

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

June 24, 2005

Department of Defense Releases

N/A

[BRAC commission likes what they see at GFAFB \(Grand Forks, ND\)](#)

National News Articles

[A Politician In Connecticut Makes Appeals For His Base](#)

[People power; Signs and symbols carry message to BRAC panel \(Grand Forks, ND\)](#)

[Thune boosts Ellsworth in C-SPAN appearance \(Sioux Falls, SD\)](#)

[Case for Willow Grove to center on reservists \(Allentown, PA\)](#)

Local News Articles

[White Sands Supporters Fight To Keep 186 Positions \(Albuquerque, NM\)](#)

[Falls Won't Take Base Closing List Lying Down \(Syracuse, NY\)](#)

[New Mexico city prepares to make case to save military base that's been its lifeblood \(Clovis, NM\)](#)

[Lawmakers Press Case For Groton Sub Base \(Hartford, CT\)](#)

[Officials support North Dakota bases \(Grand Forks, ND\)](#)

[Regional hearing on sub base includes 3 who visited Groton \(Norwich, CT\)](#)

[Civic leaders, civilian workers rally for military payroll jobs \(Cleveland, OH\)](#)

[BRAC: It's Plains to see \(Grand Forks, ND\)](#)

[ND, Minnesota National Guard bases face loss of planes \(Grand Forks, ND\)](#)

[Pentagon officials come to call \(Austin, TX\)](#)

Opinions/Editorials

N/A

[Fort Hood set to lose 16,000 GIs \(Austin, TX\)](#)

Additional Notes

N/A

[Baldacci eyes reuse options at DOD sites \(Bangor, ME\)](#)

Department of Defense Releases

N/A

[Duluthians fight to keep fighter wing alive \(Duluth, MN\)](#)

National News Articles

A Politician In Connecticut Makes Appeals For His Base

New York Times
William Yardley
June 24, 2005

HARTFORD, June 23 - Winning elections has not been easy for Representative Rob Simmons.

His Congressional district, in eastern Connecticut, voted Democratic for decades before Mr. Simmons, a self-described Rockefeller Republican who boasts of his environmentalism and support for abortion rights, narrowly defeated Sam Gejdenson, a 10-term Democratic incumbent, in 2000. And sure enough, in the final weeks of his 2004 re-election campaign, polls showed the Democrat Jim Sullivan within striking distance.

Then, late in the race, a crucial issue emerged: Which candidate would be better positioned to prevent the Pentagon from closing the submarine base in Groton as part of an expected national realignment of military bases?

"In no fewer than seven debates I listened to Rob Simmons say that he was the No. 2 man on the Navy subcommittee," Mr. Sullivan, who lost with 46 percent of the vote to 54 percent for Mr. Simmons, said in a recent interview. "And yet we still ended up on that list."

Now, as Mr. Sullivan noted, Mr. Simmons "has got a job to do."

Other politicians across the country campaigned, in part, on their ability to preserve military bases in their home states and are now scrambling to fulfill their promises. All together, 33 bases nationwide were placed on the list by the Pentagon on May 13.

But the Groton submarine base directly employs about 8,500 people, and closing it could cause the biggest job loss of any closure nationwide.

Other, more prominent Connecticut politicians are actively involved in keeping the base open, including Senators Christopher J. Dodd and Joseph I. Lieberman, both Democrats, and Gov.

M. Jodi Rell, a Republican. But they are buffered somewhat by their stature and the fact that they represent the entire state, not all of which would feel the impact should the base close.

Mr. Simmons's district, however, has long been associated with the historic base and the manufacturing industries that support it. And last fall he emphasized his credentials - Army veteran, former C.I.A. agent, Republican with connections in the controlling party in Washington - for this very fight.

"I feel better positioned," Mr. Simmons said in a telephone interview. "That doesn't mean that the position I'm in is an easy position."

His chief of staff, Todd Mitchell, said, "No one is working harder and fighting harder." As if to make that case, Mr. Mitchell followed that statement with an e-mail message that included a list of 37 base-related overtures and inquiries that Mr. Simmons made from early February to mid-June.

Among his rounds, Mr. Simmons has met or spoken with six of the nine members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, known as BRAC, which will recommend to President Bush by Sept. 8 whether he should approve the Pentagon plan.

He has written to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and met with Navy Secretary Gordon R. England, "outlining synergy" of the base and Electric Boat, a submarine manufacturer a few miles away.

On May 24, Mr. Simmons testified before a House committee as part of a failed attempt to delay the realignment process.

On June 16, Mr. Simmons received a "top secret Navy brief on submarine force structure," according to Mr. Mitchell. The next day, Mr. Simmons toured a Navy submarine base in Kings Bay, Ga., where some of Groton's 18 submarines and staff members could be transferred under the Pentagon plan. He plans to go to Virginia on Friday on a similar mission.

He is also a regular presence in Connecticut, where a state-financed group working to save the base is preparing for a two-hour hearing before BRAC commissioners on July 6.

"He's got the highest attendance record of any member of the delegation at our meetings," said John Markowicz, chairman of the group, the Subbase Realignment Coalition. Mr. Markowicz estimated that Mr. Simmons had attended about six of the group's 18 or 19 meetings, and said his staff had attended all of them.

Last fall, Mr. Simmons was joined at a campaign event in his district by Representative Duncan Hunter, a Republican from California who is chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. Mr. Hunter said then that he would recommend to the Pentagon to keep Groton open.

And last week, after a special field hearing in Groton of the Projection Forces subcommittee, which deals with Navy issues, several members of Congress expressed support for the base, including Representative Roscoe G. Bartlett, a Republican from Maryland who is the chairman of the subcommittee.

Mr. Simmons noted that no matter what BRAC recommended, Mr. Bush must approve the list. "If we are not successful at getting off the list, that's the point we begin to lobby the White House," he said. "Everybody knows I'm a Republican. Maybe that will help, but I don't know."

Some say that if the base does close, Mr. Simmons's political fortunes could be uncertain. Just hours after the Pentagon announced its plan last month, one of the most prominent Democratic consultants in Connecticut, Roy Occhiogrosso, was already trying out themes for challenging Mr. Simmons in 2006, noting the Republicans' claims that he could lead the fight for the base.

Joe Courtney, a former Democratic state lawmaker from Vernon who lost to Mr. Simmons in 2002, 54 percent to 46 percent, has

announced plans to run against Mr. Simmons again next year.

While Mr. Simmons makes a point in public of saying Mr. Courtney stands with him to save the base, Mr. Courtney declined to say whether Mr. Simmons was doing a good job in his role. "I'm not even going to answer that question," Mr. Courtney said. "This is not some little chess move for the Congressional race. This is about the fabric of the New London area. I'm not running to capitalize on this issue."

Mr. Simmons, asked if helping save the base would secure his political future in the district where he has always had to fight, noted that President George H. W. Bush lost the 1992 election despite high approval ratings a year before the voting.

"I'll leave that one to the people," Mr. Simmons said. "I'm very comfortable leaving that job to the people."

Local News Articles

White Sands Supporters Fight To Keep 186 Positions

Lab Jobs Slated For Move to Maryland
Albuquerque Journal (Albuquerque, NM)
Miguel Navrot
June 23, 2005

New Mexico's chief military backers since mid-May have focused on one big mission -- keeping Cannon Air Force Base open and operating.

But in Las Cruces, about 300 miles southeast of Cannon, another struggle has taken root. It is on a smaller scale, as advocates of White Sands Missile Range are pushing to keep about 180 jobs from emigrating to Maryland.

Friday in Clovis is the highly anticipated base-closure commission hearing, where most of the state's Washington delegation is expected to plead to keep Cannon open. After that, former Gov. Garrey Carruthers will stand and speak against the Pentagon's plans for White Sands.

"The Department of Defense has simply made a mistake," said David Host, spokesman for Rep. Steve Pearce. The New Mexico Republican's district includes White Sands.

After Cannon, which the Air Force wants closed, White Sands could have the second-heaviest job losses in New Mexico. The government wants 180 mostly civilian jobs with the Army Research Laboratory moved to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., one of the nation's top weapon development centers.

"In essence, we're only looking at 186 jobs," said Bill Connor of the newly formed White Sands Missile Range Community Response Team. "But it will greatly impact what goes on at White Sands."

