overseas and looks for a clearer picture on where to put them, service leaders said during a media roundtable May 26 in the Pentagon.

On May 13, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld proposed the closure of 15 active Army bases, seven leased bases, 176 Army Reserve installations, and 211 Army National Guard facilities.

"The timing for this BRAC has been perfect for the Army because it has allowed us through our analysis process to figure out the right location to reset units from overseas as we bring them back," said Geoffrey Prosch, principal deputy assistant Army secretary for installations and environment.

"The analysis has given us that fidelity, and it has also enabled us to validate where we are standing up these 10 new brigades," he said, referring to the Army's transformation to a modular force structure that calls for an increase from 33 to 43 maneuver brigades.

Meanwhile, Prosch said, BRAC 2005 will allow the Army to meet its goal of streamlining its portfolio of installations, part of which is being done through an integrated global presence and basing strategy.

That strategy, he said, will determine how units and assets overseas will be "reset and relocated."

In Europe, he said, some 148 installations are expected to close and thousands of troops and their families returned to the United States.

According to the Army's new basing strategy for units returning from overseas, the 1st Armored Division headquarters and three heavy brigades will go to Fort Bliss, Texas, while a brigade from Korea will head to Fort Carson, Colo.

The 1st Infantry Division headquarters and an aviation brigade will be based at Fort Riley, Kansas. Several small maneuver-enhancement brigades and support units will go to Fort Knox, Ky.

Craig College, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for infrastructure analysis and director of the Army Basing Study Group, said several units will deactivate overseas, and soldiers from those units will be reassigned elsewhere.

In all, he said, more than 47,000 troops from overseas will be reassigned to units in the United States.

Those soldiers, he added, will return as "individual replacements and fill out new modular brigades throughout the Army." Still, any move back home by troops overseas will not likely happen before summer 2006.

College said several heavy brigades in Germany slated for Fort Bliss won't get orders to the U.S. until the BRAC Commission make its final recommendation and the plan gets approval from Congress and the president. That action will not come before late fall or winter, he said.

"I don't see any units moving in large numbers until the summer of 2006, and I suspect those

wouldn't be large numbers," College said. "I would expect to see the process accelerated in the years 2007 to 2009."

College also added that no move would take place until the installation or the local community is ready to accept the influx of soldiers and their families.

He pointed out that Army secretary Francis Harvey and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker have been "adamant" that installations and communities are prepared to accept the new units. "That means things like housing, schools, and that panoply of support services that any family, whether you wear a uniform or not, needs to be able to function," College said.

"We will ... ensure quality of life is enhanced, and we're not going to move people until the communities and facilities and the installation are ready for them," he explained.

However, just as important for the Army is that BRAC 2005 will save the service billions over the next two decades, money that will further support Army transformation.

BRAC 2005 is anticipated to generate a 20-year gross savings of about \$20.4 billion, and a net savings of \$7.6 billion for the Army.

That figure is "three to four times higher" than the savings of the four previous BRAC rounds combined, College said.

In addition, he said, closing overseas facilities will save the Army \$2.5 billion more annually and \$28 billion over 20 years.

Said Prosch, "Our big goal is to win the war, transform the Army, and get resources to accomplish the first two."

Defense Officials to Make More BRAC Data Available

American Forces Press Service
May 27, 2005

Defense officials are preparing to make more data available early next week regarding the Defense Department's base realignment and closure recommendations.

According to senior Pentagon officials, the department will submit the minutes reflecting its deliberative record and the extensive volume of data underpinning its recommendations to the BRAC Commission and Congress.

On May 13, defense officials released a list of the recommended closures and realignments, a summary of the selection process and a justification for each recommendation. To further support the commission and the public's understanding, the department also provided the classified force-structure plan, reports by the military departments and the joint cross-service groups, and other related documents.

At present, the digital database of supplementary data is temporarily classified Secret, but defense officials are working to declassify substantial portions of it.

The department intends to declassify as much of it as possible and to make it available to the public through the BRAC Commission, Acting Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England stated in a letter today to the Senate Armed Services Committee. The full volume of data made available will be substantially greater than was made available in prior BRAC rounds, England noted.

By the evening of May 31, the BRAC Commission, members of Congress and their staff with Secret clearances will have access to the entire digital database accessible on computers in a secure reading room in Crystal City, Arlington, Va., near BRAC Commission offices. A similar secure reading room will be established on Capitol Hill, officials said.

Defense officials will expedite interim Secret clearances as required for commission and congressional staff.

Defense officials plan to complete the security review of the supplemental data by June 4, 2005, and all unclassified portions of the database will

be made available to the public through the commission, defense officials said.

National News Articles

Hastert Casts Rare Vote To Defeat Measure Paring BRAC

Congress Daily
Journal Group, Inc.
Peter Cohn and Megan Scully
May 27, 2005

House Speaker Hastert cast the deciding vote to defeat an amendment to the fiscal 2006 Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs appropriations bill Thursday, by a surprisingly close 214-213 margin.

The amendment would have trimmed \$169 million from funding to implement the latest base realignment and closure recommendations to fund \$53 million in increases to veterans' services.

With emotions running high over the latest BRAC round and lawmakers anxious to go home for Memorial Day feeling good about their commitment to veterans, the amendment by Rep. Charlie Melancon, D-La., drew support from 19 Republicans, almost enough to pass.

In fact, the amendment appeared to have enough momentum on several occasions, but Republican leaders held the vote open for several minutes after time had elapsed to engage in a bit of arm-twisting.

"There was a little education that needed to be done," said a GOP aide.

At least four Republicans ended up switching their votes to "no" -- Reps. Rob Simmons and Nancy Johnson of Connecticut, Phil Gingrey of Georgia and Government Reform Chairman Davis -- and with Hastert entering the chamber to cast a rare vote, Melancon's spirited effort failed.

Despite having a major facility in New London, Conn., slated for closure, Simmons switched his vote because he did not want to put other areas' economic redevelopment funds in jeopardy as a result of the BRAC process, a spokesman said.

Aides to the other Republican vote-switchers could not be reached for comment by presstime.

Gingrey's district faces the closure of Naval Air Station Atlanta, but Dobbins Air Reserve Base would be expanded under the BRAC recommendations.

Meanwhile, BRAC opponents achieved a small victory with the passage of an amendment to the bill that requires the Pentagon to release all BRAC information before funds can be appropriated for base closures.

Two dozen Republican and Democratic senators sent a letter this week to Defense Secretary Rumsfeld demanding more information on his base realignment and closure recommendations, released two weeks ago.

Specifically, the senators want to see installation-specific scoring data used to determine the so-called military value of each base.

"If the department continues to delay the release of this data, communities adversely impacted by BRAC, and the BRAC commission, will be unable to assess the department's recommendations in the limited time allotted to them under BRAC law," according to the letter.

The commission must analyze Rumsfeld's recommendations and send its own list to the White House by Sept. 8.

Pentagon spokesman Glenn Flood said that department officials are scrubbing the documents for classified information before publicly releasing them.

"We have to cull through it, look at it very carefully," Flood said. "We're not trying to do this fast. We're trying to do this thoroughly."

Flood stressed that the Pentagon has provided justifications for its recommendations, as required under law.

A spokesman for the commission said the Pentagon continues to send over BRAC information for analysis.

Lawmakers who signed the letter include Missouri Republican Sens. Christopher (Kit) Bond and Jim Talent and South Dakota Sens. Tim Johnson, a Democrat, and John Thune, a Republican.

Senators seek probe of base closing timetable

CongressDaily
By Megan Scully
May 27, 2005

The chairwoman and ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee sent a letter this week alerting GAO to what they consider a failure by the Defense Department to provide timely information on its base-closing recommendations.

Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Chairwoman Collins of Maine and ranking member Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., represent the two states hit hardest by the base realignment and closure round under way.

Any delay in receiving information "obstructs the ability of Congress to undertake a substantive review of the secretary's recommendations," according to the letter.

The department has been "on notice" about the need to disclose all data since Congress authorized the base-closure round in the fiscal 2002 defense authorization law and "has no excuse for the delay," the senators wrote.

The Pentagon has said it is scrubbing all information for classified content before it releases data. Several volumes detailing its justifications for closing installations were released Monday.

As part of the BRAC process, GAO must analyze the Pentagon's recommendations, the process and reasoning behind the decisions in a report due to Congress by July 1.

In their letter, Collins and Lieberman directed GAO officials to evaluate whether the department maintained the "integrity of its decision-making process" and to look for any decisions that appear "results-oriented or preordained."

The senators also directed GAO to investigate whether the department devised accurate base-closing cost estimates and whether defense officials considered several alternatives and scenarios.

If the independent BRAC commission adopts the secretary's recommendations later this summer, the two New England states stand to lose several major installations, including Connecticut's massive New London Submarine Base and Maine's Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

Roughly 15,000 military and civilian jobs are at stake in those two states alone. In recent days, lawmakers affected by the BRAC round have stressed that they do not have adequate information to analyze the recommendations and defend their installations to the BRAC commission.

"In order to make our case, we need data from DoD," Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine, said Thursday. "The clock is ticking."

This week, Snowe introduced a bill that would halt the BRAC process if the department does not release data within seven days of the legislation's enactment.

BRAC opponents scored a small victory Thursday, when the House adopted an amendment to the fiscal 2006 Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill that requires the Pentagon to release all BRAC information before Congress provides funds for base closures.

Attempts to halt or stall the BRAC are all part of the process, said Ken Beeks, a vice president at Business Executives for National Security, a group that supports base closings. There are "political demands on these folks who are in areas that are suffering from the decisions [and they] feel obliged to fight back," Beeks said. "And so they're going to pull out the usual tools politicians have at their disposal."

Winners in 2005 base closing round celebrate gains

Congress Daily
By Michaela May
May 27, 2005

While lawmakers from Connecticut and South Dakota -- both hard hit by Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's recommended defense base closures and realignments -- are fighting to keep their bases intact, members from districts that stand to gain from the 2005 BRAC round are busy touting their successes.

Maryland stands to add more jobs than any other state, but unlike other potentially large beneficiaries, those gains are mostly civilian and contractor, rather than military, jobs. The state stands to lose 1,570 military jobs, while adding 9,012 civilian and 1,851 contractor jobs.

Fort Meade, located in the district of Democratic Rep. C.A. (Dutch) Ruppertsberger, accounts for more than half of Maryland's potential job gains from this BRAC round. Ruppertsberger, along with Democratic Rep. Benjamin Cardin, whose district is home to many Fort Meade employees, met with business leaders from Anne Arundel County soon after the recommendations were announced.

Business leaders expressed concern about the added stress on area infrastructure, especially roads, and said that planning for the influx is key, a spokeswoman for Ruppertsberger said.

President Bush's home state of Texas also expects large gains. There, Fort Bliss, located in the district of Democratic Rep. Silvestre Reyes, stands to gain 11,501 jobs -- more than any other

base, with the exception of Virginia's Fort Belvoir.

Fort Belvoir is located in the districts of Democratic Rep. James Moran and House Government Reform Chairman Davis, and is slated to gain 11,858 jobs.

In all, 22 states stand to gain from this BRAC round. Nationwide, the recommendations would cut more than 18,000 civilian jobs and nearly 11,000 military jobs, while adding nearly 3,000 contractor positions.

Since contractors shoulder the burden of their employees' benefits, adding those jobs rather than hiring civilians can save the military money.

Base Closings Will Be Fair, Bush Tells Naval Graduates

Elisabeth Bumiller
New York Times
May 27, 2005

ANNAPOLIS, Md. President Bush told nearly 1,000 graduates of the United States Naval Academy on Friday that the Pentagon's plan to close dozens of bases across the country was part of an effort to transform America's military and that the process, though hard on many local communities, would be fair.

"The military services have each done a review of their requirements, and they have concluded that we have more bases than we need," Mr. Bush said in his first public remarks on the closings since the Pentagon announced its recommendations on May 13. "Supporting these facilities wastes billions of taxpayer dollars, money that can be better spent on giving you the tools to fight terrorists and confront 21st-century threats."

On a hot, sunny morning in Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, near the edge of the Chesapeake Bay, Mr. Bush also told the class, assembled in dress whites and dress blues, that much had changed since he last addressed Annapolis graduates. At that commencement, in May 2001, he told the new officers that they

were inheriting a "safer and more peaceful" world.

"None of us imagined," he said Friday, "that a few months later we would suffer a devastating surprise attack on our homeland or that our nation would be plunged into a global war unlike any we had known before. Today we face brutal and determined enemies: men who celebrate murder, incite suicide and thirst for absolute power."

Mr. Bush, who appears strikingly younger and less gray in pictures taken at the 2001 commencement, used this year's 30-minute address to review his administration's response to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. He cited the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and new technology like the so-called thermobaric version of the Hellfire missile, which, he noted, can reach around corners and strike enemies hidden in caves.

"In the coming years," he said, "there are going to be some awfully surprised terrorists when the thermobaric Hellfire comes knocking."

The president did not directly mention the 10 Annapolis graduates who have died in military campaigns since he last addressed the academy, although he did speak generally of American casualties.

"Some of our men and women in uniform have given their lives in this cause, and others have returned home with terrible injuries," he said. "America honors their sacrifice, and we will uphold the cause they served."

Of the base closings, which would affect all 50 states, Mr. Bush said he knew firsthand about the impact on local communities.

"I was governor of Texas during the last round of base closures, when facilities were shut down in places like Lubbock and Laredo and Austin," he said. "We'll do everything possible to help affected communities make the transition as smoothly as possible, by providing economic development aid, job training and assistance with redevelopment plans for affected bases."

The process "will result in a military that is more efficient and better prepared," Mr. Bush told the graduates, "so you can better protect the American people against the dangers of this new century."

But the nine-member independent commission reviewing the Pentagon proposal has voiced skepticism about it, saying it could hurt recruiting and might not produce the promised saving, which the administration puts at \$48 billion over the next 20 years. The commission, which can add to or subtract from the list of facilities to be closed, will spend the next three months in hearings and visits to those facilities, and must submit its findings to Mr. Bush by Sept. 8. The president and Congress will then have until Nov. 7 to accept or reject those findings, but cannot modify them.

The plan came under additional fire on Friday from lawmakers of the states that would be hit hardest by it. They, and the commission's chairman, Anthony J. Principi, demanded that the Defense Department release documents in support of its recommendations, and by the end of the day Pentagon officials had promised to release most of the data next Tuesday.

The Pentagon recommendations would close, consolidate or shrink more than 800 military facilities from Maine to Hawaii, including 33 big bases. They would shut the Navy's submarine base in Groton, Conn., a move that would cost nearly 8,500 military and civilian jobs, the largest single loss in the proposal.

After Mr. Bush concluded his remarks Friday, he spent two hours standing beneath an awning on the stadium field, shaking the hands of all the graduates as they crossed a stage to receive their diplomas. Nearly three hours after the ceremony began, it ended with the traditional shout of "hip, hip, hooray" from the graduates, who tossed their hats into the air as new Navy ensigns and Marine second lieutenants.

A short time later, Mr. Bush lifted off in his helicopter, Marine One, for a Memorial Day

weekend in the Catocin Mountains at Camp David.

Military Must Adapt, Bush Tells Graduates Base Closings Are Cited As Boost to Efficiency

Washington Post
Michael A. Fletcher
May 28, 2005

President Bush offered an upbeat assessment of the war on terrorism yesterday, saying the United States is on the road to victory after toppling brutal governments in Afghanistan and Iraq, dismantling a nuclear arms network, routing terrorists and encouraging democratic reformers across the world.

"Thanks to the men and women of the United States military, our strategy is working," Bush said during a graduation address at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. "We are winning the war on terror."

Speaking before an audience of graduating midshipmen and their friends and family numbering close to 32,000, the president also defended the Pentagon's proposal to close 33 military bases and scale down 29 others across the country. He said the consolidations will save billions of dollars that can be better spent helping to fashion the military into a "faster, lighter, more agile and more lethal" force needed to battle terrorists.

Bush acknowledged that base closings are often painful to cities and towns that lose the attendant jobs and economic activity, but he said the change is an essential part of ensuring that the military meets modern challenges to the nation's security.

"To meet the new threats, we must transform our domestic force posture as well, and that will require closing and realigning military bases," Bush said.

As governor of Texas during the last round of base closings a decade ago, Bush said he saw "firsthand how hard base closings can be on

local communities." A congressionally appointed panel is reviewing the Pentagon proposal before making final decisions, and Bush promised to provide federal economic development aid, job training and redevelopment plans for communities where bases are closed.

"The process will be impartial and fair," Bush told the academy graduates. ". . . It will result in a military that is more efficient and better prepared so you can better protect the American people against the dangers of this new century."

Bush told the graduates that the Pentagon is spending hundreds of billions of dollars on new technology so that the United States can "redefine war on our terms" and ensure victory.

Still, he told the 976 graduates, the vast majority of whom are becoming officers in the Navy or Marines, technology is only as good for the strength of the military as the mentality that accompanies it. "All the advanced technology in the world will not transform our military if we do not transform our thinking," Bush said.

The graduation, held on the grass field of Navy-Marine Corps Stadium under a hazy, sunny sky, was awash in military pomp and celebration. The square-shouldered midshipmen were sharp in their dress whites and blues as they awaited their commissions as military officers.

Booming cannon blasts marked the start of the ceremony, and six Blue Angels jets performed a low, slick flyby over the stadium, adding excitement to the already buoyant crowd. The graduates offered loud cheers for one another as their names were called to receive their diplomas, with the loudest cheers reserved for colleagues who made it despite borderline grade-point averages or other setbacks.

Bush said he could relate, given his performance as a student at Yale. As he recited some of the many traditions that mark life at the academy, Bush joked: "You threw pennies at Tecumseh, the god of 2.0. I knew him pretty well when I was at school."

The president stayed through the three-hour ceremony, shaking hands and posing for pictures with every graduate. He later delighted the crowd by donning one of the class gifts to him: a blue and gold sweat suit jacket.

Despite the high spirits, the mood underlying the event was undeniably different than during Bush's last commencement speech to Naval Academy graduates, in 2001. Then, war seemed a remote prospect, not a daily reality. Bush, his face smoother, and his hair less gray, told the 2001 graduates that they were inheriting "a safer and more peaceful world."

That changed just over three months later, with the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, which were followed by the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. More than 1,600 U.S. troops have died in Iraq, and thousands of others have been wounded. Among those killed since 2001 were 10 Naval Academy graduates.

Bush briefly mentioned the mounting toll in his address, noting that "some of our men and women in uniform have given their lives in this cause, and others have returned home with terrible injuries. America honors their sacrifice, and we will uphold the cause they served."

Despite the ambivalence evidenced by Americans in public opinion polls about whether the Iraq war was worth waging, Bush insisted that it is contributing to U.S. security. He pointed to elections there and in Afghanistan as proof that the United States has liberated more than 50 million people who formerly lived under oppression, setting an example that, he said, has been noticed elsewhere.

In Central Asia and the Middle East, he said, "we are seeing a rise of a new generation whose hearts burn for freedom and they're going to have it. America is standing with these democratic reformers because we know the only force powerful enough to stop the rise of tyranny and terror, and replace hatred with hope, is the force of human freedom."

Still, the president said serious hurdles remain, including the insurgency in Iraq and the lurking

possibility that terrorists could attempt to strike anywhere, at any time.

"We face brutal and determined enemies -- men who celebrate murder, incite suicide and thirst for absolute power," Bush said. "These enemies will not be stopped by negotiations, or concessions or appeals to reason. In this war, there is only one option -- and that is victory."

Money Wasted on Unneeded Bases, Bush Says

Associated Press
Jennifer Loven
May 27, 2005

Speaking out for the first time in favor of controversial base closings, President Bush said Friday the nation is wasting billions of dollars on unnecessary military facilities and needs the money for the war on terrorism.

Bush, who faces opposition from many states to shutting down bases, tried to be reassuring. He said the bases would be chosen fairly and the government would do all it could to help affected communities recover.

But he made clear that the process _ however painful _ could not be avoided.

In a speech to graduates of the Naval Academy, he said the closings and realignments "will result in a military that is more efficient and better prepared so you can better protect the American people against the dangers of this new century."

"In this war, there is only one option and that is victory," he said, to cheers from midshipmen, relatives and faculty at the academy on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay.

When Bush last spoke at a Naval Academy commencement, it was four months before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and his focus was his administration's effort to reshape the military into a faster, lighter and more flexible _ but not larger _ fighting force.

Since the attacks, and amid a global anti-terror campaign and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, a

top-to-bottom military transformation is even more necessary, Bush said. Keys to the success are new technology, repositioning of global forces, new weapons and realigned bases at home, he said.

Bush said he understands the fears in cities where bases have been marked for changes or closure. The first round of closings in a decade has members of Congress and local officials working hard to protect the 33 major bases slated for closure and the 29 others proposed for downsizing.

"I know firsthand how hard base closings can be on local communities," said the former Texas governor who saw facilities shut down in his state.

Members of the congressionally chartered Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) will visit bases and hold hearings on the Pentagon proposal. The plan aims to save \$48.8 billion over 20 years by eliminating redundant and inefficient facilities and promoting cooperation among the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

The panel will decide on any changes to the Pentagon plan and then give a list to Bush and Congress this fall for approval or rejection.

Commission chairman Anthony Principi on Friday joined a growing chorus of lawmakers demanding that the Defense Department quickly release the thousands of pages of data backing up each of its recommendations.

"We cannot make informed decisions without the data," Principi said on Capitol Hill. "That's critical to our work."

Though all bases have defenders, Bush suggested most efforts to save them will be futile.

Luke Kelvington, left, waves to family members with President George W. Bush, right, during commencement exercises at the U.S. Naval Academy, Friday, May 27, 2005, in Annapolis, Md. Kelvington's brother Michael will graduate

from West Point this weekend. The two entered the academies in the summer before the terrorist attacks in 2001. Michael Kelvington asked former presidential candidate Ross Perot, an Annapolis graduate, to help his family travel from the Annapolis ceremonies to West Point. He agreed, and offered a chartered plane. (AP Photo/Chris Gardner) (Chris Gardner - AP)

"We have more bases than we need," Bush said. "Supporting these facilities wastes billions of taxpayers' dollars, money that can be better spent on giving you the tools to fight terrorists and confront 21st century threats."

The graduation ceremonies got under way with 21 cannon blasts and a fast and low flyover by the Blue Angels, the Navy's precision team of F/A-18 Hornets. After speaking, Bush handed out diplomas to those graduating with distinction and, remaining standing for over two hours, he shook the hands of all 976 graduates. In return, the Class of 2005 gave him Naval Academy blankets and a jogging suit, and he promptly put on the jacket in place of his suit jacket.

The graduates, like decades of others before them, hurled their white hats into the blue sky.

In his 30-minute address, the president sought to inspire the midshipmen who were about to become military officers and future leaders of the country's armed forces.

"Show courage, and not just on the battlefield. Pursue the possibilities others tell you do not exist," he said. "The opponents of change are many and its champions are few, but the champions of change are the ones who make history. Be champions, and you'll make America safer for your children and your grandchildren, and you'll add to the character of our nation."

Bush thanked those whom he had addressed on the same field four years earlier and who went on to serve in operations around the globe. He recounted the wartime deeds of several by name, and one whose name he said he could not reveal because he was now a Navy SEAL.

"They are serving our nation with valor and distinction," Bush said, "and soon you'll join them."

Bush: base closings painful but crucial

Associated Press

May 27, 2005

Downsizing military bases is a painful but crucial step in the process of transforming the U.S. military into the kind of fighting force especially suited for this age of terror, President Bush told Naval Academy graduates Friday.

An unidentified Naval Academy graduate points out his family to President Bush on Friday.

Mark Wilson, Getty Images

"We have more bases than we need," Bush said in a commencement address to the academy's Class of 2005. "Supporting these facilities wastes billions of taxpayer dollars — money that can be better spent on giving you the tools to fight terrorists and confront 21st-century threats."

The graduation ceremonies got under way with 21 cannon blasts and a fast and low flyover by the Blue Angels, the Navy's precision jet team. Six F/A-18 Hornets streaked in formation above the Navy-Marine Corps Stadium packed with thousands of cheering graduates, relatives and faculty.

Before he spoke, ebullient midshipmen got several rousing rounds of "the wave" going around the stadium at this prestigious academy on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay.

When Bush last spoke at a Naval Academy commencement, it was four months before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and his focus was the top-to-bottom reshaping of the military into a faster, lighter, more flexible and more high-tech, but not necessarily larger, force.

That transformation is even more necessary now, Bush said, because of the attacks, and the two wars — in Afghanistan and Iraq —

launched since. Technology, a massive redeployment plan and next-generation weapons are key to the transformation, he said.

"In this era of surprise, we cannot know for certain who might attack us or where or when," he said. "But we can anticipate how we might be attacked and we can transform our capabilities to defend our citizens and deliver justice to our enemies."

He added: "In this war, there is only one option and that is victory."

Bush also spoke for the first time publicly about how the process of closing bases fits into that larger vision, despite the fears in many military communities that he said he well understood.

"I know firsthand how hard base closings can be on local communities," said the former Texas governor who saw facilities shut down in his state.

He promised an "impartial and fair" process as a congressionally chartered commission reviews the Pentagon's sweeping proposal for closing or downsizing dozens of military bases large and small. The first round of base closings in a decade seeks to save \$48.8 billion over 20 years by eliminating redundancy, streamlining services across the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps, shutting down bases deemed inefficient and promoting cooperation among the four branches.

Meanwhile, Anthony Principi, chairman of that commission, said Friday the panel can't do its job unless the Pentagon quickly releases detailed data on its recommendations.

Principi joined a growing chorus of Congress members and state and local officials demanding that the Defense Department release thousands of pages of data on each base that it has recommended for closure or realignment. Lawmakers hope to use the information to persuade Principi's commission to remove bases from the Pentagon's hit list.

"It needs to be soon," said Principi as he left a Capitol Hill meeting with officials from Maine and New Hampshire. "We cannot make informed decisions about the data, and that's critical to our work."

The panel will spend the next few months deciding whether to change the proposal before sending it to Bush and Congress this fall.

"It will result in a military that is more efficient and better prepared so you can better protect the American people against the dangers of this new century," Bush said.

Bush, maintaining his tradition of rotating between the service academies for commencement ceremonies, also sought to inspire the military's future leaders.

Before the 976 graduates hurled their starched white hats into the blue sky and left the academy for their new status as military officers, Bush offered thanks for the many he addressed on the same field four years ago — people who now are serving in difficult military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. He recounted the brave deeds of several by name, and one whose name he said he could not reveal.

"Americans are grateful to have such brave defenders," Bush said. "They are serving our nation with valor and distinction and soon you'll join them."

"You will make America proud," he added.

The president softened up the crowd with a few jokes — some at his expense.

"You threw pennies at Tecumseh, the god of 2.0. I knew him pretty well when I was in school," Bush joked, recalling his own academic mediocrity at Yale University.

He also brought what he said was his graduation gift to the class, a traditional offering at this event: absolution for all those on restriction for missing curfew or breaking other rules of conduct. That got a big cheer.

It was Bush's second and final commencement speech of 2005. Last Saturday, he spoke to the Calvin College graduating class in Grand Rapids, Mich.

After the graduation, Bush was traveling by helicopter to the Camp David presidential retreat in Maryland for the weekend. He is scheduled to return to Washington for Memorial Day events on Monday.

Military Must Adapt to Terror Era, Bush Says

The imperative to redeploy resources, including closing bases, has grown since 9/11, the president tells Naval Academy graduates.

LA Times

Warren Vieth,

May 28, 2005

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — President Bush told U.S. Naval Academy graduates Friday that the war on terrorism has heightened the need to transform the military by closing unneeded bases at home, adopting new deployment strategies abroad and spending more on advanced weaponry.

Bush said much had changed since he spoke to graduating midshipmen in May 2001, four months before the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. At the time, he called for a sweeping military overhaul to "to help us keep the peace" in the post-Cold War era.

In Friday's address to the class of 2005, Bush said that the U.S.-led offensives in Afghanistan and Iraq had underscored the importance of building a "21st century military" that relied more on mobility, speed and technology than on sheer size and strength.

"We need you to take on two different missions at once," Bush told the 976 new Navy and Marine Corps officers, who were dressed in starched white uniforms and sitting in folding chairs on the grass playing field of the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium.

"We need you to defeat the terrorists who want to destroy what we stand for and how we live,"

Bush said. "At the same time, we need you to transform our military for the 21st century, so we can deter and defeat the new adversaries who may threaten our people in the decades ahead."

A necessary part of that process, Bush said, was the closing or consolidating of dozens of military bases across the country, even over the objections of communities that rely on the facilities for employment and economic activity.

Two weeks ago, the Pentagon proposed closing 33 major domestic bases and downsizing 29 others. It presented its recommendations to the independent Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which is to refine the list after visiting the sites and hearing from officials there. The final roster will go to Congress, which will be permitted to accept or reject it in its entirety but not to amend it.

"The military services have each done a review of their requirements, and they have concluded that we have more bases than we need," Bush said. "Supporting these facilities wastes billions of taxpayer dollars, money that can be better spent on giving you the tools to fight terrorists and confront 21st century threats."

Compared with four previous rounds of base closings dating to 1988, California would fare well under the latest Pentagon recommendations. However, many other states and communities are protesting the economic hardship they would incur under massive closures.

Bush said he knew firsthand the trauma of base closings because he was governor of Texas when the last round shut down bases in Lubbock, Laredo and Austin. He promised that this year's round of base closings would be "impartial and fair" and that they would save \$48 billion over the next 20 years.

"We'll do everything possible to help affected communities make the transition as smoothly as possible, by providing economic development aid, job training and assistance with redevelopment plans," he said.

In his remarks, Bush sought to restate, in the context of the war on terrorism, the military transformation campaign he outlined four years ago.

The president said the plans involved the gradual reduction of Cold War-era troop deployments overseas and increased spending on high-technology weapons.

The Iraq war called into question some of the assumptions underlying the administration's initial restructuring mandate. Bush came into office eschewing the kind of peacekeeping missions that characterized the Clinton era. Yet in Iraq, the Pentagon found it needed more troops for a longer period of time than initially envisioned.

In a sign that his remarks were intended for a broader audience of U.S. military officials, some of whom had questioned the wisdom of the overhaul launched by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, Bush said the changes he had in mind required a new attitude on the part of the officer corps.

"Transformation requires more than high-tech weapons," he said. "It requires creativity, ingenuity and a willingness to try new things. All the advanced technology in the world will not transform our military if we do not transform our thinking."

Bush praised the valor of several members of the 2001 graduating class, including Midshipman Bobby Rashad Jones, the designated "anchorman" because he had the lowest grade-point average. Jones went on to serve as a deck officer on the amphibious assault ship *Germantown*, which ensured the safe landing of Marines during counter-terrorist operations in the Philippines, Bush said.

Jones, who gave the president an unexpected bear hug after receiving his commission in 2001, attended Friday's ceremony. "Four years later, my ribs still hurt," Bush told him. "So don't get any ideas."

After delivering his 30-minute address, Bush spent two hours shaking hands and posing for photographs with each of the graduates as they crossed the stage to receive their diplomas. The class comprised 148 women and 828 men, survivors of an initial group of 1,239 inductees.

The 3 1/2 -hour ceremony began with a 21-round cannon salute and a low-altitude flyover by the Blue Angels flight team, and ended with the traditional farewell of the new graduates, who shouted "hip hip hurray" as they tossed their white hats into the air. Later, they were to trade their midshipman anchors for the shoulder boards of a Navy ensign or the gold bars of a Marine Corps second lieutenant.

Bush was the 17th president to deliver a commencement address to Naval Academy graduates, a practice that began in 1869 with Ulysses S. Grant.

Friday's speech was his second commencement address this month. He had urged graduates of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., to become involved in public service by working with government, civic groups or religious organizations.

Senators Seek More Data on Base Closings

Associated Press
Lolita C. Baldor
May 27, 2005

Senators scrambling to head off proposed military base closings in their states are pressing Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld to release all the data used to decide which bases to shut down.

Nearly two dozen senators from Maine to Nevada have signed a letter that will go to Rumsfeld today, saying they need to know how the Pentagon ranked the bases and determined their military value.

Governors from 14 states, meanwhile, sent a similar letter to President Bush yesterday, asking

him to direct Rumsfeld to release all the information and request a delay in the base-closing process until the information is made available and there has been time for review.

Federal statute, said the governors, requires that the information be delivered no more than seven days after the list of proposed closings is released. The list was made public May 13.

In their letter, the senators noted that "Congress designed this process to be open and transparent."

In recent hearings, Defense Department officials said military value was a key factor in deciding which bases would close. They described the scores given to some bases, but they have not yet released backup material.

Members of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission (BRAC) began visiting bases this week. They have scheduled the first regional hearings on the closings for early next month.

"If the Department continues to delay the release of this data, communities adversely impacted by BRAC, and the BRAC commission, will be unable to assess the Department's recommendations in the limited time allotted to them," the bipartisan group of senators said in the letter.

They further wrote: "We urge you to release this data immediately to avoid undermining the BRAC process."

Among the senators who signed the letter were Christopher S. Bond (R-Mo.), Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine), Susan Collins (R-Maine), Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.), Russell Feingold (D-Wis.), John F. Kerry (D-Mass.), Democratic leader Harry M. Reid (Nev.), John Thune (R-S.D.) and James M. Talent (R-Mo.). The Missouri congressional delegation sent the same letter earlier this week.

Defense Department spokesman Glenn Flood said the material will be released but it is going through security checks because some information is classified.

"We realize the concern," he said. "We're working very hard on it."

Members of the base-closing commission are visiting eight bases in five states next week, including Naval Station New London in Groton, Conn.; Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine; Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod, Mass.; Willow Grove Naval Air Station in Pennsylvania; and Fort Monmouth in New Jersey. They were completing a three-day visit to Virginia yesterday.

At least four members of the panel plan to tour the Groton base, including Chairman Anthony J. Principi. Two members are heading to the Portsmouth shipyard, and one member -- retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd Newton -- is to tour Otis.

A plan announced May 13 would close 33 major bases and downsize 29 others, saving an estimated \$48 billion over 20 years.

Pentagon to Release Data on Base Closings

Associated Press
Lolita Baldor
May 27, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Under fire from Congress, the Defense Department on Friday promised to give lawmakers access by next Tuesday to detailed material backing up its recommendations to shut down about 180 military installations across the country.

Parts of the report are classified, so the Pentagon said lawmakers and staff with security clearances who want to see the classified information must review that data at a secure location in northern Virginia.

The announcement comes in the wake of increasing demands from lawmakers and state and local officials for the release of what will be an unprecedented amount of data in defense of the base closing plan. Lawmakers hope to use the information to persuade the independent commission reviewing the base closings to remove certain installations from the hit list.

With the first hearing two weeks away, there was unease about how much community officials will be able to see.

"It is of great concern to me that the installation-specific data the Pentagon used to prepare its (base closing) recommendations will not reach the level of transparency that our communities need," said Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, an Armed Services Committee member.

Phil Grone, the deputy undersecretary of defense for installations and environment, met with key Congress members Friday to explain why the data release is taking so long, and how lawmakers will be able to review the material.

Grone said the entire database will be available to lawmakers by the end of the workday Tuesday, and by June 4, all unclassified material will be available to the public.

Pentagon spokesman Glenn Flood said the majority of material will be unclassified. He said the amount of data in this round of base closings -- the fifth round since 1988 -- was 100 times greater than any previous round.

Grone's announcement comes the same day the base closing commission chairman, Anthony Principi, said the panel can't do its job unless the material is released promptly.

"It needs to be soon," he said. "We cannot make informed decisions without the data, and that's critical to our work."

Lawmakers and governors also have sent letters to the Pentagon and to President Bush pleading for the material. Congress members have been gathering support for legislation that would delay the base closing process.

Veterans feel abandoned over cuts in medical benefits

Knight Ridder Newspapers
Joseph L. Galloway
28 May, 2005

It was, I suppose, as inevitable as bluebonnets in a Texas spring: On the eve of Memorial Day a class-action lawsuit was filed against Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on behalf of more than 1,000 residents of the Armed Forces Retirement Home in our nation's capital.

The complaint of the plaintiffs -- whose average age is 76 and whose average term of service is more than 20 years in the military -- is that Rumsfeld is responsible for "drastic cuts" in their medical services.

The lawsuit, titled *Cody et al. v. Rumsfeld*, was filed this week in Federal District Court in Washington. It demanded that Rumsfeld restore all the medical benefits that have been reduced or eliminated.

It states that during the last two years, in the name of cost-cutting by the Defense Department, the veterans at the old soldiers home have faced the closure of the facility's primary treatment room with its 24/7 physician on duty; closure of the on-site pharmacy; elimination of on-site X-ray services; a shortage of even basic medical supplies; and elimination of mortuary services.

The final blow seemingly was last week's announcement that Rumsfeld had included nearby Walter Reed Army Hospital on the list of facilities to be shut down and done away with under Base Realignment and Closures.

The lawsuit says the old veterans were promised "a model retirement community" when they moved in and were told that under the law the Defense Department was required to provide residents with "high-quality, on-site medical and dental care."

It says with the closure of the primary treatment room, anyone needing medical care after 4 p.m. has limited options: a phone consultation with a nurse or an emergency call to 911. Should an emergency require off-site treatment, the residents are required to pay for transportation themselves.

With closure of the on-site pharmacy and X-ray facilities, the veterans are sent to Walter Reed Hospital for their pills and pictures. When that closes, they say, they will have to travel farther to commercial facilities.

Homer Rutherford, a retiree with 23 years' service on Air Force medical evacuation flights in Europe, Korea and Vietnam, said: "The residents are extremely upset and, quite frankly, confused by this treatment. We feel betrayed."

Steve McManus, financial officer of the retirement home, said that changes had been made in medical and dental services for the veterans, but he declared that the changes are for the better.

He confirmed that pharmacy services are now contracted out, but said that when a doctor writes a prescription for one of the veterans it is phoned to the contractor who delivers it during three-times-a-week deliveries. He added that in the past inspectors had criticized the home for failings in its pharmacy operations.

McManus said five physicians' assistants' jobs had been eliminated, but two nurse-practitioners work in their place, and four full-time physicians are available. "You know, four doctors for 1,000 patients isn't all that bad now, is it?"

Maybe so, but it sure is hard to look good when old veterans started calling you Scrooge and mistake your carefully thought out "alignment and adjustment" for penny-pinching. The government isn't going to win this one, public relations-wise. No way.

The Armed Forces Retirement Home in Washington is one of two operated under auspices of the Defense Department. The other is located in Gulfport, Miss. Ninety-five percent of the retirees served in a combat theater -- the majority of them World War II veterans, with Korean War veterans next, and a small minority veterans of Vietnam.

The Bush administration and Defense Department have had their problems in the past

with the nation's veterans, and they seem only to be getting worse.

Veterans groups complain that the new chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, Republican Rep. Steve Buyer of Indiana, wants to cut Veterans Administration health care and disability benefits for many of the veterans the VA begged to enroll only a few years ago.

Buyer says VA health care should focus on indigent veterans and veterans whose disabilities are due to combat injuries. Annual fees for enrolling in VA health care for everyone are being increased.

The fact that the Republican caucus threw out a friend of veterans, Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., and installed the blunt-spoken Buyer in his place didn't make the Republican Party a lot of new friends among veterans. The lawsuit against the administration by folks in the old soldiers' home is just the finishing touch.

Base Closure chairman cancels Tuesday Willow Grove visit

Associated Press
Kimberly Hefling
28 May, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission said Friday that its chairman would not visit Willow Grove Naval Air Station on Tuesday as previously planned.

BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi is tentatively scheduled to visit on July 6 instead.

People who opposed closing the station had been planning a rally during Principi's visit. It was not immediately clear if that rally would be held on Tuesday anyway.

Willow Grove, which employs more than 1,200 people, is one of 13 military installations in Pennsylvania the Pentagon recommended on May 13 should be closed.

The 1,100-acre based outside Philadelphia is home to the 913th Airlift Wing, which trains and

equips reservists to perform aerial resupply, and also provides air logistic support for active and reserve Navy units.

The nine-member base closure commission has pledged to visit all bases slated for closure or major realignment under the plan announced by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld.

Principi, a former Veteran Affairs secretary, has said the visits are a way for commission members to determine what activities happen at a base, how the Pentagon recommendations would affect the base, and whether the base closure criteria were used correctly.

The Pentagon plan would close 33 major bases and downsize 29 others, saving an estimated \$48 billion over 20 years.

The base closure commission must report its decisions to President Bush by Sept. 8. The decisions become law 45 days later unless Congress enacts a joint resolution rejecting them; it can reject them in whole but not in part.

On June 21, a member of the commission is scheduled to visit the Pittsburgh International Airport Air Reserve Station, which the Pentagon also recommended should be closed.

No other visits have been scheduled in Pennsylvania, said Robert McCreary, a commission spokesman.

In addition to the 13 military installations recommended for closure in Pennsylvania, the Pentagon also recommended downsizing five others in the state and adding workers in five more. Pennsylvania would see a net loss of 1,658 military and civilian jobs under the proposal.

This is the fifth base closure round since 1988, and the first since 1995. Pennsylvania lost 16,500 jobs in the other four base closure rounds.

Air Force wants to strip planes from Air National Guard

Hearst Newspapers
Eric Rosenberg
28 May, 2005

In a major redesign of the Air Force, the service wants to strip aircraft from one-third of its Air National Guard units and either retire the planes outright or ship them to other bases around the country.

All told, 166 aircraft in 28 of 88 Air National Guard (ANG) units would be removed under the plan, which was included as part of the Pentagon's recent base closure recommendations.

This tally includes 35 C-130 airlift transports, 26 KC-135 aerial tankers and 105 F-16 fighters.

Under the plan, an as-yet-undefined number of units might gain other roles, such as operating unmanned aircraft, or other piloted aircraft.

The ANG provides nearly half of the Air Force's tactical airlift, combat communications, aeromedical evacuation and refueling duties. With its force of jet fighters, the ANG has total responsibility for air defense of U.S. skies.

ANG supporters claim that such a move would be a devastating blow at time when the service is shouldering a heavy burden in Iraq, Afghanistan and the air defense of the continental United States. ANG officials also worry that the service would lose pilots, crews and maintenance technicians if the cuts are accepted by the nine-member independent Base Realignment and Closure commission, known as BRAC.

The BRAC panel is now conducting hearings around the nation about the Pentagon's recommendations.

'A fiasco'

The ANG - like the Army National Guard - has two roles: Units are under the command of state governors during peacetime, but the president may call the units to active duty during war, as

in the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Retired Air Force Gen. Stephen Koper, president of the National Guard Association of the United States, called the Air Force proposals "a fiasco." The organization represents 45,000 Air and Army National Guard officers.

"This isn't right, and it is not the right way to go," Koper said in an interview, adding that the 28 units "will be essentially put out of business."

Air Force Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, president of the Adjutants General Association, which represents Army and Air National Guard leaders in the 50 states, the District of Columbia and three U.S. territories, called the proposals "shocking."

While the Air Force proposes stripping the Guard units of their aircraft, the service would retain skeleton support crews at the 28 bases.

Although the bases technically would remain open, "they are taken down to almost nothing," Lempke, the adjutant general for Nebraska, said in an interview.

Sen. Christopher Bond, R-Mo., said the Air Force's recommendations are "absolutely stunning," adding that so many units are being stripped of aircraft that the service's ability to provide protection over U.S. cities could be compromised.

Bond accused the regular Air Force of treating the Air National Guard like "an unwanted stepchild."

The Air Force defends the proposals as necessary to make the service leaner and better equipped for fighting future enemies.

Acting Air Force Secretary Michael Dominguez defended the recommendation. The ANG needs to be consolidated at fewer locales because it is too dispersed - "not ... an effective and efficient way to operate an expeditionary Air Force," he told the base closing commission earlier this month.

He added that the active duty Air Force, not the ANG, had withstood the brunt of the closures in previous base closing rounds in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995.

Gen. John Jumper, the Air Force chief of staff, told the commission that units that lose their aircraft may eventually gain other duties such as piloting robot aircraft or managing space systems.

ANG leaders complain that they were cut out of senior-level meetings of active duty Air Force officers who helped select which bases to close while mapping out future Air Force plans.

Among the proposals

* F-16s based at Fort Smith Regional Airport in Arkansas would be divided between retirement and a base in Fresno, Calif.

* F-16s at Springfield-Beckley Municipal Airport in Ohio, would be divided between a base in Des Moines, Iowa, and retirement.

* All F-16s based at the Duluth International Airport would be retired.

* The C-130 transports at New Castle County Airport in Delaware would be split up and sent to Charlotte, N.C., and Savannah, Ga.

* KC-135 tankers in Meridian, Miss., would be sent to facilities in Wisconsin, Tennessee and Maine, while KC-135s stationed at Niagara Falls, N.Y., also would go to Maine.

The ANG argues that these cuts would hurt the recruitment of new airmen and retention of existing personnel.

Pilots, crews and mechanics, most of whom have full-time jobs in their local communities, may not want to travel to distant facilities to train, Lempke says.

The active duty Air Force concedes the point.

"It's one of the inevitable consequences of this kind of action," Dominguez said of potential retention problems. But he added that skills in any unit can be recreated in other locales. "It just takes some time ... but we can do that," he told the base closing panel.

The argument is gaining some traction on the base closing commission.

"Many on this commission believe that the recruitment of Guard and Reservists ... is going to become more and more difficult," Commissioner James Bilbray told Dominguez and Jumper at a recent hearing.

The commission has until Sept. 8 to review base-closing proposals. The president has until Sept. 23 to either send them back to the panel for revisions or to forward them to Congress where the lawmakers have 45 work days to vote the list down in its entirety. If that doesn't happen, the list of base closings goes into effect. Past commissions have approved some 80 percent to 85 percent of Pentagon recommendations.

While the commission has the authority to reverse the Pentagon recommendations, Koper conceded that time is short. "It's early in third quarter," he said.

Local News Articles

Proposed Va. Job Shifts Assailed Civil Servants Might Quit Under Base Plan, Officials Say

Washington Post
Jamie Stockwell
May 28, 2005

The military's plan to move more than 20,000 jobs from the inner suburbs of Virginia could result in a depletion of the area's civilian workforce, even though many of the jobs will remain within driving distance, Virginia's political leaders said yesterday.

In an unusual bipartisan showing, Gov. Mark R. Warner (D), Sens. George Allen (R) and John

W. Warner (R) and Rep. James P. Moran Jr. (D) held a news conference to point out what they said were flaws in the Pentagon's plan to move the jobs as part of its base realignment proposal.

Many of the civil servants live and enjoy recreational activities in the communities where they work, the officials said, and might not be willing to commute the extra 10 miles to Fort Belvoir in Fairfax County or the 30 miles to Fort Meade in Anne Arundel County.

"Even moving jobs those 10 or 30 miles away might cause us to lose 50 percent of our civilians," the governor said, speaking of the 15,754 civil servants who might be relocated from the 4 million square feet of leased office space in Arlington and Alexandria.

The proposed changes could spur many of the region's smartest and most skilled civilians to leave their jobs, he said, and disrupt the efficiency that comes from having so many defense jobs clustered around the Pentagon.

"These jobs only add to the effectiveness" of the military, Warner said after the news conference outside the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's headquarters on South Clark Street in Arlington. "How does [this] help our nation's security if the best and the brightest don't want to move?" The officials had attended a commission meeting before the news conference.

Although the expectation is that the civil servants would move with military personnel to their new posts, the state's elected leaders said, many might opt otherwise, deciding that the extra miles, which could translate into an hourlong drive, would be too frustrating. Up to 50 percent could quit, according to some estimates, Warner said.

The officials said they remain committed to finding alternatives to the proposed changes, released two weeks ago. Under the plan, Arlington and Alexandria would be the hardest-hit jurisdictions in the area, losing almost 23,000 defense workers, nearly 16,000 of them civilians.

"There might be other, better ways of doing this," Allen said.

In all, the Pentagon's plan would eliminate or reduce forces at more than 60 military installations across the country, with the aim of consolidating more distant operations and saving \$49 billion over 20 years.

Northern Virginia officials had expected job losses because the leased office buildings do not meet new Pentagon security requirements that Defense Department installations be set back at least 82 feet from traffic as protection from roadside bombs.

Under the plan, Fort Belvoir, Fairfax County's largest employer, stands to gain more than 18,000 civilian and military employees. Nearly 5,400 would move to Fort Meade.

Though many of the jobs would remain in the area, worsened traffic might dampen people's desire to stay with the Defense Department, the officials suggested yesterday. Traffic congestion is a serious problem around Fort Belvoir, for example, prompting officials to discuss extending Metrorail to the post and petitioning the federal government to pay for it.

The base closing commission, which is reviewing the Pentagon's plan, has until Sept. 8 to produce a final list that President Bush must accept or reject in its entirety and forward to Congress.

Allen said much of the time at yesterday's commission meeting was spent discussing the cost savings of moving from the buildings in Arlington and Alexandria, not the potential security threats that were raised two weeks ago.

"Our view is that it will cost more to move," he said.

If the plan goes through, the changes would take effect over the next six years. Arlington leaders have said that the county would lose about 10 percent of its employee and commercial office base.

Pepper Worried About Defense Exodus
Washington Post
May 26, 2005

Alexandria Vice Mayor Redella S. "Del" Pepper (D) says the city is bracing for significant losses if the Defense Department follows through with its plan to move thousands of jobs out of Arlington and Alexandria. The Pentagon wants to vacate the office space it leases in buildings that don't conform to new anti-terrorism standards.

While Arlington stands to lose the most -- about 20,000 jobs and 10 percent of its employee and commercial office base -- Alexandria officials say the moves proposed by the Pentagon also could seriously damage the city's economy.

Alexandria officials last week estimated that 7,500 to 10,000 jobs could be lost from the city if the Pentagon's base realignment and closure recommendations are approved. The final list must be submitted to Congress by Sept. 23.

If the recommendations go forward, Alexandria planners estimate that 1.2 million square feet of office space could be vacated at 13 sites across the city.

"This is really a serious situation, and it's going to be a hardship for Alexandria," said Pepper, who represents the City Council on the Northern Virginia Regional Commission and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, both of which held conference calls with local leaders last week to discuss the proposed exodus.

"You can be sure that we are really worried," Pepper said. "We'll be doing everything we can to see if we can get some of these buildings off of the [relocation] list."

Pepper said the loss of Defense Department leases and employees isn't the only thing concerning city officials and planners. There is a very real fear, she said, that government contractors will follow the federal employees they serve and leave the area.

As a result, Pepper said the city is going to stay focused on the issue and compete to fill open leases.

"Arlington is going to be moving heaven and earth to move [tenants] into its office buildings" as vacancies occur, Pepper said. "Alexandria, of course, would like to do the same."

**Shut bases could get nuclear waste
A \$15.5m funding plan allows for
reprocessing**

Boston Globe
Susan Milligan
May 28, 2005

Closed military bases could become repositories for nuclear waste under a little-noticed section of a spending bill that was passed by the House this week, exacerbating the fears of local lawmakers who are fighting the scheduled closure of four of New England's biggest bases.

The energy and water bill from the House Appropriations Committee includes \$15.5 million for reprocessing of nuclear waste from power plants and construction of an interim nuclear waste dump. The legislation does not specify where that dump would be. But the Appropriations Committee report, which explains the bill, suggests that mothballed military bases be considered as potential sites for the waste.

Lawmakers said the idea adds to the pain of a region that faces the loss of 14,500 jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars if the recommendations by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission are adopted.

Maine lawmakers met yesterday with the chairman of the BRAC to plead for Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, which is on the closure list, and the Brunswick Naval Air Station which is to be "realigned," or shrunk.

"I'm very, very concerned about this. Our citizens would be very upset," Maine Governor John Baldacci said when he was shown the committee report language. He said he had been unaware of the proposal, and "to think that

someone could put nuclear waste there. . .is outrageous."

Also slated for closure are Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod and the New London Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Conn. All told, the closures in New England would represent half of the 29,000 job losses nationwide under the closure plan.

Meanwhile, under fire from Congress, the Defense Department promised yesterday to give lawmakers access by next Tuesday to detailed material backing up its recommendations to shut down about 180 military installations across the country. Parts of the report are classified, so the Pentagon said legislators and staff with security clearances must review that data at a secure location in northern Virginia.

The announcement comes in the wake of increasing demands from lawmakers and state and local officials for the release of what will be an unprecedented amount of data in defense of the base closing plan. Lawmakers hope to use the information to persuade the independent commission reviewing the base closings to remove certain installations from the hit list.

Representative Edward J. Markey, Democrat of Malden, said the proposal to put nuclear waste on closed bases was an insult to local communities that face a hardship from the job losses attached to the closings. "Congratulations -- you may have lost your military facility, but you may be the winner of nuclear waste coming to your community," Markey said.

He sought to kill the idea of temporary nuclear waste dumps by defunding it in the energy and water bill, but his amendment was defeated, 312 to 110. The report language emphasizes the need to find interim sites for nuclear waste while the nation awaits the opening of a permanent nuclear waste repository. Yucca Mountain, in the Nevada desert, has been selected for permanent commercial nuclear waste disposal, but administrative and court actions have delayed the opening until at least 2012.

Sites such as shut military bases and other federally owned lands would be more cost-effective as temporary nuclear waste sites than privately owned parcels since they are federally owned and have security systems in place, the report said. It did not recommend any bases by name or location, or indicate a preference between bases that have been closed and those facing closure.

Other federal locations would also be considered, said Sara Perkins, a spokeswoman for Representative David Hobson, the Ohio Republican who filed the Appropriations Committee report. They include the Savannah River site in South Carolina and the site in Hanford, Wash. Both were used for nuclear weapons development by the federal government. Currently, the two sites do not accept commercial nuclear waste, a Department of Energy official said.

As for the shuttered military sites, "some communities may look at that as something they may be able to compete for because of the jobs it could bring," Perkins said.

Mike Waldron, a Department of Energy spokesman, said the agency "is reviewing the proposal."

"However, we believe that a permanent geological repository is the right policy for America," he said, underscoring the administration's determination to open Yucca Mountain as a permanent site.

The issue fuels concern among environmentalists about the health and safety of residents near closed bases. President Bush last month suggested putting oil refineries on shuttered bases. The energy bill approved by the House last month would limit the state and local role in issuing permits for refineries -- a provision opposed by local officials.

Environmental activists are also concerned about language in the Department of Defense authorization legislation making its way through Congress. The DOD is required by law to clean up closed military sites, many of which have

accumulated toxins from handling radioactive material and lead paint among other substances, said Phil Clapp, president of the National Environmental Trust.

The Senate version of the Defense Department's bill says the fund for realignment and closures should be the "sole source" of funds to clean up the sites. Such language could be interpreted to mean that the Pentagon isn't responsible for cleanup once the BRAC funds are exhausted, or the fund is retired, Clapp said.

"There is literally no way of calculating how many billions -- or even up to a trillion dollars -- how much liability would be dumped on state and local governments for clean-up," Clapp said. "It's saying, 'once it's [depleted], that's your problem'," he said.

The House language states that the Defense Department cannot shirk its obligation to clean up contaminated former military sites. A Democratic House energy staff member said a revised House version made the language explicit once lawmakers realized it might free the Pentagon from responsibility to clean up the sites.

A BRAC spokesman did not return calls seeking comment.

Baldacci joined other Maine lawmakers yesterday in a group appeal to Anthony Principi, chairman of the BRAC Commission. The lawmakers said that the Department of Defense has not produced the data, and that the documentation is required under law to support the closure decisions.

"This is typical stonewalling and obfuscation by the Department of Defense on base closings," Senator Olympia J. Snowe, Republican of Maine, said after the meetings. Senator Susan M. Collins, Republican of Maine, said Principi "seemed alarmed at some of the information we gave him" about the security implications of closing the Maine facilities.

Gov.'s Group Vows to Fight Base Closings in State

LA Times

Eric Bailey and Tony Perry

May 27, 2005

SACRAMENTO — Officials of a group assembled by the governor to fight any effort by the federal government to close military bases in the state vowed a vigorous campaign Thursday, including politicking in the corridors of power in Washington.

The base closure process is supposed to be immune from politics, but former Rep. Leon Panetta, co-chairman of the California Council on Base Support and Retention, said keeping politics out of anything in Washington was nearly impossible.

"Having been in Washington for 30 years, I know there isn't any process that's completely closed," he told reporters at a Capitol briefing.

Gov. Schwarzenegger has vowed that California will present a more unified front than it did in 1995 during the last round of base closings, when the state lost more Department of Defense jobs than the rest of the U.S. combined, according to a report by the Washington-based California Institute for Federal Policy Research. Since 1988, 24 major bases in the state have been closed.

"What we do not want is to repeat the mistakes of the past," said Panetta.

Panetta noted that California lawmakers from both major political parties serve as chairs of congressional committees on rules, appropriations, armed services and ways and means. The members of the California delegation "seem to be very unified," Panetta said. "This is one where we could have a bipartisan effort and mean it."

The state has 62 major facilities with 188,104 military and civilian employees, more than any other state. The Department of Defense payroll and contract value for California tops \$42 billion.

The Defense Department is set to release its proposed list of closures and realignments on May 16. The list then goes to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, appointed by President Bush, which will hold hearings before submitting its own list to Bush by Sept. 23. If the president approves the list, it will be forwarded to Congress.

In 1995, when communities were largely left to mount their own lobbying efforts, the state lost 16,362 military and civilian jobs due to base closures. The rest of the country, combined, lost 15,058.

Panetta said the state would emphasize California's "military assets," such as mountain ranges, deserts and an ocean for training purposes, as well as universities, research institutes and private industries often called on for assistance.

Panetta said the governor was "very engaged in this process.... He's ready to do whatever it takes." In the past rounds of base closures, California's arguments "were not made very effectively," he said.

N.J. town rallies against closing

Baltimore Sun Staff
Melissa Harris
May 28, 2005

EATONTOWN, N.J. - On the more-than-1,000-acre Fort Monmouth military base, Michael Brunskill and thousands of other civilian engineers develop the latest in electronic warfare, including computers that jam detonators on car bombs and flares that veer shoulder-fired missiles off course.

If the Pentagon gets its way, most of these high-salary, high-tech jobs would move to the Baltimore region over the next several years as part of a nationwide downsizing and reorganization of the military.

But Brunskill and fellow workers are doing their best to thwart Maryland's most controversial

gain: a proposal that would bring thousands of employees from Fort Monmouth to the Aberdeen Proving Ground just two hours south.

"I will absolutely not move," said Brunskill, 49, the chief of a team of 70 engineers who build systems that protect soldiers from surface-to-air missiles. "My son is the quarterback of the high school football team. I'm not going to take that away from him when I can easily find employment elsewhere."

To reverse the Pentagon's proposal to a nine-member base-closing commission, leaders in the Fort Monmouth area have launched a political and publicity offensive.

They've held "Save Our Fort" rallies, hired consultants to assess the plan's economic damage, asked citizens to write letters and formed a "Patriots Alliance" of local defense contractors.

Every worker who quits or retires early would add thousands of dollars in recruitment costs to Fort Monmouth's closure. That would bolster arguments from New Jersey officials, who say that the large number of people expected to stay behind would so disrupt the fort's research efforts that the move wouldn't save a dime.

Maryland officials said that they expect a tough fight from Fort Monmouth - which has saved some of its jobs from being shipped off in the past - but the threats from its workers do not worry them.

"There are people here who can replace them," said Aris Melissaratos, Maryland's secretary for economic development and the leader of Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr.'s two-year-old council to protect the state's military jobs. "We have the workforce depth. We're satisfying some of the Army's electronic warfare needs already."

Stephen Fuller, an economist at George Mason University, said that his study of a similar move of Pentagon civilians from Northern Virginia to Memphis after the 1995 base-closure round resulted in one-third of them retiring early, another third moving and another third quitting.

Vigorous efforts to save bases are not unusual. Right now, they're taking place at naval installations in Pascagoula, Miss., and Groton, Conn.

But in contrast to the workforce at those installations, most workers at Fort Monmouth are civilians, who can't be ordered to move.

The base's surrounding boroughs, which would be temporarily paralyzed by the loss of Monmouth County's largest employer, are spending thousands of dollars to showcase its value.

The rallies, letter-writing campaigns and consultants already have drawn attention from two members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, who have expressed concerns about a brain drain inside Fort Monmouth's commands should it close.

Five of the nine votes on the Commission would be needed to override Fort Monmouth's closure, the Army's largest.

Innovative efforts

Founded in 1917 as Camp Alfred Vail, the New Jersey installation once trained pigeons to deliver coded messages to the front lines.

Over the years, it has celebrated numerous firsts - the first portable, hand-held "walkie-talkie" on the front lines, the first radar signal bounced off of the moon and the first televised weather satellite, called Tiros-1.

Of Fort Monmouth's 7,500 on-base workers, only about 500 are soldiers. The civilians are some of the army's most skilled engineers and scientists, who design battlefield technology in advanced computer labs, 3-D simulators and echo-free testing chambers.

Earlier this week, in a vault lined with blue foam spikes, Dan Duvak, who is working on a Ph.D., adjusted a mannequin dressed in an Army green helmet.

Imbedded in the helmet is a tiny cell-phone-like antenna that would replace long, visible rods and pass information to a soldier's radio, a critical tool for receiving orders.

Duvak, 26, and his coworkers are responsible for technology intended to keep mobile military units nimble and armed with the same information available at a fixed command post miles back, including a computer that tracks the GPS coordinates of friends and enemies.

"We use all of the technology that people have in their homes - satellite television, cell phones, ham radios - but out in the desert you don't have satellite dishes or cell phone towers," said Daphne Hart, a spokeswoman for the army's Communications-Electronics Research, Development and Engineer Command. "With this technology, soldiers take the cell phone towers with them."

The James Bond-like technology, however, stands in stark contrast to the decaying exterior of the command's five-sided building modeled on a hexagon. Budget problems halted the construction of the sixth leg.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, Fort Monmouth has become far less visible to its surrounding community. The base's bowling alley, running track, football games, Burger King and museum all have been cut off from the public. Residents no longer can use its roads as short-cuts through town.

And the base is showing signs of age. A chain-link fence rings more than 200 vacant rowhouses that once housed soldiers. Down the road, a six-story office building that the fort once leased also is decaying, its parking lot now a car-storage facility for a local dealership.

A few upgrades are underway. Roads are torn up in some places so that workers can lay geo-thermal heating lines that will shave the base's electric bill. West Point's preparatory academy, also on the base, just underwent \$25 million in repairs.

But a crisis in the operating budget this year forced Fort Monmouth to abandon its lawn-care contract. In some places, the grass is knee-high.

"If the fort closes, we're going to be sitting on decaying land for seven years," said Gerry Tarantolo, the mayor of Eatontown, which has a population of about 14,000 and sits on the southwest edge of the base, about 30 miles from New York City.

"It's going to be a devastating trickle-down effect for our mom-and-pop type businesses."

Local businesses

Inside the Rise and Shine Luncheonette within walking distance of the base's front entrance, there is only one sign of military activity - a photo on the wall of Lt. Gen. Otto Guenther, the army's first chief information officer and a former commander at Fort Monmouth.

Sibling owners Sal and Al Martorana flip omelets next to the four-option soda fountain that offers Fanta. They fear the base's closure would turn Eatontown into a ghost town.

"Thirty-five percent of my business is from the fort," Al Martorana, 44, said. "I feel sorry for a lot of my regulars whose roots are here. If the base closes, they're going to have to start a new life, no matter if they move to Maryland or not."

Matt Moffitt, 44, worked on Fort Monmouth for 14 years before starting his own defense contracting company, called New Wave Associates. Like Brunskill, Moffitt refuses to move, but if the base closes, he'd be forced to line up other business. His previous employer also is his primary client.

"My roots are here, but besides my personal preference, it just doesn't make a lot of sense to reproduce all of this somewhere else," said Moffitt, who has lived in the area ever since attaining his first college degree at Monmouth University.

"You'd lose a lot of institutional knowledge. We are the only people who have this experience."

Herseth wants answers from defense officials

Aberdeen American News (South Dakota)
Scott Waltman
May 27, 2005

Unsatisfied with information released by the U.S. Department of Defense about how it arrived at its base-closure list, Rep. Stephanie Herseth, D-S.D., voted to withhold money from the agency Thursday.

With her support, the House passed a measure by voice vote that would deny base closure funds until more information is made public.

In legislative speak, the amendment would "make no funds available to be used for closure or realignment in 2005 before the secretary of defense releases all the information data indicating how military value scores were derived, upon which the Department of Defense's recommendations were based."

So far, less than 10 percent of the information the Base Realignment and Closure Committee used to decide which bases would be scaled back or closed has been released, Herseth said. To her, that's simply not enough.

Much of the information Herseth's seen has been released before. And without more, it's hard to assess how the BRAC group arrived at its decision, she said during a Thursday conference call.

"We need to slow the process down to ensure that we don't make critical mistakes," Herseth said.

All three members of South Dakota's congressional delegation have said they don't think the defense department should close any domestic bases until most of the U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan are home. They also want the Pentagon to wait for studies on overseas bases and military reorganization to be completed before reducing the number of bases at home.

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., said in a press release that there is momentum building to delay the BRAC Committee decisions.

Some members of both chambers are pushing legislation that would slow base closures. The House shot down a Herseth-supported measure Wednesday night, but it will come up again, she said. Thune said there is growing bipartisan support for the Senate bill.

"Rushing this process could have grave consequences in the future," Thune said. "The BRAC recommendations are flawed and do not reflect what is best for a nation at war."

Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., has also voiced opposition to how the DOD arrived at its decision that closes 33 bases, including Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City.

Herseth will be in South Dakota over the Memorial Day weekend, talking with veterans about the BRAC Committee and other issues.

After speaking at a number of Memorial Day programs Monday, Herseth will conduct a Veterans town hall meeting in Aberdeen Tuesday. It will begin at 10:30 a.m. at the Veterans of Foreign Wars post on Circle Drive. The event will run until noon.

Herseth said she wants to talk about veterans' health care issues such as expanding what's called TRICARE military insurance to all members of the Guard and reserves, something the House voted against this week. Right now, TRICARE is only available to Guard and reserve members on active duty.

The federal government is breaking promises to its veterans when it doesn't adequately provide funding for vet-related health care, she said.

After meeting with veterans Tuesday, Herseth will speak at South Dakota Boys State about public and community service. That will be at 1 p.m. on the campus of Northern State University.

State team to visit Georgia Navy base

Associated Press (Groton, Conn.)

Susan Haigh

May 28, 2005

A three-member team of state officials is planning a trip to Georgia to learn more about the community that would take on most of the work now being done at the U.S. Navy Submarine Base in Groton if the Connecticut facility is closed.

Staff members from the state departments of Economic and Community Development and Labor plan to review the Pentagon's claims that Kings Bay, Ga., can accommodate the thousands of military personnel and their families who would be moving from Connecticut.

"We are talking about a sudden and enormous influx of new people, something that would strain the resources of just about any community, let alone small coastal towns," Gov. M. Jodi Rell said on Thursday.

At a hearing last week, Anthony Principi, the chairman of the commission reviewing the base closings, had expressed similar concerns about the ability of King's Bay to absorb the additional people and vessels.

The team will examine issues such as the housing capacity, local infrastructure, schools, work force needs and availability of health care services in Camden County.

Rell said the state hopes that information will help Connecticut make its case for removing Groton base from the Pentagon's base closure list.

Connecticut officials also plan to conduct a separate evaluation of the capacity of the Navy base at Kings Bay to handle the additional submarines, military personnel and mission responsibilities.

No date has been set for what officials say will be a three-day trip.

Also Thursday, members of the state's congressional delegation met with Navy officials for a classified briefing about a Pentagon study on the appropriate size of the submarine fleet. At a base closing hearing last week, Navy officials said the proposed closings were based on a fleet of about 41 submarines. But other studies have recommended a larger fleet.

Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., could not say what the newest study recommended. But he left the morning meeting clearly buoyed by the information presented by the Navy.

"The BRAC commission better listen to these people," Dodd said. "I would consider it a dereliction of duty if they don't listen to what these people have to say because it goes to the very heart of what our national security needs are going to be."

Also Thursday, the group appointed to help keep the base from closing said the state should ask the Pentagon for documents about possible radioactive waste at the Connecticut base.

"For over 50 years the military has operated nuclear reactors on the premises," said John C. Markowicz, chairman of the state's submarine base realignment coalition. "I'm not suggesting there's any malfeasance, but there ought to be the same remediation and audit standards at the base as there are anywhere else and the Secretary of Defense ought to include the cost of that remediation in any plans to close the base."

Navy environmental reports filed with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 2001 do not list radioactive waste as a potential hazard at the base, but Markowicz said some such reports could be classified.

"For as long as there have been nuclear submarines operating out of Groton, the possibility has existed for that kind of release, however small," said Rell's spokesman, Rich Harris. "We're not suggesting, by any means, that there is a public health hazard, but we want to know if there is any contamination."

Rell is asking the Navy for all documents regarding pollution at the base, even those that may have once been classified, Harris said.

Members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission are slated to be in Connecticut on June 1 to take a look at the Groton base.

The BRAC will hold a public hearing in Boston on July 6. Connecticut officials will have the opportunity to present two hours worth of arguments that it makes strategic and military sense to take the base off the list.

The BRAC must present its final base closure recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8.

Center would combine Guard, Army Reserve resources

Associated Press (Middletown, Iowa)
May 27, 2005

A new Armed Forces Reserve Center - a combined National Guard and Army Reserve armory - would serve as headquarters at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant, military officials said.

The up to \$20 million center could open in 2008, said Lt. Col. Greg Hapgood, an Iowa National Guard spokesman.

In a report released two weeks ago, the Base Closure and Realignment Commission - a federal panel charged with transforming military bases - recommended funding the reserve center and three other combined arms centers in Iowa. President Bush would still have to approve the proposal.

Chances could be good for approval since the government has followed 85 percent of past BRAC recommendations.

Officials said the 30-acre center would be built on what currently is farmland along U.S. Highway 34. Plans would include training, assembly, supply and maintenance facilities for two engineer companies, separate motor pools and a shared parking area for civilian vehicles.

Two local units of citizen soldiers would share the complex. Those units include Company A, 224th Engineer Battalion based in Burlington, part of the Iowa Army National Guard, and Middletown Company C, 389th Engineer Battalion, a U.S. Army Reserve battalion.

Plant administrators also would share the space, said Lt. Col. Rory Tegtmeier, the top Army official at IAAP.

"The building we're in now is 60 years old and has been renovated many times," Tegtmeier said. "It's getting to the point where it may be more cost effective to build new than to repair or renovate this building."

The BRAC report included \$80 million in military construction in Iowa. However, the funding went mostly unnoticed by the public because of worries over recommendations to close the Rock Island Arsenal and several other military bases nationwide.

Hapgood said the design phase of the reserve center could begin as early as November if it proceeds through the commission, Congress and the president.

BRAC commissions also have backed joint Guard and Reserve centers in Middletown, Muscatine and Cedar Rapids. The report calls for a fourth combined Army and Marine Corps reserve center in Waterloo.

Hapgood said the proposals capped 10 years of study by National Guard planners.

"This is a tremendous opportunity for the Iowa National Guard," he said. "We're absolutely pleased with the progress so far."

The federal government would pay much of the bill for the new center, but the Army Reserve would contribute \$9.5 million, said Bob Krause, outgoing president of the Reserve Officers Association in Iowa.

Although the Army and Navy reserve already have combined posts in the state, the new

reserve centers would mark the first collaborations between the Reserve and the Iowa National Guard.

"There are similar arrangements in other states, so this is not groundbreaking," Krause said. "But it is groundbreaking in Iowa."

Associated Press writer Matt Apuzzo contributed to this report

Congressmen look to Saxton for guidance in keeping Monmouth open

Associated Press
Donna De La Cruz
May 27, 2005

New Jersey's secret weapon in its fight to save Fort Monmouth from the Pentagon's budget ax is a Republican from South Jersey with a perfect record of getting military installations off the base closings list.

U.S. Rep. James Saxton, 62, one of the highest-ranking Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee, has been down this road before. He is credited with getting Fort Dix (1988 and 1991) and McGuire Air Force Base (1993) off the closing list.

Even U.S. Rep. Rush Holt, the Democrat whose district includes Fort Monmouth, praised Saxton's skill, and has met with him several times to discuss ways to outmaneuver the Pentagon.

"There's nobody in the country who has been a better student and a more successful practitioner of the BRAC (base realignment and closure) process than Jim Saxton," Holt said. "On more than one occasion he was dealt lemons and he made lemonade. He's a great resource for New Jersey."

Defense analyst Loren Thompson put it this way: "If anyone can save Fort Monmouth, Jim Saxton can do it."

"Not only has Saxton been through this before, but he has substantive experience and service on committees that serve him well in this area, and

his views just carry more weight," said Thompson, with The Lexington Institute, a Virginia-based think tank.

On average, 85 percent of the Pentagon's recommendations are approved by the BRAC commission, so getting a base off the closed list is a rare feat, Thompson said.

When asked to recount his victories in keeping Fort Dix and McGuire open, Saxton credits the commanders of both facilities at the time for giving him ideas on how to convince members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission - who have the power to remove or add a base to the closing list - that those installations were vital to the military.

Fort Dix was Saxton's first test, in the first year the Pentagon did its base closings round. He still remembers the day - Dec. 29, 1988 - when then Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger appeared on national television to announce the bases that the Pentagon wanted to close.

"Fort Dix was on the top of the list," Saxton said. "It got my attention real quick."

Saxton and his staff started to brainstorm, but it was Maj. Gen. Jim Wurman, Fort Dix's commander, who came up with the key element of their plan - propose turning the active duty post into a training center for reserve forces.

It worked. The BRAC commissioners put Fort Dix on semi-active status so the Army could explore that reserve training idea. In 1991, Fort Dix was on the list again, but the BRAC commissioners decided instead to convert the base from an active duty post to a reserve training center.

"We made rational arguments during those two BRACS, and Fort Dix was reborn," Saxton said.

In 1993, the Pentagon proposed closing McGuire Air Force Base and wanted to send its mission to Plattsburgh Air Force Base in upstate New York. Saxton and his staff sprang back into action.

They managed to knock down many of the reasons why the Pentagon wanted to close McGuire by showing that the data was wrong, Saxton said.

For example, the Pentagon said there was a serious civilian air traffic encroachment problem around McGuire, but base officials insisted that was not true.

So state officials hired a pilot and flew up to check out the situation at Plattsburgh, landing at a nearby municipal airport, Saxton said.

And there on the taxiway was a sign that Saxton used to sway the BRAC commissioners his way.

"The sign is still burned in my memory," he recalled. "It said 'Pilots. Avoid a mid-air collision. Call Plattsburgh Air Force Base on frequency 120.9 to avoid a mid-air collision.'"

Plattsburgh's runway and the municipal airport's runway were angled toward each other. Saxton called it "an unexpected revelation."

But Saxton wasn't done. His staff also found out that Plattsburgh got its fuel shipments via barge, but that the river near the base often froze over during the winter. In contrast, McGuire gets its fuel via pipeline and is not subject to weather-related supply disruptions, Saxton said.

"We were able to demonstrate the utility of McGuire by simply using facts," Saxton said.

It worked. McGuire stayed open; Plattsburgh closed instead.

Saxton points out that McGuire and Fort Dix both now have vital missions. Fort Dix provides final stateside training for Army Reserve and National Guard units preparing to go to Iraq or Afghanistan. McGuire is a major cargo port for resupplying troops stationed throughout the world. In this year's base closings round, the Pentagon recommended adding hundreds of jobs to both installations.

When asked about efforts to save Fort Monmouth, Saxton, a former elementary school

teacher and real estate agent, quickly noted that Holt is in charge of this fight, but added that he is more than willing to help out.

Fort Monmouth was also on the Pentagon's list twice - in the 1988 and 1993 rounds - for major reductions in its workforce but was kept open. Two different congressmen represented the post during those rounds.

Asked to explain how he would help keep Fort Monmouth open, Saxton said he would apply what he has learned over the years.

"Stick to the facts. Just stick to the facts."

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes