

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

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Department of Defense Releases

Indiana City Flourishes After 'Fort Ben' Closure

American Forces Press Service
Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample
June 15, 2005

INDIANAPOLIS— Along Post Road here, the post exchange and commissary are still in business, and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service's Building 1, though remodeled, still stands.

The prospect of 3,000 new jobs at the Defense Finance and Accounting Service located in Building 1 at the former Fort Benjamin Harrison, Ind., has Lisa Rowe smiling at the Java Junction coffee shop she operates across the street. Rowe says the new jobs will mean more business. Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample, USA (Click photo for screen-resolution image);high-resolution image available.

However, those military facilities are nearly all that remains of the former Fort Benjamin Harrison, located at the northeast corner of Indianapolis in the city of Lawrence.

After the post closed nearly a decade ago as a result of the 1991 base realignment and closure process, more than a million square feet of

building space has been demolished. In its place has risen millions of more square feet in new business and housing.

"It took us a little time to get the financing and the infrastructure together to really encourage new development," said Ehren Bingaman, executive director of the Fort Harrison Reuse Authority, the agency charged with redeveloping the post and bringing new business here. "But, boy, since that time we have all kinds of development. Most everything that's still standing is stuff that we deemed historic or that fits into the architectural character that our plan calls for," he said.

So much has been torn down, the old post rarely resembles its former self. Though a few historic markers point to the post's past, most signs signal Lawrence's future, with construction signs advertising that new housing developments and retail and office space are coming soon.

In all, Lawrence has invested \$250 million in the 550 acres that once made up the main post area. Plans are in place for a new Lawrence government center building that will house civic organizations. And the city of the Indianapolis has expressed interest in building a library on land where the post bowling alley once stood.

In fact, signs of progress are everywhere, with new businesses and housing developments at every corner. At the former post office, hot cups of latte and cappuccino are now served at the Java Junction.

The big white building that once housed the Defense Information School where service members received training in journalism, broadcasting, public affairs and photography is now called Ivy Tech, where high school students prepare for careers in nursing and other careers.

Inside the post gym, where soldiers once played intramural sports, children and adults learn arts and crafts and take swimming classes at a state-of-the-art YMCA.

Construction is finished on a 19,000-square-foot medical office building, and nine buildings sit in

a new 67-acre industrial park. The American Legion has built a 65,000-foot office and warehouse facility next to a 250-unit senior citizen apartment complex.

The housing boom ranges from condominiums and apartments to single-family homes.

Many of the rustic brick officers' quarters on what used to be "Colonel's Row" have been remodeled, and now sell for upwards of \$500,000.

"One of the things the Reuse Authority has benefited from is the close proximity of Indianapolis, the 12th largest city in the United States," Bingaman said. "Land is going to be at a premium," he said. About 1,700 acres of the post once used for training was turned into a state park and golf course. "So that's a quality-of-life issue. People like to be near those natural resources, and that's been an attractor to all that's going on here," he said.

That is what attracted Jerry Clifford and his wife, Mary, who bought a two-story red brick colonial. The house is nestled on a tree-lined street near what was the post parade field where Jerry once stood in formation as a young Army Reserve soldier.

"One of the things that initially attracted us was the history of the place," he said. "The fact that things looked older and there were trees and places to walk, that's the type of neighborhood we came from," he said.

The plan for building housing here was "well thought out," said Mary.

"You look at the housing and you've got half-million-dollar homes, but you've also got moderate housing and adult communities. They've really done a nice job of making it a community that is very heterogeneous; there is diversity of cultures here. It was a very neat plan."

Nevertheless, years ago many here thought there was nothing "neat" about the Pentagon's

decision to close "Fort Ben," as it is fondly referred to by residents.

When the post closed, some 3,300 military and 1,050 civilian positions left the city. And many here, mostly retirees who had made this area their home, feared their PX and commissary privileges would leave as well.

"A lot of them were very upset," said Sharon Williams, who manages the PX. "They fought, and they fought, and they said, 'We are not going to let our privileges die.'"

"We have a lot of retirees who came here to retire because of PX and commissary privileges, and they fought for those privileges," she said.

Williams said the both the PX and commissary were kept open, and other services, such as military clothing sales, Class VI (liquor sales) and convenience shop facilities combined into the main PX store. Although her store is not doing the business it once did, "we are making the bottom line," Williams said.

"We've got loyal customers; that's why we are still standing. We're not doing the millions (in sales) anymore, but we're stable," she said. "They closed the base, but the PX and commissary survived."

But some say the PX and commissary stand in the way of progress here. "We're sitting in a major spot," Williams said. "We're in the way."

The Reuse Authority wants to use that land where the PX and commissary sit -- 12 acres valued at \$250,000 an acre -- to build the city's new government center.

Bingaman said that next year the PX and commissary will move into a new building on the site where the old post hospital sits vacant. The hospital will be demolished, and the two facilities will be combined into one store.

He is hopeful construction on the new government center will begin in about three years, and join the newly built Harrison Center, a multi-million-dollar retail and restaurant

facility, across the street to form the city's downtown area.

He said the new downtown area will only add to the lure of the post that has attracted more than 100 new companies and civic organizations in the past four years, bringing with them thousands of jobs.

And there are more jobs to come.

The word here is that the Defense Department will relocate as many as 3,500 finance employees to its accounting offices in Building 1.

On the main thoroughfare, Lisa Rowe manages the Java Junction coffee shop that just opened inside the old post mail station across the street. She said the influx of new jobs should more than double her business, keeping her 10 employees busy.

"When we bought the business, we had no clue that many jobs were coming here," she said. "This is going to be great for business."

Which is what Bishop Wellington Dotson, who opened a Primerica Financial Services branch inside the former military clothing sales warehouse located next to other remodeled offices, is hoping for.

Wellington remembers his first days of business here, coming to work in the morning and seeing deer running through the parking lot. "It was that barren," he said.

Now he looks at his surroundings, the brick railyard storage sheds converted into chic office spaces, and sees "opportunity," he said. "In bad times, we do good," he said with a smile. "In good times, we do great."

Many here share that optimism, but it could not have happened without a good plan, said Bingaman.

He remarked on the current round of BRAC closure proposals announced May 13. "We've been through what a lot of communities are

going through right now," Bingaman noted. "The downside about BRAC is that there is nothing overnight about this process," he said. "It just takes time to make a lot of things happen."

But with patience and a good plan, he said, the sky is the limit.

"I hope that people can point to us and say, 'How did we do it?'" he said. "And I would say, 'careful planning, cooperation, some ingenuity, creativity and a willingness to take some calculated risks.' As you see, our way turned out OK."

Singapore squadron at Cannon to stand down

Air Force Times
June 15, 2005

Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. — A Singaporean Air Force fighter squadron stationed at Cannon Air Force Base will be gone next month.

Cannon announced Tuesday it will hold a July 6 ceremony for the inactivation of the 428th Fighter Squadron, made up of 140 Republic of Singapore Air Force and 25 U.S. Air Force airmen who flew Singaporean F-16 Block 52 aircraft.

Nine of the wing's 12 aircraft have already left for Singapore. The others will go to Luke Air Force Base near Phoenix sometime next month to join the 425th Fighter Squadron, Singapore's other U.S.-based squadron.

Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., whose district includes the base, and Sens. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., expressed disappointment at the Republic of Singapore's decision to stop training fighter pilots at Cannon.

The decision was based on budget issues in Singapore and not on Cannon as a military installation, the congressional members said.

The Singapore Air Force unit has been at Cannon since November 1998 when the U.S.

and Singaporean governments reached an agreement to bring a second Singaporean F-16 unit to the United States. The squadron combined airmen from both countries to provide training for Singaporean pilots in airspace surrounding the southeastern New Mexico base.

Inactivating the 428th will bring the total number of aircraft assigned to Cannon to 60.

The congressional delegation said officials assured them the decision had nothing to do with the Pentagon's recommendation that Cannon be closed under the 2005 base realignment and closure process.

Bingaman and Domenici were among a bipartisan group of senators who wrote Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on Friday, warning the Pentagon not to transfer any personnel or military activities permanently until the independent Base Realignment and Closure Commission completes its work. Commissioners should have time to analyze the targeted installations before permanent changes are made, the senators wrote.

Udall said the relocation of the Singapore pilots should have no bearing on the realignment process.

He, Bingaman and Domenici all pledged to continue efforts to save Cannon.

Members of the commission are to hold a hearing in Clovis on June 24. The congressional delegation is expected to attend.

Meanwhile, Gov. Bill Richardson and Hanson Scott, director of the state Office for Military Base Planning and Support, planned to meet with BRAC members this week in Washington, D.C., and Florida.

The governor has already met with three other commissioners and spoken to a fourth by phone.

"Face to face meetings with each commissioner are critical to our overall efforts to overturn the Pentagon's decision to close Cannon Air Force Base," Richardson said in a news release.

Five of the nine members of the commission would have to vote to take Cannon off the closure list.

National News Articles

Alaskans Turn Out to Support Eielson AFB

The Washington Post
Dan Joling
June 16, 2005

FAIRBANKS, Alaska -- More than 3,000 people turned out to protest the proposed removal of most of the permanent personnel at Eielson Air Force Base -- a move many fear would cost the community thousands of jobs that could not be replaced.

Auto dealers Lane Nichols and Greg Wagner closed their business Wednesday and sent about 80 employees in vans to attend the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's first regional base closure hearing.

An Air Force A-10 jet lands at Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks, Alaska, May 19, 2005. Alaska leaders will present reasons why Eielson Air Force Base should remain at full strength on Wednesday, June 15, 2005, when four Base Realignment and Closure Commission members travel to Fairbanks for the first regional base closure hearing.

"It's that important," Nichols said. "We need to make a statement to the BRAC commission. It's pretty crucial to our community."

The Pentagon has proposed shutting 33 large bases and scores of smaller ones across the country to save \$48 billion over 20 years, prompting concerns nationwide about the possible effects on local communities.

But many in Alaska feel particularly hard-hit. Jim Dodson, a contractor who heads the Save Eielson state and local task forces, describes Alaska as "a frontier economy," isolated from

other regional economies that could help absorb change.

"I think it would be devastating to our community to lose those people," said Karen Petersen, an employee of Alaska USA Federal Credit Union. Petersen said the bank has been considering opening a branch at the Eielson base.

The Pentagon's plan recommends moving Eielson's Air Force personnel and fighter aircraft to other locations by 2011.

A BRAC analysis concludes that the net loss of 2,940 military and civilian jobs at Eielson will result in the loss of 1,770 more jobs in the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Eielson is located 30 miles southeast of Fairbanks.

Together, that's a loss of 8.6 percent of all borough jobs, according to the Institute of Social and Economic Research at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

The Pentagon says it could save \$2.7 billion over 20 years by shifting Eielson to a "warm" status _ staying open but removing most permanent personnel. The Air Force covets Eielson's vast flying space and would use it to rotate in units from across the country for training sessions.

BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi said after the hearing that discrepancies between the military's estimated cost savings while maintaining Eielson in "warm" status, or partial shutdown, will require additional investigation.

"Clearly, we're going to have to take a hard look at the financial data, the cost data, that the Defense Department has come up with," Principi said.

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, said the recommendation to mothball much of Eielson and use it only part-time for training doesn't take into account how the harsh Alaska winters would affect unused buildings.

Stevens also said the decision ignores lessons learned in World War II when the country was not prepared for war.

"Let me be clear," Stevens said. "I strongly object to this recommendation for strategic reasons, not only on the basis of its impact on our local community or economy."

National Guard Leaders Criticize Pentagon BRAC Proposals

National Journal
Megan Scully
June 15, 2005

In an unusual move, New Hampshire's adjutant general, who stands to gain from this round of base closings, today criticized the Pentagon's decision to strip a significant number of airframes from 28 Air National Guard facilities. For many lawmakers and communities, the Defense Department's base closure and realignment process has spurred a defend-at-all-costs mentality as they fight to save local bases deemed by the Pentagon to be irrelevant to future missions.

However, the National Guard has railed against Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's decisions on Air National Guard units in part because of a growing fear that the Air Guard could evolve into a grounded force. Adjutants general across the country also have criticized the Air Force for shutting them out of base-closure discussions, which Rumsfeld eventually adopted in the BRAC list he released last month. In contrast, the Army National Guard took part in several of the Army's BRAC deliberations, sources have said.

"I don't believe the New Hampshire gain is in the best interests of the Air Force," Maj. Gen. Kenneth Clark said today at a Heritage Foundation event. Under Rumsfeld's recommendations, New Hampshire would receive four KC-135 aerial refueling tankers from Southern California. Clark later said the Air Guard's trust in the Air Force had plummeted when it was not consulted during

more than two years of base-closure reviews within the Air Force and the Pentagon. "You maybe don't have the partnership you thought," he said.

Clark was joined by Delaware Adjutant General Maj. Gen. Francis Vavala, who could lose his fleet of C-130 aircraft should the independent BRAC commission endorse the Pentagon recommendations. National Guard leaders in all U.S. states and territories voted last month to unite against the recommendations -- whether they were winners or losers in the BRAC round -- said Vavala, a vice president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States. "This is the message coming from all 54 of us," Vavala said. Retired Brig. Gen. Stephen Koper, president of the National Guard Association of the United States, said he does not oppose the BRAC process in general, but believes the Air Guard was the victim of a "drive-by shooting." Koper added his organization is "going after a flaw and that flaw is in the Air Force."

Daniel Else, a national defense specialist at Congressional Research Service, said the principal objection raised by the Air National Guard appears to be the Air Force's BRAC process, rather than its ultimate decisions. "The nub of it, the core of it, is they were not in on the process and that is where all the power lies," Else said. The National Guard now has turned its attention to the BRAC commission in an attempt to persuade it to alter the Pentagon's recommendations before it submits its own list of base closures to the White House by Sept. 8.

Lawmakers, Guard Officials Rally To Keep Planes in Place

National Journal

Megan Scully

June 16, 2005

Lawmakers and National Guard leaders are uniting to fight what is quickly becoming the biggest national issue in the latest round of base-closing decisions -- the attempt to move aircraft from 28 Guard facilities around the country.

About 40 congressional staffers packed into a Senate meeting room Tuesday to grill Air Force officials about what would happen if Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's recommendations are adopted by the independent Base Closure and Realignment Commission. The meeting was scheduled to last just one hour, but extended into the evening as staffers questioned the officials responsible for the service's BRAC recommendations on the reasoning behind their decisions, a source who attended the meeting said. Air Force officials in attendance included Fred Pease, deputy assistant secretary for basing and infrastructure analysis.

The key concern is that Air National Guard officers were shut out of the Air Force's BRAC analysis, learning at the same time as the general public of the decision to shift hundreds of tankers and fighters and transporters from Guard units to other states.

"It was involved, engaging," one Senate aide said of the lengthy meeting, which was organized by the Senate Armed Services Committee as part of a larger effort to educate staffers on the BRAC process. The source said the Air National Guard issues are "becoming, from a national perspective, the most controversial issue."

Staffers questioned the metrics the Air Force used to determine which Guard stations would lose which aircraft, the source said. Others voiced concerns that the Air Force had no written metrics for some of their decisions, making it difficult for lawmakers to decipher the reasoning behind the recommendations.

The secretary's BRAC list has the support of National Guard Bureau Chief Lt. Gen. Steven Blum, who has said the recommendations would position the Guard to better respond to both state emergencies and homeland security missions, as well as to mobilize for overseas deployments.

Blum, who was involved in the Pentagon's BRAC deliberations, also said he believes changes to the Air Guard and other Air and Army reserve posts will help recruitment and retention, rather than hinder it.

"The demographics that once supported those installations have ... moved to new and different places," Blum told reporters last month. "By closing or divesting [the Guard] of inefficient facilities and moving to places where we have better demographics ... I think we give better opportunity to the members of the Reserve component."

But lawmakers and adjutants general around the country have said they are worried that without aircraft such as C-130 transports and KC-135 tankers, recruitment for the Air Guard will suffer.

Six states and territories might lose all Air Guard aircraft, leaving them with a highly trained force of pilots and engineers who must either relocate or switch to combat support missions.

For instance, at the New Castle County Air Guard Station in Delaware, the Pentagon has recommended moving eight C-130H aircraft to North Carolina and Georgia, making airmen "available for employment at these nearby installations," according to the department's BRAC documents.

Several sources have said they are skeptical that Guardsmen in Delaware and elsewhere around the country will want to travel several hundred miles for duty.

"They literally take the air out of the Air National Guard in Delaware," the state's adjutant general, Maj. Gen. Francis Vavala, said during a Heritage Foundation speech Wednesday.

**Alaskans Fight to Save a Base on the Block
With Eielson Air Force Base set for reductions, thousands voice opposition at a hearing.**

Los Angeles Times
June 16, 2005

FAIRBANKS, Alaska — Commissioners who will help decide what military bases should be

closed to save money heard anger and outrage Wednesday as they began listening to public comment here on a list of recommended closings that includes gutting nearby Eielson Air Force Base.

The Pentagon recommendations would turn Eielson into a training facility for other bases around the country. The realignment would mean the loss of 2,800 airmen — nearly the entire active military contingent — and their 3,300 dependents. About 8.6% of all jobs in the Fairbanks North Star Borough would be lost.

So when the four members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission opened the nation's first regional hearing on the recommendations, they faced more than 3,000 residents, most wearing red T-shirts handed out by the local Save Eielson Committee. Residents began lining up two hours before the meeting to secure a seat.

Susan Kalen, owner of Chena Surveys, a surveying company with 15 employees that does extensive work at Eielson and nearby Ft. Wainwright, wore a white construction hat and was first in line.

"I'm here to save Eielson," she said. "Closing down Eielson doesn't make sense."

Auto dealers Lane Nichols and Greg Wagner closed down their business and sent more than 80 employees in vans to attend the hearing.

"It's that important," Nichols said. "We need to make a statement to the [base closing commission.] It's pretty crucial to our community."

The Defense Department's recommendations overall are supposed to save \$49 billion over 20 years. They include closing 33 bases and substantial reductions at 29 more.

The commission must create its own list of recommendations and give them to President Bush by Sept. 8. Bush then has two weeks to accept the list, ask the commission for revisions or reject it.

If he accepts the commission recommendations, Congress would have 45 legislative days to accept or reject them, without revision.

Alaskans insisted that there must have been some mistake.

The proposal would provide only 18 fighter aircraft to defend the North American Aerospace Defense Command, a new ground missile-defense bed and the entire state of Alaska, 20% of the nation's land base, said Sen. Ted Stevens, (R-Alaska).

Local News Articles

Leaders Plead Their Case to BRAC Official

Pensacola News Journal (Pensacola, FL)
Nicole Lozare
June 16, 2005

Pensacola made a pitch Wednesday to preserve the 1,579 jobs it stands to lose if recommended Base Realignment and Closure Commission cuts are enforced by the Pentagon.

BRAC Commissioner Hal Gehman lunched with about 20 local leaders, including several members of the Military Regional Oversight Committee, and heard them make their case for leaving in place the positions at Pensacola Naval Air Station and Saufley Field.

After lunch, Gehman toured Pensacola NAS and was briefed by Capt. John Pruitt, the base's commanding officer.

"We've only heard from the Department of Defense," said Gehman, a retired Navy admiral. "Now, we're here to listen to the other side. ... This was an opportunity for local community leaders to make their views known."

During the meeting, which was closed to the public, Gehman heard from representatives of each of the commands that the Department of Defense has recommended be moved to other bases.

Under the realignment plan, the Naval Education and Training Command, the Officer Training Center and the Naval Aero-Medical Research Laboratory would move from Pensacola. The Pensacola branch of the Defense Finance Accounting Service would close.

"I want to hear their views of what BRAC means (to their commands)," said Gehman during a news conference at Jackson's restaurant, where he listened to an hour-long presentation by retired Navy Vice Adm. Jack Fetterman, a member of the Military Regional Oversight Committee and Gov. Jeb Bush's Advisory Council on BRAC.

Fetterman's presentation focused on why the jobs should stay in Pensacola and challenged data the Defense Department used to make the recommendations.

"We achieved what we wanted to do," Fetterman said. "We planted the seeds. We felt that the Department of Defense data was faulted. In some cases, justification to move those jobs just wasn't there."

BRAC recommendation

The recommendation calls for moving 857 military positions, 1,304 civilian jobs and 97 contractor positions out of Pensacola. But the area also stands to gain 555 military positions and 124 civilian jobs. The area's net loss is 302 military positions and 1,180 civilian positions.

Fetterman did not elaborate on specifics but said he believes Pensacola has a good chance of overturning the recommendation to transfer the Officer Training Center from Pensacola to Newport, R.I.

Representatives from Florida bases will have a chance to meet with the full BRAC Commission during a regional hearing on July 12 in New Orleans. Fetterman most likely will make the presentation on behalf of the Pensacola base and Saufley Field, which stands to lose the Navy Education and Training Professional

Development and Technology Center to Millington, Tenn.

Four data analysts who work with Gehman had a more thorough visit to each of the commands on Wednesday. Each of the nine BRAC commissioners visit bases that stand to lose 300 civilian jobs or 400 total military and civilian positions.

Gehman and his analysts will present their findings during a BRAC Commission meeting before the regional hearing. It takes five out of nine votes from the BRAC Commission to be removed from the list.

"Before we make a vote, we want to say that at least one commissioner physically walked the grounds and met the people who will be affected," Gehman said.

\$96 Million Center Eyed For Westover

Springfield Republican (Springfield, MA)

Etta Walsh

June 15, 2005

CHICOPEE - The Pentagon is proposing a \$96 million Armed Forces Reserve Center at Westover Air Reserve Base to consolidate several military units from Springfield, Windsor Locks and Fort Devens in Ayer.

The proposed center is part of the Base Realignment and Closure plan submitted last month by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld.

About 1,000 additional Army personnel, most of them reservists, will be stationed at the 2,500-acre base under the proposal.

The Pentagon said last month that 830 reservists and 150 active-duty Army personnel would be assigned to the base, along with 82 full-time Army unit specialists in various disciplines.

To accommodate the extra personnel, military officials propose building the \$96 million office complex, according to Maj. Jennifer Christovich, public affairs officer at Westover.

"It means a bigger mission for Westover," she said.

The new complex would be used by Army, Navy and Marine personnel at the base, she said.

Rumsfeld's proposals, which include closing 180 military installations nationwide, are being studied by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which must report to President George W. Bush by Sept. 8.

Rumsfeld recommends closing Westover's current Armed Forces Reserve Center, the MacArthur Army Reserve Center in Springfield and Army Reserve Area Maintenance Support Activity in Windsor Locks. He also wants to realign the Malony Army Reserve Center in Ayer.

Those units would be relocated to the new Armed Forces Reserve Center at Westover, Army Maj. Desiree Wineland of the Pentagon said yesterday.

"They're trying to consolidate different services in one center," Wineland said. "The whole point is, we're trying to streamline."

The 5th Joint Task Force, 654th Area Support Group and 382nd Military Police Battalion now at Devens will switch to Westover, she said.

An Army Reserve Sustainment Brigade headquarters will also be established there, she said.

The new center also could accommodate units from the National Guard Armory in Agawam, if Gov. W. Mitt Romney decides to assign them there, Wineland said.

Pentagon officials estimate closing the older facilities will save the Army \$21.6 million in anticipated renovation costs.

That, and the consolidation of units at Westover, will drop the entire cost of the project from \$96 million to \$61 million, according to Army analysts.

Costs of the project should be repaid within 13 years, and the Department of Defense should save \$22 million over a 20-year period, analysts conclude.

Final plans may not be approved by the president and Congress until the end of this year.

Westover is home to the 439th Airlift Wing, which flies giant C-5As, the largest planes in the Air Force inventory. The reserve base accounts for 5 percent of the nation's airlift capacity.

Westover pumped \$196 million into the area's economy last year, according to the Air Force. It is Chicopee's largest employer, with 3,600 workers, including about 1,100 civilians.

**Fate of military bases weighed;
Regional hearing scheduled for June 30 to
discuss possible closure of four Georgia sites.**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Atlanta, GA)
Add Seymour Jr.
June 16, 2005

Local leaders who want to keep Fort Gillem open have one more opportunity to sway officials who are considering closing the Clayton County military base.

Members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission will host a June 30 Atlanta regional hearing to listen to pleas to keep Fort Gillem and three other Georgia bases open.

That follows last week's evaluation visit to Fort Gillem by BRAC Commissioner James Bilbray.

Heading into the hearing, which will be held at Georgia Tech, U.S. Rep. David Scott (D-Ga.) believes the base has a good chance of getting off the Defense Department's list of bases recommended for closure.

"We think we've scored some points [with commission members]," Scott said. "It's a long way, but we scored some points."

But supporters face an uphill climb in keeping the base open. It is commonly known that bases across the country on the BRAC closure list have a less than 10 percent chance of being taken off the list.

Defense officials hope to streamline the number of military bases across the country and save millions in taxpayer dollars by closing the bases.

Fort Gillem, Fort McPherson, Naval Air Station Atlanta in Cobb County and the Naval Supply Corps School in Athens are the Georgia bases on the closure list.

Closing Fort Gillem would save \$421.5 million during the next 20 years, according to the Defense Department.

Defense officials characterize Fort Gillem as an administrative installation. Tom Salter, head of the Save Fort McPherson/Gillem Foundation, said those are bases seen as expensive to maintain.

Defense officials want to move Fort Gillem's 1st U.S. Army Headquarters to Illinois, the 2nd Recruiting Brigade to Alabama and an explosive disposal group would go to Kentucky.

Other units would be relocated to South Carolina, North Carolina and Fort Benning near Columbus.

The Air Force Exchange System Distribution Center at Fort Gillem would close, with the Georgia Army National Guard taking its space.

A state-of-the-art forensic crime lab and a few other units would remain on the property.

All of that relocating would cost \$56.8 million -- a number even BRAC Commissioner James Bilbray said seems low.

"We have new numbers that are contradictory to the numbers that the Defense Department gave us," Bilbray said. "I think their figures are very, very low. We're going to analyze [the figures] very closely."

Meanwhile, Bilbray offered Fort Gillem backers a bit of hope after visiting the base.

"Fort Gillem has an excellent chance of getting off the list," he said. "I can't guarantee anything, but I was very impressed."

BRAC representative to visit Mississippi bases

The Associated Press (Jackson, MS)
Holbrook Mohr
June 15, 2005

The deputy commissioner of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission on Thursday will visit two south Mississippi bases that are targeted for restructuring or closing by the Pentagon.

Lt. Lisa Ferguson, a Keesler Air Force Base spokeswoman, said retired Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr. will visit the base. He is also expected to visit Naval Station Pascagoula.

"It's basically a fact-finding site visit," Ferguson said.

Ferguson said Gehman will be briefed about operations of the 81st Medical Group at Keesler. The Pentagon recommended restructuring the unit, causing a decrease of 181 military, 31 civilian and 190 contractor positions.

Keesler officials have said the Pentagon justifies the changes to its medical unit by relying on civilian facilities with accredited inpatient capacity that are located within 40 miles of the base.

U.S. Rep. Gene Taylor, D-Miss., said Wednesday that the recommendations to change military inpatient service missions to outpatient clinics and ambulatory surgery centers could have a devastating impact on soldiers and retirees.

"We think the unintended consequences are all bad," he told The Associated Press.

Taylor contends military retirees between the ages of 38 and 65 are going to be forced to pay out-of-pocket for health care in the form of enrollment fees and co-payments.

"Because they were promised a lifetime of free health care, the military retirees have settled near bases," Taylor said. "I think we need to know exactly what the answers are, not guesses," before changes are made to the medical unit.

Retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Clark Griffith, former commander at Keesler, and a consultant for Biloxi and the Mississippi Military Communities' Council, agrees that the recommended changes to Keesler's medical unit could be dramatic.

He said common sense reveals that it would be difficult to continue training military doctors without patients. And he said outsourcing military medical care will put a heavy burden not only on soldiers, but nearby civilian hospitals as well.

"We put this Keesler caseload downtown and waiting periods for appointments go from a week to a month," he said. "We're building a case to go defend this in the regional meeting on the 12th of July in New Orleans."

The regional hearing in New Orleans will provide a forum for community leaders to argue against the Pentagon's recommendations.

The Pentagon wants to close Naval Station Pascagoula. The base could lose 844 military personnel, 112 civilian workers and seven contractors, if the plan is approved.

Taylor, who opposes the BRAC process, said closing Naval bases could be devastating for national security.

"What we're doing is setting ourselves up for another Pearl Harbor," he said.

Taylor places the blame for widespread restructuring of bases on Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Taylor said Rumsfeld has

created a climate in which the highest brass of the military is afraid they will lose their jobs if they take a stand against the realignments.

Pascagoula is one of 150 military installations nationwide recommended for closure.

The Department of Defense's suggestion that Pascagoula be closed came as no surprise to most of Mississippi's congressional delegation.

Taylor, U.S. Sens. Trent Lott and Thad Cochran, both R-Miss., have said the absence of multiple missions could make it a prime target. Two of the base's largest ships are no longer there.

Cochran has said the Coast Guard would likely increase its presence if the Navy were to abandon the deep-water port and the site could be used for Homeland Security purposes.

The BRAC commission will hold public hearings before presenting its own recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8. Congress will ultimately approve the final list.

In Mississippi, the DOD also wants to shut down the U.S. Army Reserve Center at Vicksburg and the Mississippi Army Ammunition plant in Hancock County.

Realignments were suggested at Naval Air Station Meridian, Key Field Air Guard Station in Meridian and a Naval Human Resources Center in Hancock County, in addition to Keesler.

Columbus Air Force Base was recommended for a gain of jobs.

Statewide, Mississippi would lose 1,678 military, civilian and contractor jobs at the military installations under the Pentagon's recommendations.

BRAC commissioner gets earful from Pensacola boosters

The Associated Press (Pensacola, FL)
Bill Kaczor
June 15, 2005

State and local officials and business and civic leaders got their first chance Wednesday to present arguments against proposals to cut 1,579 Pensacola military jobs to a Base Realignment and Closure commissioner.

It would be the biggest loss for any Florida community if the BRAC commission approves eight reductions the Defense Department has recommended for Pensacola Naval Air Station and Saufley Field. More than 1,000 of the jobs are held by civilians.

Retired Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr., one of nine BRAC commissioners, met with the state and local advocates over lunch before visiting the two Pensacola bases.

"It's pretty predictable what their views are," Gehman told reporters. "It was very helpful and very informative."

BRAC commissioners are visiting about 75 bases facing the most serious losses. Cape Canaveral Air Force Station is the only other Florida base on that list, standing to lose 136 military and 59 civilian jobs. It received a visit June 9.

Florida bases, overall, would see a net gain of 2,575 jobs from the Pentagon's recommendations.

Gehman declined to discuss specifics. Pamela Dana, director of the Governor's Office of Tourism, Trade and Economic Development, was "cautiously optimistic" about reversing four of the eight proposed reductions.

"There is some pretty good rationale as to why they merit serious consideration," she said.

Dana said Gov. Jeb Bush, U.S. Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., and U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., will argue Florida's case at a regional hearing July 12 in New Orleans.

The commission must give its recommendations to President Bush, the governor's brother, by Sept. 8. He can send them to Congress for

approval, but neither he nor lawmakers can make changes.

Retired Vice Adm. Jack Fetterman, who serves on the governor's BRAC Advisory Council, said Pensacola's strongest case is against moving the Navy's Officer Training Command to Newport, R.I.

"First of all, 30 or 40 percent of the product of OTC comes into the aviation pipeline," Fetterman said. That means those officers will have to come to Pensacola, anyway, for the next phase of their training.

Fetterman, president and CEO of the Naval Aviation Museum Foundation, pointed out that the Officer Candidate School, part of OTC, moved here in 1993 from Newport and merged with a similar school for aviation officers. The course was cut from 16 to 14 weeks because the move was so efficient, he said.

Florida will push, instead, to move some small educational activities from Newport to Pensacola but leave the Naval Academy Prep School there.

"It's cost-efficient, the climate is right," Fetterman said. "We've got a strong case. The second one is a little more complicated."

The Pentagon wants to combine the Naval Education and Training Command, headed by a three-star admiral, with the Navy's personnel bureau at Millington, Tenn.

"I don't know where you get efficiency out of that," Fetterman said.

Instead, Florida will propose a different consolidation: Keep the command here and add the Navy's air training headquarters from Corpus Christi, Texas, Fetterman said.

Two more top priorities are a 106-member Navy intelligence unit and a finance and accounting office with about 500 workers. Florida will propose that Pensacola replace Denver as one of three consolidated finance and accounting sites.

The other four cuts will be harder to defend: moving a Navy brig to South Carolina and the Naval Aerospace Medical Research Laboratory to Ohio, merging regional Navy commands at Jacksonville and shifting about 400 jobs to Eglin to support Joint Strike Fighter training.

Top state officials offer defense of Eielson

Anchorage Daily News (Anchorage, AK)
Tataboline Brant
June 16th, 2005

FAIRBANKS -- Alaska's top elected officials teamed with two retired generals Wednesday to make the case to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that Eielson Air Force Base should not be gutted.

About 3,500 community members, most dressed in red "America Needs Eielson" T-shirts and carrying small flags and booster signs, packed the Carlson Center for the midafternoon hearing -- the first full-scale hearing in the country since the BRAC list was released in May.

Four of the nine commissioners charged with reviewing the Pentagon's recommendations for closing and downsizing military facilities across the country attended. They spent the morning touring Eielson and the neighboring Army post, Fort Wainwright, then entered the Carlson Center in Fairbanks about 1 p.m. to a standing ovation and took their seats at a long table at one end of the arena.

For two hours the commissioners listened and took notes as a parade of public officials told them why the Pentagon's idea to "warm-base" Eielson -- military jargon for turning it into a part-time training base and cutting nearly all of its roughly 3,000 personnel -- was a bad idea for America, Alaska and the Fairbanks area.

The tone among Alaska officials appearing before the panel was one of courteous outrage and disbelief.

"There is no such thing as a 'warm' facility in midwinter Alaska," U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, warned at one point, drawing applause

and some laughter from the crowd. "A facility is either operational or it's not. The Department of Defense has tried this 'warm-basing' approach previously at Adak and (Fort) Greely. I urge you to review those. ... (They) led to rapid deterioration of the infrastructure at both bases."

Most of the points made to the commissioners had been raised publicly in the weeks leading up to the presentation, but Wednesday's gathering went into more vivid detail and transpired amid the emotions of the thousands who attended.

The main argument of those making appearances before the panel focused on four points: Eielson's strategic location, its expansive training range, the opportunity here for joint Army-Air Force training and the economic impact locally of downsizing.

"Look at where you are," state Sen. Gary Wilken told the commissioners. "You're 160 miles south of the Arctic Circle. Flying into Eielson, you certainly noticed an absence of any urban settlements for a thousand miles," he said, explaining that the economies in the Interior are isolated. "As such, we are uniquely self-contained. And therein lays a major difference in our message that you will hear in no other community. ... We are not a community built around a base. We are a base who built a community."

Wilken and others made the point that if Eielson is downsized, the local economy will be too. With it will go some services essential to base operations that can't come back overnight. Wilken gave the example of jet fuel. A local refinery makes the kind the base needs and pumps it over in a dedicated pipeline, he said. If Eielson is gutted, the company will start catering to commercial jets, which take a different kind of jet fuel, making it that much harder for the base to spring back to life should it need to in an emergency.

The Save Eielson task force had worked for weeks to plan Wednesday's presentation. They were shooting for 5,000 attendees but were clearly pleased with the number who showed up.

The air outside the Carlson Center as people arrived was county fair meets Independence Day. The Fairbanks community band played tunes on the front lawn as hundreds of people flocked from home and work to attend the meeting.

"This turnout, it's exactly what I thought Fairbanks would do," said task force member Marilyn Romano, publisher of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. "I'm thrilled. I heard traffic's backed up all the way to Airport Way. It's going to be a sea of red."

A line started forming about an hour before the arena opened and eventually snaked around the building. Bunches of red, white and blue balloons lined the sidewalk, and a balloon arch floated near the front door where a man played "Johnny Came Marching Home" on a tin whistle.

Volunteers handed out bottled water to those standing in the hot sun while a security woman near the entrance tried to keep things moving, shouting periodically: "I got two lines, please. Keep coming forward."

Don Ritter, a retired state health worker, said the turnout showed how much the base means to the community. "It's more than just the economics," he said, referring to times in the past when the military has helped in times of crisis, such as during fires and floods.

Inside, once the formal presentation started, University of Alaska President Mark Hamilton, who is a retired Army major general, and Alaska Railroad President Pat Gamble tag-teamed the main pitch to the commission. They told the commission that some of the information from the Department of Defense just doesn't add up -- a point echoed by Stevens.

"The Air Force cannot have it both ways," Stevens said at one point. "It claims cost savings by mothballing much of this base, which notionally reduces the base operating costs. At the same time, its analysis does not account for the costs associated with shutting down the base

-- such as environmental cleanup and community assistance."

The team also questioned how it could be in the nation's interest to all but shut down one of the few bases in Alaska -- which is enormous in size and has many things to protect.

"Our aircraft at Eielson have been the first line of defense against threats to Fort Greely, Alaska NORAD, our coastline and the trans-Alaska pipeline," Stevens said. "And that includes the Port of Valdez."

"The strategic importance of Alaska to our nation's defense and to our responsibilities in the world is the reason that we maintain an Alaskan Command," said U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska. "The Joint Chiefs of Staff does not maintain a Georgia Command, a Louisiana Command or a Nevada Command. It maintains the Alaskan Command because Alaska is America's frontier and Alaska basing is vital to the protection of America's interests in the Pacific."

The commissioners, who will make their recommendations to President Bush at the end of summer, asked several questions after the presentation, which Hamilton took as a good sign. He said he was "very impressed" with the commissioner's attentiveness. "It was clear they listened," he said.

Commission chairman Anthony Principi said the members' 2 1/2-day Alaska visit, which included stops at Kulis Air National Guard Base and Elmendorf Air Force Base, was "very informative." He said that he thought the presentation was well done but that it was too soon in the process to draw any conclusions. "We learned a great deal," he said.

Another commissioner, James Hansen, said that if community support is any kind of criteria for influencing the panel, "you've got a winner here."

BRAC analyst hears pitch
Biloxi Sun herald (Biloxi, MS)

Michael Newsom
June 16, 2005

Jackson County officials on Wednesday told a representative of the government it would be wrong to close Naval Station Pascagoula, because it will not save the military money and the installation is a strategically important location.

Jackson County officials presented their argument to a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) analyst to try to save Naval Station Pascagoula. The pitch was as a warm-up for the regional hearing July 12 in New Orleans.

The meeting comes a day before a member of the BRAC commission tours the Naval Station and Keesler Medical Center. The local people pitched to the analyst that Keesler Medical Center should be saved also, because its closing would have implications for Jackson County.

A meeting with an analyst was also supposed to have been held in Harrison County on Wednesday to deal with Keesler, but the analyst canceled.

George Freeland, executive director of the Jackson County Economic Development Foundation, attended the Jackson County meeting.

"We presented what we thought were false assumptions about the military's cost savings," Freeland said. "The military is not going to save anything. If they close the base, they would also be relinquishing a piece of property that is extremely well positioned on the Gulf Coast."

Freeland said he thinks the personnel cost the Department of Defense is figuring on saving will be minimal, because those workers will not be laid off. He also said the Naval Station, being close to a large refinery and a large defense contracting plant, provides security for those plants, and the loss of the base would leave them vulnerable.

The group met with Brian McDaniel, an analyst for retired Adm. Harold W. Gehman, who will

tour both Keesler Medical Center and Naval Station Pascagoula today before he sits on the BRAC commission July 12 in New Orleans. The regional hearing will give interested persons a chance to petition the commission to remove installations from the list for closure.

Both tours are closed to the press and public.

Naval officials gave Naval Station Pascagoula the lowest worthiness score of all of its facilities in an evaluation done by the Navy, according to Gannett News Services.

**Base-closing plan unites lawmakers
A Northwest delegation protests the proposal
to move an Air National Guard wing.**

Bothell Herald (Bothell, WA)

Jim Haley

June 16, 2005

The entire Washington state congressional delegation Wednesday joined lawmakers in Oregon in criticizing a military base-closing plan that would strip the Northwest of most of its air defense.

Under scrutiny is a Pentagon proposal to move a Portland, Ore., wing of Air National Guard F-15 fighters that has been protecting the Northwest since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

The plan "would leave the entire Pacific Northwest defended by two F-15 fighters. It's tantamount to taking the metal detectors and security people out of the airport and just letting anybody get on the plane," said Rep. Brian Baird, D-Wash., who represents southwest Washington.

The delegation signed a letter written by Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., to the chairman of the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which has begun its inquiry into the Pentagon base-closing recommendations.

The letter says the plan overlooks the critical role the fighters play in protecting the Northwest and notes that in an emergency, jets would have

to be scrambled from bases as far away as Fresno, Calif.

The recommendation is to move all 15 of the F-15 fighters in the Air National Guard's 142nd Fighter Wing based at Portland International Airport. They would go to other Air Guard units in Louisiana and New Jersey.

The plan is to rotate a pair of F-15s to Portland to be on alert status for emergencies.

"This plan overlooks the critical role these jets play in ensuring the security of the Pacific Northwest and our nation," Cantwell said. "We should not let our guard down when it comes to defending our citizens against terrorist attacks."

Cantwell met Tuesday with Washington Air National Guard commander Maj. Gen. Frank Scoggins, who also expressed concerns.

In a statement, Scoggins said the plan "will have negative impacts on the protection of our homeland. The proposal would have serious unintended long-term consequences if fully adopted."

The letter was delivered two days before members of the base-closing panel are scheduled to meet in Portland to discuss what the Pentagon called a realignment of the National Guard forces. The Defense Department pegged no major bases in Washington for closure or big changes.

In Portland, however, the proposal also calls for the removal of all eight air-refueling tankers, another thing that bothers Scoggins. He said moving the tankers would limit the ability of fighters to stay aloft, even if there were fighters in the area.

Baird pointed out that the fighters now protect two major population areas in central Puget Sound and greater Portland. In addition, Washington has numerous major military bases, including Naval Station Everett, that would be left at risk.

"We're already a target," Baird said, "but we would be an unprotected target. We're going to pull out some serious political horsepower to stop this."

In Portland, Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., issued a statement Wednesday saying removal of the 142nd Fighter wing will put the entire Northwest in danger.

"Military cost-cutting is not an adequate reason to leave this corner of the homeland vulnerable to attack, and that's the message this region's leaders will bring to the (base-closing panel) on Friday," Wyden said.

The commission will take testimony in affected regions around the country throughout the summer and will make its final recommendations to President Bush Sept. 8. The Pentagon has proposed closing 33 major bases and realigning hundreds of others in hopes of saving \$50 billion over the next 20 years.

Slow data release frustrating to BRACers

Lima News (Lima, OH)

Tim Rausch

June 16, 2005

LIMA — Watching and waiting.

The slow release of Base Realignment and Closure data by the Defense Department has frustrated lawmakers and community leaders, even the consultant to the local task force charged with keeping Lima off the list.

"It is a month into the process and they're still delivering information to the commission," said Task Force L.I.M.A. consultant James Gallagher. "If I were on the list, like the Mansfield people are, I would not be happy."

Gallagher said time is running out for communities to ascertain why they were placed on the BRAC list and to get information that may help them get off the list of base closings and realignments. The commission set a self-imposed deadline of July 21 to add, and

theoretically subtract, bases from the recommendations.

"It is like going into court and not having all the depositions," said U.S. Rep. Mike Oxley, R-Findlay.

Oxley said some information was released over the weekend because of a Senate subpoena. "Still, there's a lot more that needs to be done and we're running out of time."

Gallagher said part of the problem is the classified information.

"When I was on the commission, the only thing I recall ever being classified was the force structure plan. Other than that, every piece of data was unclassified," Gallagher said. He was on the commission staff during the 1991 and 1993 BRAC rounds.

"I know we're in the post 9/11 era, but I find it interesting that it has taken them four weeks," Gallagher said.

Gallagher said most congressional staffers don't even have the clearance to look at some of the classified defense data, and the one's who do wouldn't be able to share the information with affected communities once they read it.

U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommendations before the BRAC Commission would close 33 major bases and realign 29 others, resulting in a savings of \$48.8 billion through 20 years. Joint Systems Manufacturing Center is only on the list for a reduction in 27 percent of its infrastructure.

Department personnel involved in the more than two-year-long process sorted through 25 million bits of information in making their appraisals, Rumsfeld said.

"They considered some 1,000 different scenarios or approaches, and devoted some 4,000 man-hours while their staffs devoted tens of thousands of hours more," Rumsfeld said.

Two of those 1,000 scenarios were to close or privatize Joint Systems Manufacturing Center, according to entries found in the “Army Alternative Recommendations” data released to the public and the BRAC Commission. Neither made it to Rumsfeld’s desk.

“We escaped unscathed by the overall list. We’re very pleased by that,” Gallagher said.

Joint Systems Commander, Army Lt. Col. Damon Walsh, said there is no reason to worry that the Defense Department considered the other scenarios.

“I think the Army study group worked very hard to be able to say we looked at everything, anticipating that when the recommendations did come out, there was going to be a lot of second-guessing and challenging,” Walsh said.

While some data have been released through the Defense Department’s Web site, there is other data out there that interest Gallagher.

“We can’t look at everything and know what people said about us,” Gallagher said. The Washington, D.C., consultant is keeping his eyes out for efforts to take work away from Lima, as well as see if there is workload that could be shifted to Joint Systems.

Task force member Judy Cowan said no one from Lima planned to attend the BRAC Commission’s regional hearing in Buffalo on June 27.

Gallagher said he would be handling most of the task force’s work in the nation’s capital, where the commission headquarters is located.

Gallagher said the task force has a better chance of getting answers by going straight to the commission staff.

One answer the task force will be looking to get is the removal of the land reduction entry in the BRAC recommendations. A letter is being drafted this week for Gallagher to give to the commission, making the commissioners aware

the Army and Marine Corps programs in Lima and the need for all available space.

Walsh said he is still seeking direction from his superiors about the idea of gifting Army land used by the Johnny Appleseed Metropolitan Park District over to the park district. It may satisfy the BRAC requirement for land reduction.

Walsh said it might be done even if the commission reverses the land reduction.

Base supporters like reception in Washington

Clovis News Journal (Clovis, NM)

David Irvin

June 16, 2005

The push to save Cannon Air Force Base moved to Washington this week, as community leaders and paid consultants presented their case to save the air base.

Originally scheduled for one hour, the Wednesday meeting with the Base Realignment and Closure staff lasted for more than two hours, said Committee of Fifty member Randy Harris. In that time, the group was able to present a 78-page document.

“I was very pleased to see a Commission staff that is focused on analyzing the Department of Defense’s recommendations objectively and independently,” Harris said. “In no way have they said, ‘We are just going to be a rubber stamp.’”

He said the BRAC staff does a lot of the footwork and analysis for the BRAC Commission.

After Cannon was placed on the Pentagon’s closure list May 13, the city of Clovis and the state pledged money to hire consulting firms to help retain Cannon. Two of those firms — DLA Piper and Hyjek & Fix, Inc. — were also at Wednesday’s meeting, Harris said.

The group argued the decision to close Cannon was based on inaccurate data.

“We showed that using the military value score based on accurate data” puts Cannon in the top three Air Force installations, Harris said. The Pentagon’s current evaluation puts Cannon behind 49 other installations, he said.

“There’s so much data, so many formulas and crunching of numbers, that it’s easy for these things to be wrong,” he said. “So that’s what our team has to do, is go through and show where there were inconsistencies or incorrect data.”

Harris also said the formulas may have been flawed. For instance, the DoD only counted the cost savings of removing staff from bases closed, and ignored the cost of absorbing personnel at other facilities, Harris said.

They also argued that encroachment was not weighted highly enough in the formula; that the Air Force should take the New Mexico Training Range Initiative into consideration; and the force structure plan from the Pentagon is flawed.

“Their overall basing structure will not take care of the young men and women (in the Air Force),” Harris said, adding Air Force personnel will have to spend more than half of their careers overseas with the current force structure from the Pentagon.

Gov. Bill Richardson also met with BRAC officials Wednesday, according to his press office.

Accompanied by Hanson Scott, director of the office for military base planning and support, Richardson met with BRAC Commissioner and former Secretary of Transportation Sam Skinner. Later Wednesday, he traveled to Pensacola, Fla., to meet with Commissioner Adm. Harold Gehman.

“Face-to-face meetings with each commissioner are critical to our overall efforts to overturn the Pentagon’s decision to close Cannon Air Force Base,” Richardson said.

Richardson is set to meet today with Commissioner Gen. James Hill in Miami, according to the press release.

The state’s congressional delegation has also been active this week. Sens. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., each had representatives at the meeting with BRAC staff Wednesday morning, Harris said.

Late Tuesday, Rep. Tom Udall, D-N.M., met with BRAC Commissioner Sue Ellen Turner and urged her to reverse the Pentagon’s recommendation to close Cannon, according to a press release from his office.

“The clock is quickly ticking for us to make the case for keeping Cannon to the BRAC Commission,” Udall said. “Commissioner Turner was not only asking good questions, she was asking the right questions. I reminded her that no other community in the country would be as economically harmed as eastern New Mexico if Cannon were to leave.”

That economic impact has been estimated by the Pentagon at more than \$200 million annually.

Pentagon rules in BRAC game

Chamber chief cites 'politics' in effort to lure relocated defense workers to Morgan, Decatur
The Decatur Daily (Decatur, AL)

Jay Wilson

June 16, 2005

Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce leaders say they are on track and doing all they can under the Pentagon’s rules of engagement for BRAC.

Steve Sasser, vice chairman of the chamber’s governmental affairs and communications committee, said Decatur is “in the thick of it” when it comes to the Defense Department’s Base Realignment and Closure develop-ments.

Sasser reported for his committee during Wednesday’s board meeting.

"We can't get ahead of ourselves," said Jim Page, chamber vice president of governmental affairs and communications. "If the Army sees us or anyone else trying to beat Huntsville for jobs . . ."

John Seymour, chamber president and chief executive officer, interrupted Page with an explanation. Seymour said many people in the area seem to think that the Huntsville-Madison County Chamber is calling the shots.

"This is not the Huntsville chamber, it's the Army, and the guy wasn't smiling," Seymour said.

Seymour said an Army representative told the Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee that the Army would not tolerate anyone "getting out of line" in the BRAC process.

"It's a lot of politics," Seymour said. "We're having to play a little defense, and we're having to play a little offense."

Seymour said the Tennessee Valley BRAC Committee has six retired generals in its ranks and has been through the BRAC fight before.

Page said when the time is right, the chamber would approach each municipality in Morgan County and ask for funding to recruit people sent to the area because of BRAC.

The federal government will initiate a hearing process for BRAC this summer. Seymour said the chamber would actively participate in that process to ensure maximum representation.

Restaurant woes

Decatur did lose a recent fight, and the board talked about the issue. Rod Ross, owner of Lagniappe's Café, a downtown Decatur restaurant and coffee shop, teamed with investor Herb Underwood several months ago.

They planned to open an Italian restaurant in the old Decatur Utilities warehouse on First Avenue Northeast.

The city said it was obligated to determine fair market value and sell to the highest bidder when the pair offered \$95,600 for the property, so the restaurant team moved their plans to Hartselle.

"There's nothing wrong with Hartselle, but things like this just shouldn't happen," said chamber board member Rick Paler.

Paler serves the chamber's Downtown Revitalization Authority. He said the authority realized the importance and urgency of its existence when Decatur lost the Italian restaurant opportunity.

Blake Robbins, chamber vice president for business and workforce development, said something good came from the situation.

"I think eventually that building will sell, and it will be a restaurant ... maybe not an Italian restaurant, but I think some good came out of this," he said.

BRAC fallout may cost state millions

Unemployment benefits

Athen Banner-Herald

Vicky Eckenrode

June 16, 2005

ATLANTA - In three months, a federal panel will turn in final recommendations on which U.S. military bases to close, and state labor officials are bracing for the thousands of Georgians who could be looking for new jobs.

Of the 33 major military installations nationwide initially targeted in this year's Base Realignment and Closure, four are in Georgia, including three in the metro Atlanta area and the Navy Supply Corps School in Athens.

In a worst-case scenario that all four end up on the final list, labor officials estimate that more than 2,700 civilian workers would be affected and eligible for \$7.7 million in unemployment insurance benefits from the state.

"It's very nebulous right now because the final decision has not been made," state Labor

Commissioner Michael Thurmond said, adding that he is hopeful that the Georgia bases will be spared. "We're on standby, so to speak."

To get a feel for how much unemployment benefits might be paid out, the labor department looked at potential costs for each of the state's 13 military installations.

Using averages that a worker would receive a weekly benefit check of \$235 for 12 weeks while he or she looks for another job, the department estimated it could pay out \$5.5 million to civilians leaving Fort McPherson in Atlanta and \$177,660 for workers out of the Navy school in Athens.

Unemployment benefits are paid from a pool of money collected by taxes on employers. Right now, the pot is slightly more than \$1 billion - its high point for the year because most employers already have paid their obligation.

The labor department study based its BRAC numbers on the 63 civilians who work at the Navy school, according to 2000 report from the Department of Defense. The Georgia Military Affairs Coordinating Committee, which lobbied to protect the state's military bases, estimated that the school employed significantly more civilians, putting the count at 190 people.

At either end of the count, if the Navy school does close, the effects are expected to extend outside the facility's gates.

"The Navy school is a significant component of the Athens-Clarke County economy," Thurmond said. "Of course, it will be felt in a negative way."

To help ease any transition, the labor department already has a game plan for addressing workers if their base closes.

Officials would set up temporary centers near the bases, equipped with job placement resources, and hold job fairs targeted to the civilian workers as well as any military personnel who retire rather than move to another base.

Once the final list is determined, the agency will visit the bases and document workers' skills, said Rosa Hayes, assistant labor commissioner.

"What we'd want to do is to determine how we'd transfer those skills to another career," Hayes said. "We've learned here at the labor department that contingency planning is always the wisest course."

Civilian jobs

More than 2,700 civilian employees would lose their jobs if all four of the Georgia military installations targeted for closure make the final BRAC list and close. Employment totals are based on a 2000 Department of Defense Base Structure report and the benefits total is based on the average weekly payment of \$235 for 12 weeks.

Base City Civilian Unemployment Jobs Benefits

Navy School Athens 63 \$177,660

Naval Air Station Atlanta 125 \$352,500

Fort McPherson Atlanta 1,936 \$5,459,520

Fort Gillem Forest Park 611 \$1,723,020

Source: Georgia Department of Labor

Save Otis brochures, Web site help make the case

The Upper Cape Codder (Cape Cod, MA)
Silene Gordon
June 16, 2005

The Otis Civilian Advisory Council (OCAC) is putting out a distress signal to Sandwich residents this week in the hope that letters, e-mails, and other communications to politicians and decision-makers will help keep Otis Air National Guard Base open and operational.

"If there is one thing to take away from all the information it is that the disbanding of the 102nd ANG Wing at Otis will affect every town on the

Cape," said Sandwich selectman Doug Dexter, who represents the town on the Base Realignment and Closure Commission and called on his constituents to engage in the letter-writing campaign.

"We all need to join in the effort to keep Otis operational," he said.

The OCAC is a grass roots movement formed last month in reaction to the Pentagon's proposed closure of Otis. The group is comprised of Upper Cape businesses, civic leaders and residents who will be working to make a strong case for Otis to remain open.

Dexter, a retired member of the United States Air Force, urged citizens to log on to the group's Web site at saveotis.com to access up-to-date information about meetings and events. The selectman also shared a sample of a newly created brochure that aims to educate and inform citizens about the impact to the region and the town of Sandwich should the base shut down.

The title of the brochure is simply "Save Otis." Dexter said distribution of the brochure will begin this week.

"We are hoping to get 2,500 to 3,000 people minimum up to Boston on July 6 for the [BRAC] regional meeting," said Dexter. The public hearing at the Boston Convention Center is expected to draw thousands, including a Cape contingent which is providing buses to transport its supporters.

"We hope that people will take the time out of their day to be there with us. This affects everyone on Cape Cod and our security is at stake," said Dexter.

Late last month, members of a government committee reviewing the realignment of U.S. military bases visited Otis and were met by lawmakers who hoped to have the base eventually removed from the closure list.

BRAC commission to take second look at recusals

Fairbanks News Miner (Fairbanks, AK)
R.A. Dillon
June 15, 2005

After some debate on the issue, Base Realignment and Closure Commissioner Jim Bilbray said Tuesday that he would excuse himself from commission votes related to Pentagon plans to strip Eielson Air Force Base of its aircraft and personnel. But his decision may come up for discussion yet again.

Following the BRAC regional hearing in Fairbanks on Wednesday, Commission Chairman Anthony Principi said the commission would meet with its legal counsel next week to review the recusal process.

Four commissioners have now recused themselves from voting on issues relating to military facilities in their home states or facilities in other states that have a direct correlation.

The repeated recusals were hampering the business of the commission, Principi said. "If we keep recusing people every time there's a potential minor conflict we're going to run into trouble," Principi said.

Bilbray, one of four commissioners who attended Wednesday's regional commission hearing in Fairbanks, said he would abstain from voting on the fate of Eielson on the advice of the commission's legal counsel since some of Eielson's aircraft are destined for his home state of Nevada under the Defense Department's plan for revamping the nation's military forces.

Before recusing himself, Bilbray said he had considered voting against Eielson's inclusion on the list of recommended base reductions, saying he believed removing fighters from Eielson was unnecessary.

"I've been leaning against the recommendation to realign Eielson," Bilbray said. "I could very well have been a 'no' vote that they canceled out."

Removing a base from the list requires a simple majority of the nine-member board. Eielson's supporters must now find five votes from among the remaining eight members.

Bilbray spent four terms in Congress representing Nevada and has previously said he would exclude himself from voting on issues related to military bases in his home state in order to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest.

Commission bylaws mandate that commissioners abstain from voting on issues that directly impact their home states, said Jim Schaefer, commission spokesman.

Under the Pentagon's plan 18 of Eielson's F-16 fighter jets would be transferred to Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada.

Bilbray said he did not think adding 16 more jets to Nellis Air Force Base would have a big impact on Nevada but agreed to excuse himself from voting. He asked no questions during Wednesday's hearing at the Carlson Center.

Bilbray said he would also likely excuse himself from voting on Elmendorf Air Force Base, which would also transfer planes to Nellis under the Pentagon's plan.

Bilbray said he decided to recuse himself after questions from the media raised the issue with the commission. "I feel bad for the people of Alaska," he said. "I've been very sympathetic to these bases."

Andrew Lundquist, consultant for the Save Eielson Task Force, said the group would push to have Bilbray's decision to abstain reversed.

Local Coalition Questions Base-Ranking Methods

New London Day (New London, CT)

Robert A. Hamilton

June 15, 2005

New London — While the Pentagon ranked the submarine base at Kings Bay, Ga., much higher

in military value than the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, the answers that officials gave to questions that formed the basis of the rankings show they were actually matched.

Officials at Kings Bay and Groton gave the same answers on 31 of the 75 questions. Each base fared better on 22 of the remaining questions.

Yet Kings Bay emerged from the process with a score of 63.51, putting it third among 16 bases considered for closure or realignment. Its score was 25 percent higher than that of the Groton base, which scored 50.68, putting it 12th, which the Pentagon used as justification to close it.

"My question is, how do you get from these questions to the scoring that they got?" said John C. Markowicz, chairman of the grassroots Subbase Realignment Coalition, which is fighting to overturn the Pentagon's base realignment and closure (BRAC) recommendation to close the Groton base.

Groton's submarines would be moved to Kings Bay and Norfolk, Va., while many of the smaller agencies at the base would be scattered to other installations.

Markowicz acknowledged that some of the questions obviously carried more weight in the scoring process — whether a base can handle nuclear weapons is obviously more important than whether it has a golf course, for example.

But in some of the high-value questions, there is no explaining why Groton scored so low, he said. For instance, Groton had 4,008 linear feet of pier space built since 1990, while Kings Bay had 3,497, and more piers at Groton had Internet connections.

Yet Groton got no points for piers, and Kings Bay got 1.7 points.

"The scaling factors that they used, that's what we need," Markowicz said. "How did we come out at the bottom? Many of these questions seem to favor Groton, but you can't tell it from the final scores."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Gov. M. Jodi Rell said Tuesday that the state is in the process of hiring a high-powered consulting firm to help with the BRAC battle.

“It's on the agenda, but we have nothing official signed yet,” said Rich Harris of the governor's staff. “Anything we can do to bolster that effort, and to help the process along, we're going to do.”

Harris stressed that the consultant is not intended to replace any of the organizations working on the save-the-base initiative — the coalition is reviewing military-value issues while a state strike force is reviewing economic impact, environmental considerations and other factors.

“This is only intended to be another arrow in the quiver,” Harris said.

The Connecticut congressional delegation and state Attorney General Richard Blumenthal will meet Thursday with Rell via conference call to discuss recent BRAC developments and the upcoming BRAC regional hearing in Boston.

The state and the coalition are working daily on presentations that will be made July 6 to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center.

Harris said a team of state officials who visited Georgia to gather information about the area where one of the Groton submarine squadrons would be moved has not briefed the governor yet.

For almost a month after the Defense Department released its closure recommendations, Markowicz had said that the coalition was hampered by a lack of information on how the Pentagon reached its rankings.

But starting late last week and continuing through the weekend, the Pentagon has been releasing the information in clumps, some of them quite large — one database was roughly 100 megabytes, Markowicz said.

“We're going to slowly work our way through these questions to see what the answers should have been,” Markowicz said. “Now, at least, we can go through and see how the answers ranked us consistently below the competition in military value.”

Markowicz said he has serious questions about the accuracy of some of the information. For instance, the Navy gave credit for having access to two graving docks for submarine repairs in its harbor, but there are three at Electric Boat.

Other questions favored Kings Bay but have no relevance to submarine missions — at one point, Kings Bay got extra points for being closer to a gunnery range and an anti-aircraft range, but submarines have no deck guns or anti-aircraft weapons.

Where the answers favored Groton by a wide margin, the scores didn't seem to reflect it either, he said. The Groton base is just three miles from a nuclear-capable shipyard, good enough for three points; Kings Bay got one for being 522 miles away.

Critics Dispute Estimates Of Base Closure Savings

Markowicz: projected personnel cuts fail 'common sense test'
New London Day (New London, CT)
Robert A. Hamilton
June 16, 2005

Groton — The Navy expects to eliminate almost one in four of the military and civilian positions at the Naval Submarine Base by closing it, an estimate that a critic said is seriously overstated.

The submarines, schools, medical research units and other agencies on the base would for the most part be moved relatively intact to other bases around the country, primarily those at Norfolk, Va., and Kings Bay, Ga.

In its Cost of Base Realignment Action, or COBRA, analysis, the Navy said it would eliminate 136 officer positions, 681 enlisted

positions and 743 civilian positions — a total of 1,560 positions. It would move 483 officer positions, 4,226 enlisted positions and 209 civilian positions, resulting in a 24 percent reduction in personnel.

“That 1,500 number does not make sense,” said John C. Markowicz, chairman of the Subbase Realignment Coalition, a grass-roots group that is working with the state to save the base. “That’s almost 25 percent of the personnel at the base. They can’t achieve it.”

Save-the-base advocates contend that the Navy has underestimated the cost to close the base, and overestimated the savings. If the coalition can prove that the bulk of personnel savings are unrealistic, it undercuts the Defense Department’s argument for closing the base.

Opponents of the base closure are preparing to make their case to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, which will conduct a regional hearing July 6 in Boston. The commission will decide whether Groton is removed from the Pentagon closure list.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell, a strike force of state agencies she established to save the base, the coalition, and the state’s congressional delegation are all expected to testify.

“I don’t disagree that if you close down an installation you’re going to get some savings,” Markowicz said.

But at the same time, the 17 submarines that would be moved would each have a crew of about 140 people whether it’s homeported in Groton or Norfolk. And while there might be some efficiencies in support functions, if there are more submarines at the receiving base, it will take more people to support them, Markowicz said.

Savings come from the fact that you won’t need gate guards and people to run the lawn mowers in Groton, Markowicz said, but those savings would be relatively small and would tend to involve low-ranking sailors.

But the Navy estimates show more officer positions being eliminated than enlisted personnel — 22 percent versus 14 percent.

“It defies common sense that the overhead function to support Sub Base is about 1,500 bodies,” Markowicz said. “It just doesn’t pass the common sense test.”

Markowicz said the coalition’s preliminary analysis of the Navy data has shown that personnel savings account for almost 75 percent of the \$203 million a year of recurring savings that is expected if the Groton base is closed.

The Navy estimate is slightly lower, but it also projects that the savings will continue to grow even after the base has completely shut down.

For instance, the data projects savings in officer salaries will grow from \$125,000 next year, when the first moves take place, to \$12.1 million in 2011, when the last moves occur. But after 2011, the Navy expects almost \$17 million a year in savings.

For enlisted people, the COBRA data has \$1.89 billion in savings next year, growing to \$38.2 billion in 2011, and then jumping to more than \$56 million in 2012. And for civilian employees, it expects the savings to start at \$4,000 next year and grow to \$31.2 million in 2011, then jump to \$53.2 million a year after that.

Salaries and housing allowances, in the COBRA analysis, would account for almost \$170 million, or 62 percent of the recurring savings that the COBRA estimates.

Contamination Added To Pentagon Subpoena

Blumenthal: DOD documents contain major discrepancies
New London Day (New London, CT)
Judy Benson
June 15, 2005

The subpoena of Department of Defense documents relating to its recommendation to close the Naval Submarine Base in Groton has

been expanded to include current information about assessments of radiological contamination levels at the base, home to a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines.

U.S. Sens. Joseph I. Lieberman, D-Conn., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, both of whom issued the original subpoena June 7, added radiation documents to the list at the urging of Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, Lieberman spokeswoman Leslie Phillips said Tuesday.

“It’s more than a legitimate concern,” Phillips said.

The subpoena calls for the Pentagon to turn over as soon as possible all documents pertaining to the most recent recommendations for base closures. Some of the information has been released, but more is awaited by state and local officials seeking to find flaws in the recommendation’s assumptions and craft arguments to keep the base open.

In a June 10 letter to Lieberman and Collins, Blumenthal said he has found significant discrepancies in the Defense Department’s calculations of how much it could save by closing the Groton base. The costs of remediating radiological waste on the base were not factored in, Blumenthal said, and these “must be incurred if the base were to be closed.” The true costs of cleanup and closure, he said, could provide a powerful argument for keeping the base open.

The Defense Department’s “failure to consider such costs fundamentally undermines and calls into serious question its decision to include the Groton base on its base closure list,” the attorney general wrote.

The Navy has estimated it will spend about \$24 million to clean up remaining hazardous waste at the base, mostly soils contaminated with toxic chemicals, regardless of whether it remains open.

The base, named in 1990 to the federal Superfund list of the country’s most polluted sites, has been partially cleaned, but Blumenthal

argued that a 1994 agreement obligates the Navy to restore the base to a much higher standard if the base is closed.

The agreement, reached under requirements of Superfund laws, is among the Navy, the state and the federal Environmental Protection Agency and is unique to Connecticut, Blumenthal said. He said he will take the Navy to court to enforce the agreement if necessary. The base, he added, would be required to meet the same strict standards for radiation cleanup as would be required of any industrial or residential site in the state.

Christopher Zendan, public affairs officer for the base, reiterated previous Navy statements that it is eager to cooperate with requests for information from state and local officials, and has been making information available as soon as possible. The Navy maintains its position that concerns about radiation contamination of the base and Thames River sediments are unwarranted, Zendan added.

He referred to a previously published statement on the issue by Adm. Mark Kenny, a Navy rear admiral and commander of Submarine Group Two and Navy Region Northeast. In it, Kenny states there is no evidence of any radiological contamination at the base at levels that would be harmful to people, animals or the environment.

Blumenthal, however, quoted Navy documents from around the time the last comprehensive radiological assessment was completed, in 1997, to buttress his argument. The assessment was based on data collected in 1993 and 1994, and the Navy “revealed that (this) assessment was only cursory,” he said.

“The Navy admitted that if the base were to be closed, significant radioactive waste assessments — studies that would take years to complete — would be required to determine the extent of the radioactive contamination that may exist at the base,” the attorney general wrote. “Such assessments would not be required if the base remained open.”

His letter quotes portions of statements made by Navy officials in which they acknowledge that if the base was closed, significant testing would be needed to determine the extent of radiological contamination.

Blumenthal characterized the Navy's statements as "striking admissions" from the base closure recommendation. He also said the Navy's comments reveal that the Defense Department used "erroneous assumptions" in placing the Groton base on the closure list.

He told Lieberman and Collins that all documents about radiation at the base should be made available as soon as possible and before the state's presentation to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission on July 6 in Boston.

John C. Markowicz, who heads the local group working to save the base, said the Subbase Realignment Coalition welcomes Blumenthal's efforts.

"The issues he's raised are valid," he said.

Base supporters make case to BRAC staff
Springfield News-Sun (Springfield, OH)
Samantha Sommer
June 15, 2005

Supporters of the Springfield Air National Guard Base started making their case Tuesday afternoon to keep jobs and jets there.

The Pentagon has recommended that the F-16 fighter jets and 291 direct and 149 indirect jobs leave Springfield as part of the Base Realignment and Closure process.

The BRAC commission will review the Pentagon's list this summer and then forward its recommendations to the president in September.

Two BRAC commission staff members visited the base Tuesday for a closed tour.

They also listened to base commander Col. Richard Lohnes and others explain why the pilot training mission of the 178th Fighter Wing shouldn't be realigned.

Lohnes pointed out errors in the Pentagon's BRAC recommendations and data.

"We tried to convince them that there were multiple items here that would warrant a re-look," he said.

The F-16 jets are scheduled to fly out permanently in 2010. But Lohnes pointed to other areas of the report that shows jobs and people starting to go in 2006 and 2007.

More than \$76 million has been spent to upgrade the base. The Pentagon's report showed the base realignment costing \$11.4 million and saving about \$900,000 a year.

Lohnes questioned the savings as well as the base job loss estimates.

Wherever the fighter jets are moved, those bases will have to duplicate the facilities already at the Springfield base.

That probably will eat up any savings, Lohnes said.

"We showed them the investments here, which is investment they won't have to remake ... As they try to recreate this, it will cost them a lot of money," he said.

He also showed the BRAC staffers the new facilities and where the base has room for expansion.

"We tried to give them data that wasn't asked (for) through the BRAC process," Lohnes said.

Representatives of both U.S. senators from Ohio and U.S. Rep. David Hobson, R-Springfield, attended the tour.

Sen. George Voinovich visited the Springfield base in April, before the Pentagon released its BRAC recommendations.

Voinovich said in a statement Tuesday that he hoped the visitors saw what he saw then and called realigning the base shocking.

“Realignment will cost a pretty penny and it is critical that the BRAC commission makes its recommendation based on accurate data,” Voinovich said.

U.S. Sen. Mike DeWine also supports the Springfield base and keeping its flying mission.

DeWine encouraged the Pentagon to release all the BRAC data in a timely manner to provide transparency.

“The BRAC process is by no means a reflection on the service of the military men and women who are affected, nor the work of the many civilian employees,” he said in a statement. “These fine citizens have answered the call time and again as America fights the war on terror.”

The BRAC commissioners are scheduled to review the Ohio bases at a regional hearing on June 27 in Buffalo.

Hobson plans to testify before the commission.

Supporters of the Springfield base twice before have lobbied to remove it from the BRAC list when it was marked for closure.

Lohnes hopes after the visit and hearing, the commissioners will decide to prolong the base’s pilot training mission.

“They are going to find out the F-16 is going to need to stick around a little longer,” he said.

Cuellar, S.A. differ on Brooks approach

San Antonio Express-News

Gary Martin

June 15, 2005

WASHINGTON — San Antonio leaders said Tuesday they are walking a tightrope, defending Brooks City-Base from closure while being

careful not to jeopardize Pentagon plans to build a regional medical center at Fort Sam Houston.

But Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, prodded the Greater San Antonio Chamber of Commerce to fight harder for Brooks, even though the city stands to gain jobs and federal spending under the plan submitted to the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, commonly called BRAC.

"I understand it's a major win for San Antonio, not only for jobs but for the potential, but all I ask is, 'Help me out on this particular part,'" Cuellar told the group during a breakfast gathering at the Renaissance Mayflower Hotel.

"I need your help," he said.

Under the Pentagon's proposal, jobs lost at Brooks and Lackland AFB would be more than offset by 9,300 new positions at Brooke Army Medical Center, site of the new medical center, and more than \$1 billion in new construction that comes with it.

Because of that, San Antonio leaders have urged restraint in making the case for Brooks to the Pentagon and BRAC, when it holds a regional hearing July 11.

"San Antonio is considered a net gaining unit," said John Montford, chairman of the Greater San Antonio Chamber. "We need to temper our comments."

But Cuellar, whose congressional district includes the working-class South Side, urged business leaders not to ignore the fight for Brooks or for the 3,700 civilian and military jobs that would be lost if the base closes.

He said the fight needs to be waged, not only for the research personnel who command high salaries, but also for workers who make the minimum wage.

"I'll be very honest," Cuellar told the group. "I'll be a team player for San Antonio, but you have to help me out on the South Side."

Cuellar said losing Brooks would mean a second economic hit for the South Side, which lost thousands of jobs after Kelly AFB was ordered closed in 1995.

Then, San Antonio business leaders organized huge demonstrations involving thousands of people who donned T-shirts with slogans and urged BRAC to spare local facilities.

Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff said those tactics, "T-shirts, begging, just didn't work."

This time, Wolff suggested, a little perspective would be useful.

Though San Antonio will argue to save specific missions at Brooks, the city will gain far more than it loses under the 2005 BRAC proposal. And, besides, the Pentagon has considered closing the base for more than a decade.

"You can't argue out of both sides of your mouth," Wolff said. "We're not going to take a broadside at the Pentagon."

Others say that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Officials in the District of Columbia are protesting the closing of Walter Reed Army Medical Center, which would consolidate with National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and send other missions to Fort Belvoir, Va.

Nearby states and counties, though happy to be beneficiaries of the BRAC recommendations, nevertheless are complaining that the Pentagon failed to adequately plan to move thousands of jobs to facilities in a metropolitan area ranked as one of the highest nationwide for traffic congestion.

Local governments are seeking federal assurances that roads and infrastructure would be improved to handle the influx of new workers in Maryland and Virginia.

Paul Taibl, with Business Executives for National Security, a nonpartisan group that advocates corporate practices in the Defense

Department, said San Antonio might be wise to consider a similar strategy.

"They ought to be saying, 'What are you going to do for me?'" Taibl said.

"Communities and their local leadership should take their best shot at saving their base," Taibl said.

But if it looks as if the Pentagon will prevail, "they should look at alternative uses if they stay on the list."

If Brooks closes, Cuellar said, he would seek reimbursement from the Air Force of \$9 million spent by San Antonio during the past decade to take over maintenance of the base.

Taibl said the city was right to seek those funds.

"They should certainly ask. They should definitely make that case," he said.

Wolff agreed that if the base closure commission, which has until Sept. 8 to review Pentagon proposals, sides with the Defense Department, the community should accelerate its redevelopment plans

He noted that numerous private businesses are moving to the base's business park operated by the Brooks Development Authority.

If the commission orders the Air Force to close Brooks, Wolff said, the military should move out immediately and allow the city and county to complete its redevelopment.

"If they make a decision to go, the quicker they go, the better for us," Wolff said.

Opinions/ Editorials

Base closures flout Maine's military tradition

Central Maine Morning Sentinel (ME)

Travis S. Johnson

June 16, 2005

Recently I visited a museum in Bath that highlighted Maine's great shipbuilding heritage. As I toured the facility, I realized that building ships was not the greatest tradition Maine has given to our military. Perhaps our greatest heritage has been providing our children for the military machine in times of need.

Consider the great heroics of the 20th Maine, the legions of men who served in World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam. Heck, my family even served in the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War.

I feel that for Mainers, that is our greatest heritage, and it angers me that the Base Realignment and Closure Commission treads on this heritage with little remorse. Sure, they bombard our student population with recruitment propaganda, but with the projected closings and realignment of the bases here in Maine, they have made it perfectly clear: They want our children; they just don't want them to be stationed here.

Well, let me make it perfectly clear to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld that despite a long family history of military service, he won't be recruiting my children. Perhaps then he will realize Mainers provide the military with more than just great ships. They provide the military with great people.

Don't blow a hole in Northwest air defenses

Bothell Herald (Bothell, WA)
June 16, 2005

Remember that collective sigh of relief last month when we learned our state's military bases - including the Navy stations in Everett and Oak Harbor - weren't being targeted for closure by the Pentagon?

Turns out the preliminary list of base closures and realignments does include something for the Northwest to worry about. The Defense Department is recommending that a group of 15 fighter jets stationed in Portland be moved to

New Jersey and Louisiana, leaving a dangerous hole in the region's defenses against terrorism.

For three days after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, F-15s from the 142nd Air National Guard fighter wing patrolled the Northwest skies, ready to take care of any further airborne threats. Without them, fighters would have to be scrambled from Fresno, Calif., or farther, to respond to a future terrorist attack in Washington, Oregon or British Columbia. They might be too late to make a difference.

Such a move might be understandable if the region were devoid of prime terrorist targets, but it isn't. In addition to the military bases spread throughout Puget Sound, the Northwest includes several major population centers, major dams, a nuclear reservation and Boeing Co. plants - any of which could be attacked from the sky.

Many of the protests over proposed base closures have been based on economics - no community wants to lose hundreds or thousands of jobs. To be sure, Snohomish County is elated that Naval Station Everett has survived so far, and folks in Oak Harbor were thrilled at last week's news that an air reconnaissance squadron with 500 personnel soon will be moving from Spain to Whidbey Island.

The chief argument against moving these fighters from Portland, though, is one of security. Sept. 11 woke us up to the destructive potential of terrorists. Just because we haven't seen another attack on the homeland since then doesn't mean we can let down our guard, especially in a region with so many targets.

Members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which will make final recommendations, is scheduled to meet in Portland on Friday. Keeping most or all of this critical air wing in the Northwest should be high on the agenda.

Additional Notes