An argument expected Friday for White Sands is that moving the Army Research Laboratory jobs to Aberdeen doesn't necessarily mean that research efforts in Maryland will be improved. Connor said the workers slated for relocation specialize in the testing and evaluation side of new weapons -- not research and development.

Further, advocates will argue White Sands is a premier area for testing new equipment and technologies. There is almost no haze and little radio signal congestion to interfere with sensitive testing.

New Mexico city prepares to make case to save military base that's been its lifeblood

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Clovis, NM)
Felicia Fonseca
June 24, 2005

The grass is newly trimmed, trash has been picked up and 4,000 miniature flags are ready to be hoisted.

An army of volunteers has spruced up this eastern New Mexico city in advance of a hearing Friday that will help decide the fate of nearby Cannon Air Force Base, which the Pentagon wants to close.

New Mexico's congressional delegation, mayors and state leaders will be among those trying to save the base in their testimony before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Top officials from Arizona and Nevada also are expected at the daylong regional hearing.

"We as a community are getting it together to show the commissioners that Clovis does support Cannon," said Terry Moberly, chairman of the Committee of Fifty, a group of business leaders organized to support Cannon. "But what really matters is going to be our ability to prove to the BRAC commission that there was a mistake made in putting Cannon Air Force Base on the closure list."

After sharing a moonlit dinner of steak, potatoes and wine with members of the commission Thursday night, Gov. Bill Richardson and other New Mexico officials said they were optimistic that Cannon would be allowed to stay open.

"I feel better today than when they made the announcement that the base was closing," Richardson said in an interview late Thursday. "The way this community has responded has been united and bipartisan. The love this community has for the military, I believe is going to influence the decision the commission will have."

The commissioners listened Thursday night as New Mexico officials professed their support for the base over dinner at the home of Beverlee J. McClure, president of Clovis Community College. Soon after, they were swept into a pair of sport utility vehicles and taken to their hotel rooms.

McClure said Clovis has bombarded the commission with evidence that base should stay open. She cited the military advantage and the human relationships that bind Cannon to the community.

"We're going to have emotional support and the data," she said. "We're really going to have that one-two punch. Then we're going to have the knock out punch - the governor. He has traveled

to meet with each of the commissioners one-on-one."

Mayor David Lansford said earlier Thursday that he and New Mexico leaders will argue that Cannon is critical because it provides the military spacious runways and airspace convenient to a bombing range nearby.

"It's like you've got the free highway all to yourself," he said.

Cannon supporters claim flawed information was used to place the base on the list. The BRAC commission overlooked Cannon's ideal conditions for bombing missions and training exercises, said Marshal Stinnet, a member of the Committee of Fifty.

"They rated Kirtland Air Force Base as a better fighter base than Cannon," he said. "Kirtland has to use a commercial runway. How can you come to conclusion that Kirtland is a better fighter base when Cannon has its own runways?"

In addition to promoting Cannon's strategic military importance, Lansford said civilians in the city hope to show the commission they don't want to lose their close, long-term friendships with military families.

"If we lose them, we're losing our friends, our family," Lansford said. "It hits us personally. We feel like we're married to the military here."

The Pentagon has estimated it would save \$2.7 billion over two decades by closing Cannon, costing 2,385 military and 384 civilian jobs on base and about 2,000 more positions off the base. The economic hit that Clovis would take is estimated at about \$200 million a year, or one-third of the local economy.

"It's going to be devastating. Cannon Air Force Base's presence here brings so much money to the community," said Mike Awais, a Clovis hotel owner. "It will be a terrible blow."

Awais and his wife, Marina, said Clovis is in the midst of a housing and restaurant boom, but the

closure of Cannon could bring the growth to a screeching halt.

"People are building so many houses and thinking there is a future here," Marina Awais said. "If the base closes, all of their hopes and dreams will not come true. It will be like our bubble has burst."

The Department of Defense estimates a one-time cost of \$90.1 million to implement the recommended closure of Cannon. Costs and savings during the implementation would be \$815.6 million, the department estimates.

The commissioners' recommendations are due to President Bush by Sept. 8. He can accept or reject the entire list but not individual recommendations. If accepted, the list would go to Congress for a yes or no vote again on the entire list.

A feeling of shock swept over Lansford when Cannon was placed on the closure list on May 13, but the mayor said there's a good chance it can be saved.

"One way or the other, we will press on," Lansford said. "We're not all going to load up the wagons and leave."

Officials support North Dakota bases

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Grand Forks, ND)

Dale Wetzel

June 23, 2005

State officials cited North Dakota's wide open spaces and the Air Force base's help to a flood-stricken community in making their pitch to a military base review commission.

"The Air Force cannot buy wide-open air space. It cannot buy clean air ... yet the weight the Air Force gave those considerations was almost inconsequential in deciding the military value of the air base," Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., told commission members at a hearing Thursday in Grand Forks.

"The fact is, North Dakota's bases have what the Air Force needs," Dorgan said.

More than 2,000 people at the University of North Dakota's Chester Fritz auditorium lent a rock concert atmosphere to the hearing. They waved flags and signs, giving standing ovations to members and speakers and interrupted their testimony frequently with applause.

The Pentagon wants to transfer the Grand Forks Air Force Base's tanker planes and most of its military personnel, and use the base for unmanned flying drones. State officials support the new mission but also want to keep the tankers.

The Pentagon also proposes to retire the F-16 fighter planes used by the Guard's 119th Fighter Wing of Fargo, without replacing the planes. State officials want that recommendation removed from the final commission report.

John Marshall, a Grand Forks attorney who is chairman of the city's base retention effort, put a hush over the crowd at Thursday's hearing when he described the Grand Forks base's role in helping the city recover from the April 1997 Red River flood.

More than 4,000 people took shelter at the base, many over several weeks. Marshall said the community owes the base its support.

"They put their arms around us, and held us," Marshall said. "And when we finally laughed, they laughed with us ... you pay back your friends and you pay back your family."

Dorgan said the Fargo Air Guard's pilots have won national air fighting competition, even though they fly older F-16 planes.

"You don't take planes away from America's best pilots," Dorgan said.

Gov. John Hoeven said North Dakota would like to be a national training center for the military.

"To eliminate all the (Grand Forks base) tankers as recommended would create a vacuum in the

entire north central part of the country," he said. A flying mission could support the drones, he said.

The nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission, an independent panel, will submit recommendations to President Bush on whether to close or overhaul dozens of military installations. Commission members Samuel Skinner, James Bilbray and Philip Coyle attended the hearing in Grand Forks.

Thune boosts Ellsworth in C-SPAN appearance

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (Sioux Falls, SD)
June 23, 2005

Senators must weigh what's best for the nation and their state in the military base closure process, Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., told a national television audience Thursday.

Thune appeared on the C-SPAN cable network and fielded questions about the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's recommendation to close Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City.

One caller pointed out that following the May 13 announcement, Thune had threatened to withhold support for some Bush administration initiatives.

Thune, a freshman senator, said he has made it clear from the start that he would do everything possible for Ellsworth.

"That obviously means using the tools that you have, the powers you have at your disposal as a United States senator," he said. "Clearly, I'm going to do what I think is in the best interest of my state of South Dakota as well as in the best interest of the country because I think that's our responsibility as senators."

Thune said he is making his argument with the administration, the Pentagon and his colleagues

in Congress. "We're not going to go down without a fight, that's for sure."

Ellsworth's fate was part of the 2004 campaign that unseated former Sen. Tom Daschle. Thune, who earlier said he had the advantage of close ties to the Bush administration, was asked if his political future is in jeopardy if the base indeed is closed.

It was Daschle who raised the Ellsworth issue during the campaign, Thune said, adding that his response was, "if, in fact, there was a political component that was part of this process, that yes, I would be able to make the case to this administration."

The Bush administration has taken a hands-off attitude and allowed the base closure process to work, Thune said. "They have not tried to influence the decisions that were made by the Pentagon."

Still, the Ellsworth decision is wrong, he said.

"I was surprised like a lot of people were" when it was announced, the senator said.

Civic leaders, civilian workers rally for military payroll jobs

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Cleveland, OH)
Thomas J. Sheeran
June 23, 2005

A member of the Pentagon's base-closing commission got a firsthand look at the city's military payroll office on Thursday and offered a sliver of hope to civic leaders and employees trying to save its 1,000 jobs.

Retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd Newton toured the skyscraper home of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service with Gov. Bob Taft and hometown members of Congress. He said he would forward what he had learned to fellow commission members.

"There is some cost data that may be different, there may be a discrepancy there. The

department may not have had all of it," Newton told reporters in the lobby of the Celebrezze Federal Building, where the payroll agency occupies 14 floors.

Newton declined to specify what cost-saving considerations he had learned, but politicians trying to preserve the jobs have focused on a proposal to reduce agency rent by constructing a new office building for DFAS.

U.S. Reps. Dennis Kucinich, Stephanie Tubbs Jones and Steven LaTourette have complained that the higher rent charged DFAS in Cleveland by the federal General Services Administration has put the jobs at a disadvantage compared to other cities that also have DFAS jobs.

The base-closing commission plans a hearing Monday in Buffalo, N.Y., to consider appeals from the region challenging recommended base closings and consolidations.

The Department of Defense wants to combine DFAS payroll and accounting work in Indianapolis, Denver and Columbus, Ohio.

Under the base closing plan, Ohio stands to lose 1,000 jobs at an Air National Guard Base in Mansfield and 50 at the NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland. Overall, Ohio would gain about 241 additional jobs, including 1,758 at the Defense Supply Center in Columbus and suburban Whitehall and 494 at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton.

Newton acknowledged that sentiment around the country to preserve hometown jobs made it difficult to consider closing military bases or facilities, but he said the commission was determined to focus on the well-being of the nation's military.

"We need to find every way we possibly can to insure that every dollar that is being spent is being spent for the absolute need of our men and women in uniform," Newton said.

"The more I go and visit a location, the more difficult my job becomes," he said.

After Newton's tour, Mayor Jane Campbell and other elected officials made the city's pitch for the jobs at a rally at a downtown park overlooking Lake Erie.

DFAS employees wearing green "Keep Cleveland DFAS" T-Shirts mentioned a common concern: they do good work and don't want their jobs shifted elsewhere.

"The agency needs to stay in Cleveland," said Vanessa Lawson, 47, a 21-year DFAS veteran from Cleveland Heights. "We're good. If you go by the quality of work, it's the best."

Lawson, heading off for a free hot dog lunch offered to rally participants, said the city's poverty rate, the worst among the nation's big cities, was an additional reason Cleveland shouldn't lose the DFAS jobs.

Tamara Davis, 49, of Cleveland, who works in a Social Security Administration office in the same building, said she has been impressed by the professionalism of the DFAS staff, which prepares military payroll and retirement checks.

"People need jobs. Their professionalism is real good," she said.

**Pentagon officials come to call;
Two from closure commission tour Fort Hood
before hearing**

Austin American-Statesman (Austin, TX)
Anita Powell
June 23, 2005

KILLEEN -- Members of the Pentagon's Base Realignment and Closure Commission visited Fort Hood on Wednesday to discuss the Pentagon's plan to significantly reduce the post's size in upcoming years, a proposal that has been met with sharp criticism from Texas legislators since its release in May.

The two visiting commission members, retired Gens. James T. Hill and Sue E. Turner, said they had not drawn any conclusions from the visit, which included a flyover of the post's recently

acquired training acreage and visits with top post commanders.

Turner said only that she was impressed with Fort Hood's resources and felt the visit was worthwhile. Neither commissioner would talk about their private visits with post officials.

U.S. Rep. John Carter, R-Round Rock, who accompanied the commissioners for part of their visit, said at a news conference at the Killeen airport that he was still opposed to any plan to reduce Fort Hood in size.

"It doesn't make economic sense," he said. "I have questions about the expenditures and whether this is cost-effective."

The Pentagon's proposal calls for Fort Hood to shrink by 5,000 to 7,000 soldiers by 2011. A related Department of Defense document says the 47,000-soldier post would dwindle to less than 41,000 by 2011.

The 750-page report also recommended the closure of 33 major installations nationwide. Three are in Texas: the Red River Army Depot in Texarkana, Naval Station Ingleside near Corpus Christi and Brooks City-Base in San Antonio.

Wednesday's visit was a prelude to a July 11 commission hearing in San Antonio. Fifteen such hearings are planned nationwide in June and July.

Carter said he was confident that Texas legislators would make a compelling case for Fort Hood at the hearing.

"We have a lot to sell," he said. "I think they'll listen."

Carter and U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Waco, have lobbied fiercely to keep the post as is. Both noted that the closure commission's report, which was based on figures from 2003, did not take into account a recent post expansion that added nearly 40,000 acres of training land.

The report justified the transfer of one brigade combat team and a unit of employment headquarters from Fort Hood to Fort Carson, Colo., by saying that Fort Hood lacked "available maneuver training acreage."

Carter and Edwards challenged that assertion, saying Fort Hood's new acreage would serve as better training ground than Fort Carson's Pinon Canyon Maneuver Site, 150 miles southeast of the main post.

After the hearings, the commission will make its final recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8.

Bush has until Sept. 23 to accept or reject the recommendations. If he accepts the recommendations, Congress has 45 days to pass a joint resolution against it. Otherwise, the plan will move forward.

Carter did not say whether he would seek the congressional resolution.

"That's really far out," he said, but added: "I think there's a lot of unhappy people in Congress."

**Fort Hood set to lose 16,000 GIs;
Plan revealed this week would move 4th
Infantry to Colorado;
2 new brigades possible**

Austin American-Statesman (Austin, TX)
Anita Powell
June 23, 2005

KILLEEN -- About 16,000 soldiers will leave Fort Hood under a plan to relocate the entire 4th Infantry Division to Fort Carson, Colo., military officials said Wednesday.

The move, announced earlier this week to Fort Hood officials, would occur after the division returns from a one-year deployment in Iraq. The loss would be offset by the addition of two Army brigades at Fort Hood suggested in the Pentagon's base realignment and closure plan.

Overall, Fort Hood would still lose from 5,000 to 7,000 net soldiers, according to Pentagon recommendations made in May.

The loss of an entire division, however, would represent a significant symbolic and psychological blow to Texas' largest military post, which prides itself on being one of America's few two-division installations. The ripples also could have a major effect on the Killeen-Temple area, uprooting thousands of families and disrupting the local economy.

On Wednesday, officials with the 4th Infantry Division offered no opinion on the announcement.

"The 4th Infantry Division is continuing to focus on preparations for deployment," said Staff Sgt. Damian Steptore, a division spokesman. "The base realignment and closure decisions are made at the Army level, and it would be inappropriate for us to comment."

Under the plan, announced by Secretary of the Army Francis J. Harvey during a speech Tuesday to top Fort Hood officials, six of seven 4th Infantry Division brigades would relocate to Colorado upon the troops' return in late 2006 or early 2007. The seventh already is stationed at Fort Carson.

"We should not get hung up on the issue of which brigade combat teams are stationed where," Harvey said, according to a military transcript. "They are interchangeable -- just one more example of the incredible flexibility modularity gives us."

Harvey also announced plans to create a new brigade combat team within Fort Hood's 1st Cavalry Division. The plan also would transfer Fort Carson's 3rd Brigade Armored Cavalry Regiment, which is currently in Iraq, to Fort Hood.

4th Infantry Division officials said they did not know how many soldiers would be added, but military officials said the plan is in line with recommendations made in May by the

Pentagon's Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

The commission's report, released May 13, recommended that Fort Hood lose from 5,000 to 7,000 soldiers by 2011 but did not specify which units would be affected.

Harvey's visit was followed by one by members of the realignment and closure commission, which was sent to evaluate the Pentagon recommendations.

One commissioner, retired Gen. James T. Hill, said Wednesday that the commissioners' and Harvey's visits were "totally coincidental."

U.S. Rep. Chet Edwards, D-Waco, said he remained opposed to any plan to remove soldiers from Fort Hood.

"I met with the secretary of the Army last week, and I told him that I think there are still questions about the analysis that was the foundation of the recommendation to reduce troops at Fort Hood," he said. "The BRAC Commission can agree with that or make different recommendations. Historically, the independent BRAC Commission has approved 85 to 90 percent of the recommenda- tions."

U.S. Rep. John Carter, R-Round Rock, who visited Fort Hood on Wednesday to discuss the report's recommendations, did not refer to Harvey's announcement.

When asked if Fort Hood would become a one-division installation, Carter said: "When the flag moves, it's just the flag headquarters that moves. That's only 1,000 soldiers."

Killeen Mayor Maureen Jouett said she was unconcerned about Harvey's announcement, as it was in line with the base realignment and closure recommendations, and was optimistic that Fort Hood could avoid an overall loss of soldiers.

"I don't really care how they move them around," she said. "It does not diminish Fort Hood as far as it being a great place as far as its

position or status. It would be sad to see people leave, but the impression that I heard is that they'll be shifting around."

She added: "I guess the bottom line is that it doesn't matter what units we have at Fort Hood, as long as we have 50,000 people at Fort Hood."

Fort Hood is home about 47,000 soldiers, spread among two major divisions and several smaller units.

Harvey said that the post would end up with five combat teams and eight support units, keeping its status as a premier military installation.

"The bottom line is that Fort Hood -- and Fort Bragg -- will eventually have more headquarters and maneuver and support brigades than any other posts in the Army, just as they do today," Harvey said.

Baldacci eyes reuse options at DOD sites; Officials prepare for closure; As they fight base committee
Bangor Daily News (Bangor, ME)
AJ Higgins
June 23, 2005

While the Baldacci administration forges ahead to oppose the potential closure of Department of Defense facilities in Maine, planning efforts are quietly under way for reuse options.

During a media reception Wednesday on renovation concepts for Sanford's Mill Stone Place - formerly the Goodall Mills - Gov. John E. Baldacci confirmed contingency plans were made within the last week to prepare for reuse possibilities at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service office in Limestone. At Brunswick Naval Air Station, reuse options are more complicated since the DOD simply wants to maintain the property at the facility while relocating the base's personnel and aircraft.

Baldacci said he has asked Laura Fortman, commissioner of labor, and Jack Cashman, commissioner of the Department of Economic

and Community Development, to head a state effort to work with the communities of Limestone, Brunswick and Kittery.

"We've also made an application with the state of New Hampshire for some technical assistance and planning grants that will be helpful whether or not the bases close," the governor said. "Our strategy is to first and foremost fight the case. We think we've got a strong case and that we're building an even stronger case. At the same time we're also applying for participating jointly with New Hampshire on these planning grants and inventorying skills assessments because we need to be able to do both. So those things have begun."

Although the Maine Legislature authorized \$100,000 to address issues raised by the federal Base Realignment and Closure Committee, Baldacci said all of that money has been "geared toward fight." Still, the governor is confident that working jointly with New Hampshire, Maine will be eligible for \$1 million in Department of Labor grants. Additionally, Brunswick and Kittery will be eligible for \$250,000 in economic adjustment funds, Baldacci said. Limestone will also be able to participate in the grant application.

Getting Maine's three DOD facilities off the BRAC list will dominate the governor's agenda over the next two weeks. Baldacci will be in Washington for BRAC-related meetings June 27. He will travel to Boston on July 5 to prepare for a formal hearing on the proposals the following day.

Meanwhile, BRAC panelist retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd Newton plans to visit the DFAS facility in Limestone on June 28. The center, one of more than a dozen DFAS offices targeted for closure across the country, was created as a nod to the devastating impact of the closing of the Loring Air Force Base in 1994. More than 300 jobs would disappear if the center closes.

As devastating a blow as the lost jobs would be to revitalization efforts at the former Loring AFB, some state leaders maintain a strong offense against closure plans must be balanced

by an equally effective defense. During an interview Tuesday evening on Adelpia Channel 9 with Maine economic policy analyst Christopher St. John, Kay Rand encouraged communities to prepare for the worst while hoping for the best. Rand, an Ashland native and former chief of staff for Gov. Angus S. King, currently works for BSSN Resources consulting and is the vice chairman of the board of directors for the Loring Development Authority, which oversaw the establishment of the DFAS center.

"Eighty-five percent of the DOD's recommendations are going to be approved by the commission," she said. "So you can't ignore that reality either. And it's way too important not to prepare for."

Rand said things have changed in the BRAC process since Loring's closure, with the government moving more aggressively to sell its former properties. She said the accelerated resale schedule only underscores the need for advance local planning.

"We know the entities that have done the planning and are ready to say 'this is the plan that we want to implement,' are going to be the best-positioned," Rand said.

Brian Hamel of Hamel Enterprises was also a guest on the Channel 9 "State of the State" show. A former president and CEO of the LDA, he agreed with Rand and observed the government's interests and the local community's plans do not always coincide.

"You run the risk of having the local people ... not having control over what goes on at the property," he said. "That's why it's so important to plan now for land use and zoning control capability on the property."

Balancing efforts to oppose the DOD against preparations for coping with all three worst-case scenarios makes politicians more than a little uneasy. Rand said the challenge lies in keeping the planning process from stealing the headlines away from those actively involved in fighting the closures.

"It's very much a dance, and I'm not sure we've got the rhythm just right yet," she said.

Duluthians fight to keep fighter wing alive

Duluth News-Tribune (Duluth, MN)
June 23, 2005

Despite recent assurances from Pentagon officials to spare the Duluth Air National Guard base from proposed staff cuts, a team of Minnesota politicians and generals continued to argue stridently before a base closure commission to retain its mission.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission hearing today in the Chester Fritz Auditorium on the University of North Dakota campus attracted a near-capacity crowd, many carrying flags and clad in red, white and blue, eager to show support for their Air National Guard Base in Fargo and Air Force base just miles from the Red River here.

The Duluth representatives, including Mayor Herb Bergson and Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, spoke for about a half hour after timed presentations for the local air bases, which face elimination.

Like their predecessors today, the Duluth delegation's arguments were a blend of economic impact and military value.

"We can't have an Air National Guard when we don't have any aircraft to speak of," Pawlenty told the three panelists.

The planes are integral to recruiting and retaining volunteer warriors, Pawlenty and others said.

Duluth looks to have avoided the apparent fate of the North Dakota bases. The day before, Pawlenty said Duluth's 148th Fighter Wing's next mission will involve a similar number of Air National Guard members to what exist now.

Pawlenty met this week at the Pentagon with Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, the chief of the National

Guard Bureau, and Lt. Gen. Daniel James III, director of the Air National Guard. However, despite the commitments, Pawlenty said no specific actions or new missions have been outlined yet. Other attendees at the meeting included U.S. Rep. Jim Oberstar, D-Minn.; Sen. Mark Dayton, D-Minn.; and Sen. Norm Coleman, R-Minn.

Today, Coleman and Dayton also addressed the BRAC Commission. The BRAC Commission, a nine-member independent panel entrusted to close or remake dozens of bases across the United States, will offer their official recommendations to President Bush within the next several months.

It remained unclear today what impact the commission will have on Duluth's immediate future.

After the presentation, Bergson said they can decide the base's alert status, which could effect its longterm viability if it's downgraded.

"I'm concerned about Duluth's economic situation for my children," Bergson said. "I don't want them closing in 2015 or 2020."

The delegation members came with a messages that complimented each other.

Dayton said Duluth avoided closure in the BRAC's previous recommendations, but was included in the

Pentagon's future Total Force Plan.

Pawlenty said those plans are in conflict. He asked commissioners to stay within their purview and focus on facilities rather than planes or programs.

Coleman said he remains deeply concerned that Duluth does not have a new mission, but said the issue of plane placement should be left to Congress, not the Defense Department and BRAC.

Former wing commander Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ray Klosowski countered poor BRAC evaluation

scores for the base one by one. He said the airspace is plentiful, the data was measured incorrectly and emergency scrambling capabilities cannot be underestimated. He also said they undervalued the region's cold weather for testing and training purposes.

The commissioners only questions for Duluth were technical and aimed at understanding Klosowski's complaints with the scoring system.

Maj. Gen. Larry W. Shellito, adjutant general of the Minnesota National Guard, criticized the effectiveness of turning Duluth into an "enclave base," which planes would be rotated through.

"I'm not sure what that means," he said of the concept.

After the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, the 148th patrolled over the White House and the nation's capitol. And more than 400 members are now deployed in Iraq and elsewhere as part of the war.

"Unfortunately, the people from the 148th couldn't be here to fight for their jobs, because they're in Iraq fighting themselves," Bergson said.

The BRAC commissioners here today were James Bilbray, a former U.S. representative from Nevada, Samuel Knox Skinner of Illinois, a former secretary of transportation and Philip Coyle III, a former assistant secretary of defense from California.

The 148th had faced the retirement of its 15 F-16s, possibly by 2007. The Air Force also recommended eliminating 583 of about 1,100 air wing jobs in Duluth by 2011. But Pawlenty said early next month adjunct generals from all 50 states will meet with Blum to begin to determine where missions will be assigned.

The most recent news appears more bleak for North Dakota's bases. The Air Force recommends moving Grand Forks' 50 KC-135 tanker planes to other bases. The move would result in 2,800 jobs lost.

The 22 F-16 fighters at Fargo's 119th Fighter Wing also will be retired.

BRAC commission likes what they see at GFafb

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
Elisa L. Rinehart
June 23, 2005

After touring the military installation here, members of the base trimming panel said Wednesday that they were impressed with the facility and praised the local community for its support.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission is reviewing Pentagon recommendations to move the Grand Forks base's 50 KC-135 tanker planes to five other bases, and to transfer most of its 2,800 military personnel elsewhere.

The Pentagon also has suggested retiring the 22 F-16 fighter planes that are part of the North Dakota Air National Guard's 119th Fighter Wing, which is based in Fargo.

Local residents stood outside the base for hours chanting and cheering until the commissioners emerged from a four-hour base survey.

Gov. John Hoeven, a Republican, and Democrats Rep. Earl Pomeroy and Sen. Kent Conrad accompanied the group Wednesday.

"They asked very detailed questions, very probing questions," Conrad said of the commissioners. "They're on the key issues about the evaluation of this base. They're right into the nitty-gritty of the military value of this installation."

Commissioner James Bilbray, a former U.S. representative from Nevada, said the base was "very impressive."

Bilbray, Samuel Knox Skinner and Philip Coyle III are part of the nine-member BRAC Commission, an independent panel that will submit recommendations to President Bush on

whether to close or overhaul dozens of military installations.

The panel will take testimony today from the Grand Forks base retention team, which will address the commission for one hour, followed by Fargo with one hour and Duluth with a half hour.

Bilbray said the panel will do its job independently.

"We've got a lot of work to do," he said. "But I guarantee the people of North Dakota that we will do a fair job on assessing the need and the mission of this particular base."

New mission

The Air Force has selected Grand Forks as a "bedding site" for a squadron of unmanned aerial vehicles. Air National Guard pilots in Fargo would operate the flying drones. The aircraft slated to come to Grand Forks are the Predator, a missile firing and reconnaissance drone, and the Global Hawk, a long-range aerial reconnaissance system that relays near real-time imagery to battlefield commanders.

Conrad said that the North Dakota officials hope to coax the base commission into recommending that Grand Forks retain its tanker planes, while taking on additional duties as a UAV base.

The term UAV also describes remotely piloted combat aircraft being developed, such as the X-47 Pegasus missile launcher and the X-45 bomber, which Conrad said also could come to Grand Forks.

Conrad said that a core group of the tankers ought to be in Grand Forks because, months ago, the Air Force determined that Grand Forks was going to be a major base for new tankers that it was going to lease from Boeing. The Boeing deal since has fallen through, but Grand Forks would have been the first to have all new tankers.

"One of the questions we're asking is, 'What's changed?'" Conrad said.

He said he plans to demonstrate that, of the major tanker bases, Grand Forks has the shortest flight time to Baghdad, which makes it strategically important to the Air Force.

Good visit

Pomeroy said he's been in tours before where people just go through the motions, but this time he felt that the commissioners "were taking it seriously," and seemed to recognize "the good work provided."

Coyle, of California, a former assistant secretary of defense, said that in their interaction with base personnel and the community, the commissioners learned important things about the facility that Department of Defense reports don't provide.

Skinner, of Illinois, a former chief of staff, said that he noticed the community support when they arrived at the airport and the Baptist choir was waiting for them.

"Support of a facility like this is very important, and it clearly showed," said Skinner, a former U.S. transportation secretary. "If you didn't see that, it would be a negative. And if you see it at this level, it certainly has got to be a positive."

Robert J. McCreary, deputy director of communications for the BRAC Commission, said that in the areas he has visited with the commission so far, he hasn't seen anything similar to Grand Forks' welcoming reception Wednesday.

East Grand Forks Mayor Lynn Stauss was at the base's main gate holding up a "Support the base" sign and talking to the crowd along with Grand Forks Mayor Mike Brown, a former Air Force officer.

Stauss said that because of its outstanding school system and wholesomeness of its community, Grand Forks offers military families a unique opportunity to raise their children in "the good old American way."

**People power;
Signs and symbols carry message to
BRAC panel**

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)

Stephen J. Lee

June 23, 2005

"Need anyone to hold signs?"

Ray Johnson, a retired plumber from Larimore, N.D., was asking the right guy early Wednesday morning on the road leading to Grand Forks Air Force Base.

"Take two," George Niece said, handing Johnson the lathe-and-poster signs scrawled with Magic Marker messages. He had a pile of them in the back of his purple pickup truck.

"GFAFB is the best for America and democracy worldwide," they said. "Defending America is Freedom 4 Us."

Niece had made 125 signs and hauled them to the rally aimed at impressing three men who toured the base Wednesday.

Samuel Skinner, James Bilbray and Philip Coyle are one third of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that is studying the Pentagon's plan to close 33 major military bases and downsize 29 more, including Grand Forks.

The trio flew in Tuesday from Rapid City, S.D., where nearly 8,000 people turned out at a rally and a formal hearing where supporters of Ellsworth Air Force Base argued that the facility should not be closed as the Pentagon has planned.

Early Wednesday, between 500 and 1,000 people turned out to support the Grand Forks base and greet the commissioners, who were accompanied by Gov. John Hoeven, Rep. Earl Pomeroy and Sen. Kent Conrad. About 300 vehicles - trucks, cranes, school buses and a squad of red or white or blue Dodge pickup trucks - lined U.S. Highway 2 most of the way between the Grand Forks airport and the exit to

the base at Emerado, a distance of about 10 miles. The half-mile of county highway between Highway 2 and the base's east entrance was lined with cars, buses and people.

The commissioners spent four hours touring the base and getting briefed by Air Force officers.

This morning the commissioners will listen as a variety of elected officials make a case for keeping the base's 50 air refueling tankers and expanding any new mission at the base.

Red, white and blue

Wednesday, after the early morning greeting that included red, white and blue streams of water from the hoses of the Emerado Fire Department and similarly colored balloons released into the sky, most citizens left to go to work or home. Many returned over the noon hour, despite 90-degree heat, to mass outside the base gate as the commissioners held a brief news conference before returning to their Grand Forks hotel.

"I wish more people had come out," said Jo Ann Renfrow, owner of J & G Landscaping in Emerado, who organized the rally. Dozens of her workers passed out cold water, hot dogs and pizza to the throng. But she called it success. "All of this is everybody just working together, a community working together."

It was tough duty in the heat and wind and mosquitoes. "Mom, I'm going to need sunscreen," Erica Hagert, 16, told her mother, Karen.

With her two younger sisters, Erica woke up at 5 a.m. Wednesday to stuff helium-filled balloons - yes, red, white and blue ones - into the box of a big grain truck owned by farmer Steven Sand of Emerado.

As the BRAC commissioners, riding in a UND coach bus, turned the corner into the base's east gate about 9:20 a.m., the girls' father, Dave Hagert, rolled the truck's tarp forward and the 450 balloons rose en masse into a southerly wind, disappearing within a few minutes high to the north over the base.

About a fourth of her school mates in Larimore have base connections, meaning they might not be here except for the base, Erica Hagert said.

Allen Dahlen, area supervisor for several Domino's Pizza stores, including the one at Baseview in Emerado, had his crews passing out free slices from 60 pizzas.

"This is very important to us, so we want to be part of the effort," Dahlen said. "About 80 percent of our business is on the base."

But it's more than that, for Dahlen and many here.

"I grew up in Michigan, N.D., and the base has always been part of the landscape," Dahlen said. "I've lived here since 1997 and, during the flood, the base community really helped us out at that time."

Long ties

Arnold Johnson was a freshman at UND as "the base was just getting started" in 1955. This spring, as chairman of the electrical engineering department at UND, he retired. "I taught 13 years out at the base for UND," Johnson said. Any shrinkage at the base "will do a heck of a lot to the economy" of surrounding communities, including his community of Larimore, Johnson said. "Indirectly everyone is affected, whether on the base or off the base."

Marijo Shide, also of Larimore, wore a red suit and red canvas shoes with blue and white stars.

She's a longtime base booster, second generation.

"My father, Fred Loomis, was on a committee that worked to bring the base to Grand Forks."

That was a half century ago. Some 230 years ago, her ancestor Daniel Loomis fought in the Revolutionary War, and the American military has been important to her family ever since, Shide said.

When community leaders in Grand Forks 50 years ago asked her father what was in it for them if a base was built nearby, he told them, "You already got it: your freedom."

"I was kind of hoping for more people to show up," said Mike VanInwegan, working hard to hold up a large flag into the stiff breeze. He retired a year ago after nearly 21 years in the Air Force, the last 10 at Grand Forks.

"I was here for the flood," he said, referring as much to the community's response as to the 1997 disaster that, with water and fire, emptied Grand Forks and East Grand Forks. "That's what made me really fall in love with this place."

Plus, he met and married his wife in Grand Forks.

"So I'm a naturalized Nodaker," VanInwegan said. He stood next to Mike Coachman, also retired from the Air Force and settled in Grand Forks.

Both men and their families belong to New Testament Baptist Church in Larimore, which has a membership perhaps half military, active or retired, said the Rev. Ken Shaffer, the pastor and himself an Air Force veteran.

At 6:15 p.m. Tuesday, he got a telephone call that the BRAC commissioners would be at the Grand Forks International Airport at 7 p.m., Shaffer said. He hit the phones and "we had everyone on the bus at 6:30," he said. The church group sang as the commissioners came into the airport. One of them, former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Samuel Skinner, said Wednesday at a news conference he was pleased to "have the opportunity to sing with the Baptists' choir, and I was able to blend in a little bit."

The Baptists sang again Wednesday outside the base entrance, waiting for the BRAC commissioners to finish their tour: "The Star Spangled Banner," and "God Bless America," to the music played by the Larimore High School Alumni Band.

"It definitely cannot hurt a thing," Shaffer said of the show of community support. "Appearance is what people look at and they want to know we really care. It's very important."

Standing strong

Mayor Mike Brown of Grand Forks and Mayor Lynn Stauss of East Grand Forks walked through the crowd, thanking people for turning out.

"This community continues to amaze me with their heart and drive," Brown said. "It makes you proud."

As the BRAC commissioners left the base, the crowd chanted:

"G-F-A-F-B! This is what you mean to ME!

Friends- Freedom- Family!

He and Stauss met with the BRAC commissioners over breakfast Wednesday, Brown said.

"I'm very optimistic they will do the right thing," said Brown, an Air Force veteran. "The commissioners generally are very astute and asked good questions."

There's no percentage in bad-mouthing other Air Force installations to push Grand Forks up, Brown said.

"We feel we stand strong with what we bring to the table," he said. "Every wing that was ever stationed here has excelled. I think that's a good sign for the community. We can all win in this."

Former Air Force leaders have called the Grand Forks base "the crown jewel" of Air Mobility Command, Brown said.

After previous BRAC rounds, the role of the Grand Forks base wasn't always so clear, Brown said.

This time, there is the Pentagon's promise of a new mission involving the Air Force's newest

technology, "unmanned aerial vehicles," or UAVs, which are increasingly useful in the war on terror, Brown said, as well as growing programs at UND's aerospace school, and a growing need for more security at the international border 75 miles to the north.

The BRAC panel will decide sometime in August how much of the Pentagon's base closing and realignment plan it will approve. Their recommendation is due on the president's desk in early September; he and Congress must take it or leave it whole.

After the news conference Wednesday, Skinner was asked if the BRAC commission needed more time to make its decisions.

"We can't get anymore time," Skinner said. "It's statutory."

Case for Willow Grove to center on reservists; Officials: Pentagon overlooked air units at base slated for closure.

Morning Call (Allentown, Pennsylvania)
Jeff Miller
June 23, 2005

Could an error of omission save Willow Grove Naval Air Station?

Gov. Ed Rendell and members of Pennsylvania's congressional delegation seemed to think so after meeting to plot strategy in Republican Sen. Arlen Specter's office Wednesday.

The officials said they had a strong case to make that the Pentagon made a mistake on the facts, leading to an error in judgment that put the Montgomery County base on the closure list.

In this instance, they said, the Pentagon did not evaluate all of Willow Grove's military components, primarily because the Air Force decided to give up on the base after the Navy began phasing out its P-3 anti-submarine aircraft, some of which fly out of Willow Grove.

"Because the Navy made a decision, all of a sudden [it's] forget about the National Guard and the Air Reserve," said Rep. Curt Weldon, R-7th District, who serves on the Armed Services Committee.

"That's a mistake," agreed Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa. "We believe that's a very strong club that we have at Willow Grove that needs to be developed."

The next few weeks could prove crucial.

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission, which is reviewing the Pentagon's proposal, has scheduled a site visit to Willow Grove on July 5. A formal hearing will follow on July 7 or 8 in the Washington, D.C., area.

The commission will make its own recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8. If he accepts them, Congress would have 45 days to approve or reject them. But neither Bush nor Congress could make any changes.

The Pentagon wants to close Willow Grove, in Horsham Township, as part of a larger plan to streamline domestic bases. Closing Willow Grove would eliminate more than 1,200 military, civilian and contractor jobs and save the government \$710 million over 20 years.

But state and local officials have vowed to keep the base open.

Rendell and members of Congress stressed that, as a joint reserve base, Willow Grove is home to Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine and Air National Guard and Reserve units that are vital to both national defense and homeland security.

The base's two major units are the 913th Airlift Wing, which trains and equips Air Force reservists to perform aerial resupply, and the 111th Fighter Wing of the Air National Guard, which operates tank-killing A-10 aircraft.

"The war in Iraq has proved again how important it is to keep a strong Guard and reservists," said Democratic Rep. Allyson

Schwartz, whose 13th District includes Willow Grove.

On Tuesday, a base closure commissioner visited the other major Pennsylvania base slated for closure, the Pittsburgh International Airport Air Reserve Station, home of the Air Force's 911th Airlift Wing.

Rendell said the visit persuaded the commissioner, retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd Newton, that the Pentagon was mistaken in saying the 911th lacked room to expand when it clearly does.

"We took him around and demonstrated to him a very fundamental flaw in the Defense Department reasoning in Pittsburgh," Rendell said. "We'll do the same thing when Gen. Newton comes to Willow Grove on July 5."

Falls Won't Take Base Closing List Lying Down

The Post-Standard (Syracuse, NY)
Patrick Lakamp
June 23, 2005

Everyone suspected the worst even before seeing the list.

First, Sen. Charles E. Schumer announced he was coming to the gates of the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station.

Then Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton headed our way.

Before long, the gathering of political heavyweights included Rep. Thomas M. Reynolds, of Erie County, who ranks among the top eight GOP leaders of the House.

That kind of bipartisan group typically mingles at a funeral for someone famous.

Nobody was buried May 13, but a death watch began.

Everyone figured the news would be bad. Later, the Pentagon released the base closing list.

The Air National Guard 107th Air Refueling Wing would see its eight KC-135R aircraft moved to Bangor, Maine.

And the Air Reserve's 914th Airlift Wing would see its headquarters moved to Langley Air Force Base, Va., and its eight C-130H cargo planes moved to Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark.

Reckoning day had arrived in Niagara Falls, with all the predicted pain and anger.

Some 600 people work at the Niagara Falls base and more than 2,040 reservists and National Guard members report for duty there. The payroll totals \$50 million.

Local officials remain upset.

"They are taking planes out of Niagara Falls, and I think that's a national security problem. And I think it's a homeland security problem," Reynolds said at a rally.

New revelations also leave people puzzled.

Department of Defense documents show the airlift wing was targeted for expansion as recently as last November. Nine other bases slated to keep their cargo planes finished below the Niagara base on a ranking of their ability to support cargo missions.

And the Bangor base that's getting the Niagara refueling tankers finished below Niagara in a ranking of bases' ability to handle refueling missions.

The Niagara base has won Air Force recruiting awards the past two years for reservists persuading others to join. Also, its 97 percent retention rate surpasses the 89 percent national average.

These facts should help the base in its attempt to argue itself off the closure list.

"It gives us hope it might survive," said Sandra Wahler, of Lockport, whose son is a pilot for the air refueling wing.

At the Lockport rally, Wahler and other volunteers encouraged people to write letters to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which has the power to remove bases from the list. The best shot to persuade the commission will be Monday, when several commissioners tour the Niagara base and then hold a hearing in Buffalo.

Reynolds has called on thousands of residents to turn out so the commissioners will pass them en route to the base.

Meanwhile, the Niagara Military Affairs Council, a support group, has collected 25,000 letters toward its initial 30,000 goal. The new goal is 100,000.

Both units have been activated recently, with the airlift wing the first Reserve unit in the Air Force to be sent to Iraq twice.

Now it's Western New York's turn to fight.

"We're going to get closed unless we get off the list," Overhold said. "We have to fight to get off."

Lawmakers Press Case For Groton Sub Base;

Base-Closing Panelists Who Haven't Toured Facility Lobbied

Hartford Courant (Hartford, CT)

Jesse Hamilton

June 23, 2005

Both of the state's U.S. senators and two of its congressmen have mailed a batch of letters to the members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission who haven't yet toured Groton's submarine base.

The letters ask for meetings with those commissioners to discuss the base, which is the largest slated for closure on a list of Department

of Defense recommendations the commission is reviewing.

“Given the considerable time constraints under which you are operating, we understand that you may not have the ability to tour Submarine Base New London before the July 6 regional hearing,” said the letters, signed by Sens. Christopher Dodd and Joe Lieberman, as well as U.S. Reps. John Larson and Rob Simmons. “However, we hope that we can meet with you as well as the other commissioners who did not visit the base.”

Four of nine commissioners, including Chairman Anthony Principi, toured Groton's sub base three weeks ago.

Meanwhile, the Subbase Realignment Coalition, the group trying to prove the base is vital to the national defense, has been working through reams of data to prepare arguments for a July 6 hearing before the commission. For the Boston hearing, the group is building a case in several parts, said coalition Chairman John Markowicz.

Among them, according to Markowicz:

The bases in Georgia and Virginia that would receive Groton's facilities, boats and personnel may have been unfairly exempted from the BRAC process;

The annual savings numbers from closing Groton largely come from a major cut in personnel without a cut in the boats and facilities they would have to run elsewhere;

And the coalition is looking at another Navy unit from Florida set to move to Kings Bay, Ga., which may further strain a base that would be jammed with some of Groton's subs and its submarine school.

Markowicz called the July 6 presentation a “mid-term report” in the commission's process, set to end in September. “This is going to be a long journey,” he said.

But whatever the complex arguments will be, another coalition member, Groton businessman Bud Fay, is helping organize a united front in

the community, hoping to prove the region's loyalty to the old sub base. He's encouraging businesses and citizens to buy up \$6 T-shirts declaring: “S.O.S.: Save Our Sub Base.”

He suggests people wear the T-shirts, available at Liberty Bank and Chelsea Groton Bank branches, all over New London County on July 6. Several busloads also will be leaving Groton that morning to take an army of supporters up to Boston to cheer for the Groton delegation.

“This would be a strong show of support from the community for the team's efforts,” Fay said.

These facts should help the base in its attempt to argue itself off the closure list.

“It gives us hope it might survive,” said Sandra Wahler, of Lockport, whose son is a pilot for the air refueling wing.

At the Lockport rally, Wahler and other volunteers encouraged people to write letters to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which has the power to remove bases from the list. The best shot to persuade the commission will be Monday, when several commissioners tour the Niagara base and then hold a hearing in Buffalo.

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Regional hearing on sub base includes 3 who visited Groton

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

NORWICH-- Four members of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission will preside over the regional hearing July 6 in Boston when Connecticut officials make their case to overturn the Pentagon recommendation to close the Groton submarine base.

Three of the four -- BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi, retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd "Fig" Newton of Connecticut and former Utah Congressman James Bilbray -- toured the Groton base earlier this month and are now slated to be on hand in Boston. The fourth commissioner at the hearing will be retired Air Force Gen. Sue Ellen Turner of Texas.

"That makes five," said John Markowicz, chairman of the Subbase Realignment Coalition. "We would have liked to talk to all of them, but hopefully, she'll be attentive to what we have to say, and we'll see."

The regional hearing will be held at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center and begin at 8:30 a.m. The hearing is open to the public and doors will open at 7 a.m.

However, it is unlikely the public will get an opportunity to speak at the hearing. State officials will take the time allotted its presentation to refute the Pentagon recommendation to close the Groton facility.

The regional hearing will be for all of New England affected by the base closing recommendations. Representatives from Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Maine and New Hampshire will each be given two hours to present their arguments. The exact order in which each state will proceed has not yet been announced, however, it is believed that Rhode Island will go first, followed by Connecticut.

Principi, Newton and Bilbray, accompanied by commissioner Philip Coyle of California, spent two days in Groton touring the submarine base and meeting with local, state and federal officials on May 31 and June 1.

The commission has until Sept. 8 to complete its work and forward its recommendations to the president. It takes five votes to remove a base from the Pentagon list. There are nine members on the commission.

BRAC: It's Plains to see

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
Stephen J. Lee
June 24, 2005

The traditional bane of North Dakota's boosters - its small population and empty countryside - became a boon argument for keeping air bases in the state at a hearing Thursday before three members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission at UND.

Or in the words of Sen. Kent Conrad, the first to give sworn testimony: "Unfettered and uncluttered airspace."

His partner, Sen. Byron Dorgan, put it this way: "some of the lowest population densities in the country."

The urban development pushing up against many military installations in highly populated regions across the nation is not an issue for the Grand Forks base, Dorgan said. Using a giant screen to show an aerial photo of the Grand Forks base surrounded by miles of orderly farm fields, Dorgan said, "Encroachment isn't a problem. You can see it. And it won't be a problem 20 years from now."

Conrad, Dorgan and three other testifiers each displayed the same huge satellite photo map showing a typical day's air traffic routes across America, with North Dakota marked mostly as a blank spot in the nation's contrails.

That space in land and sky - plus reasons such as having a strategic location closer to Europe and

the Middle East than most Air Force bases and warm ties between the base and the surrounding communities - was the message pounded out Thursday to James Bilbray, Philip Coyle and Samuel Skinner.

Three prongs

The men make up one-third of the BRAC panel charged with evaluating the Pentagon's plan to close 33 major military bases and downsize 29 others, including Grand Forks Air Force Base. The Pentagon says its BRAC proposal would save \$50 billion over 20 years and make the nation's military more ready to fight the new kinds of war worldwide.

Before a flag-waving crowd of about 2,000 people in the nearly full Chester Fritz Auditorium, the three commissioners, plus staff members of the BRAC panel, heard 3½ hours of testimony from three banks of sworn testifiers for the Grand Forks base and for Air National Guard units in Fargo and Duluth.

The effort to sway the BRAC men was three pronged:

- To keep, rather than lose, the contingent of 50 KC-135 air refueling tankers and 2,200 airmen at the Grand Forks base, while enthusiastically accepting the proposed new mission of stationing unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, at the base.
- To keep a flying mission at the North Dakota Air National Guard's 119th fighter wing at Fargo's Hector field.
- To give the 148th Air Guard fighter wing a new mission at Duluth when its planes are retired.

Minnesota's senators, Democrat Mark Dayton and Republican Norm Coleman, and Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, joined North Dakota's all Democratic delegation of Conrad, Dorgan and Rep. Earl Pomeroy, as well as North Dakota Gov. John Hoeven.

Also testifying were Grand Forks Mayor Mike Brown and East Grand Forks Mayor Lynn Stauss, local base retention committee leader John Marshall, former Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Ronald Fogleman, Grand Forks City Council President Hal Gershman, Fargo Mayor Bruce Furness, Fargo base retention leader Dick Walstad, Maj. Gen. Alex Macdonald, retired adjutant general of the North Dakota National Guard, Maj. Gen. Mike Haugen, current adjutant general of the Guard, Maj. Gen. Larry Shellito, adjutant general of the Minnesota National Guard, Brig. Gen. Ray Klosowski, retired adjutant general of the Minnesota Guard, and Duluth Mayor Herb Bergson.

Can't buy this

Dorgan said the strengths of North Dakota, mentioned often by the Air Force in recent years, didn't seem to count enough with the Pentagon's scoring in the BRAC process.

"The Air Force cannot buy lack of encroachment," Dorgan said in his prepared testimony. "It cannot buy wide open airspace. It cannot buy clean air or air-quality attainment. Yet the weight the Air Force gave those considerations was almost inconsequential in its scoring of air bases. The fact is North Dakota's bases have what the Air Force needs. And we believe that we can and will be a proud host to our military for decades to come."

Gov. Hoeven urged the BRAC commissioners to remove the Pentagon's wording - unique to the Fargo Air Guard unit - that removed any flying mission for the unit while retaining the unit itself.

Meanwhile, the state's wide open skies offer unique opportunities to the U.S. military, Hoeven said.

"One of the issues we are currently working on is the creation of a Joint National Training Center in North Dakota," he said. "This concept would transform the entire state, some 70,000 square miles, into the largest air and special forces training area in the entire world. North Dakota is an ideal setting for this training area

due to diversity of the terrain, four distinct weather seasons, bases in the state that are well suited for exercises and virtually no air traffic congestion."

Pentagon plan flawed

The BRAC commissioners appeared to follow the lengthy, sometimes repetitive testimony closely, often following along in the printed text. They asked a few questions, mostly centered on the Pentagon's plan to not give the Fargo 119th fighter wing a plane to replace the aging F-16s they fly - as the famed "Happy Hooligans" - when the planes are retired in a couple years.

"We're very impressed with your testimony," Bilbray told them. "Many of us are very concerned about what is happening with the Air Guard."

He's a former Democratic Congressman from Nevada, one of 24 states losing Air Guard flying missions.

"The Happy Hooligans, I really would like to make them happy," Bilbray said, winning a raucous applause from the audience, which was not allowed to ask questions at the hearing.

At a brief news conference after the hearing, Commissioners Bilbray and Coyle seemed to be convinced the Pentagon's plan for the Air Guard was flawed.

Commissioner Coyle said many governors have told BRAC commissioners of similar concerns about Air Guard units.

"When that many governors express the same point of view, we have to take it seriously," Coyle said.

In fact, the BRAC panel called an ad hoc meeting June 30 in Atlanta to meet with governors and Guard commanders to discuss the Air Guard's situation.

A main concern is that states are left with inadequate resources to handle the sorts of emergencies, whether natural disasters or

homeland security issues, for which Guard units typically are called on, Gov. Pawlenty said. In little more than two years as governor, he's already had to call out his Guard units several times, Pawlenty said.

The BRAC panel is not bound to the Pentagon's plan, but free to drop or add bases to the closure list, Bilbray said.

"I think that we're a very independent BRAC commission," Bilbray said. "The secretary of defense may think they are too independent."

Skinner, of Illinois, is a former transportation secretary; Coyle, from California, a former assistant secretary of defense.

Hearing notes

- The bipartisan North Dakota team spent hours rehearsing their presentations Wednesday night in the Fritz, they said. Still, the testimony ran about 45 minutes over the allotted time. Part of the blame went to the frequent applause, said Skinner, who halfway through urged the audience to refrain from such public displays of approval in the interest of time.

- The best ad lib line delivered Thursday, based on the audience's response, was Gen. Haugen's. Asked by Commissioner Coyle how, if there are no fighter planes stationed in Fargo, other aircraft could respond to area emergencies, Haugen replied: "The question isn't how long will it take them to get there, but what will they do once they get here. Well, they would be out of gas without tankers!"

The crowd erupted in applause and whoops.

After the hearing, in an interview, Haugen said it was an unrehearsed remark, but grinned and added: "It was a beautiful set up. Sometimes you've got to take advantage of an opening."

- The highest paid of those who testified Thursday - most, of course, got no remuneration - was Gen. Fogleman. One of the heavy hitters as a BRAC consultant to a variety of communities, Fogleman's firm, the 20th Century

Alliance, has received about \$400,000 of the \$600,000 spent so far over the past 2½ years by the Grand Forks base retention committee. A total of \$750,000 for the effort was allocated in 2003 by the city council. Marshall has been paid about \$62,000 in retainer and expense fees over the same period for his work in base retention, according to city officials.

- Mayor Brown told how, as the son of an Air Force mechanic and an Air Force veteran himself, he realized how powerful and special are the ties between the Grand Forks base and the surrounding civilian population.
- Mayor Stauss said the low cost of living in this region, affordable housing and lack of traffic jams and crime gives this region "a superior quality of life."
- John Marshall got all choked up telling commissioners how much it meant to people flooded out of Grand Forks in 1997 to find "our second home, to the west," at the Air Force base, where 4,500 people stayed, some for weeks. After the hearing, Marshall said the local effort to save the tanker mission will continue. Using information gleaned from the commissioners, and plying the Pentagon with questions, more arguments can be mounted over the summer, he said.

The BRAC commission will hold similar hearings at dozens of other military bases over the summer, then forward its final recommendations to the president by Sept. 8. President Bush must accept or reject the report in full; if accepted, Congress will have about two months to either reject it, or it becomes the Pentagon's plan to be implemented over the next few years.

ND, Minnesota National Guard bases face loss of planes

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Grand Forks, ND)
Dale Wetzel
June 23, 2005

GRAND FORKS, N.D. - Air National Guard bases in Fargo, N.D., and Duluth, Minn., share a complaint with Pentagon recommendations to change how they are run. Both would lose their F-16 fighter planes, without any assurance the aircraft will be replaced.

Officials from the two states told three members of a military base review commission on Thursday that the suggestions don't make sense, and could block the Fargo base from ever having fighter aircraft again.

"If you have a volunteer fire department, and you take away their trucks, hoses and ladders, are they still a fire department? How can it be an Air National Guard with no aircraft?" asked Maj. Gen. Mike Haugen, the commander of the North Dakota National Guard.

Haugen and his Minnesota counterpart, Maj. Gen. Larry Shellito, asked members of the panel, which is formally known as the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, to change the proposals. The panel will submit its own recommendations to President Bush.

The two Guard commanders said the Pentagon's proposals were drafted using criteria that put Air National Guard units at an automatic disadvantage, and de-emphasized the units' homeland security duties.

Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., said Fargo's 119th Fighter Wing, which is nicknamed the "Happy Hooligans," has won Air Force war-fighting competitions, even though its pilots use older planes. The unit has 22 fighters and 24 pilots.

"I can't believe the Air Force would want to take fighters away from America's best flyers," Dorgan said.

In Duluth, the Pentagon is recommending that the 148th Fighter Wing's 15 jets be retired within two years. The unit itself, which has about 400 full-time personnel and about 1,100 members, would remain, albeit with job losses. Duluth would be considered an "air sovereignty alert" site.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty was skeptical.

"We can't get people excited about joining and being there and being retained if we don't have a mission that's relevant to them," he said. "We can't have an Air National Guard and expect it to be high-functioning when you don't have aircraft ... If you're an air sovereignty alert site and you have no airplanes, that creates a real problem."

The commission members listened to testimony Thursday during a regional hearing at the University of North Dakota's Chester Fritz Auditorium. Three of the commission's nine members - Samuel Skinner, Philip Coyle and James Bilbray - attended.

Bilbray, a former Nevada congressman, said the Pentagon has made similar recommendations affecting his home state. Commission members intend to discuss Air National Guard issues at more length next week, at a hearing in Atlanta. Haugen said more than 20 states have similar complaints.

"Many of us are very concerned about what's happening to the Air Guard," Bilbray said. "I think the Happy Hooligans, I personally would like to make them happy."

The Pentagon report recommends that the Fargo base's 22 F-16 fighters be taken out of service "without a flying mission backfill."

North Dakota officials want the commission to remove the phrase, fearing it could be interpreted as barring the Fargo Air National Guard from having any flying duties.

"We're not asking you to find a specific aircraft for the future, although we'd surely take that," Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D., told the commissioners. "We just want you to remove that 'no flying mission' language."

The Air Force has already said it intends to use the unit's pilots to operate unmanned flying drones, which would be based at the Grand Forks Air Force Base and flown by remote control.

Haugen, in an interview afterward, said he believed the Air Force wants to retire the F-16s to make room for newer jets.

The logic of retiring the planes, yet keeping their units active, is to keep pilots and support personnel that the Air Force is relying on, such as civil engineers, security police, firefighters and medics, he said.

"I think the Air Force ... went, 'Oh my gosh, we're getting rid of this giant force structure that we are currently leaning on very heavily,'" Haugen said. "So, how can we get rid of the airplanes, but not get rid of all these people that we need?"

In remarks to the commission, Haugen said he doubted that Fargo's Air National Guard unit could be kept sharp without airplanes to fly.

The Air Force "has acknowledged the advantages of leveraging the experience levels of the Air National Guard pilots and maintainers," he said. "However, by eliminating a flying mission at (Fargo), they will likely decimate the core competency, and eliminate the very strength they want to leverage."

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes