

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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National News Articles

Adjutants General to Contest Air Force Plan at Special BRAC Commission Hearing in Atlanta

US Newswire
June 29, 2005

To: National Desk

Contact: John Goheen of the National Guard Association of the United States, 202-408-5882

WASHINGTON, June 29 /U.S. Newswire/ -- State National Guard leaders will argue against Air Force plans to ground one-third of the Air National Guard at a special Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) hearing in Atlanta tomorrow.

The BRAC Commission, which is currently reviewing and evaluating the Defense Department's realignment and closure recommendations, granted the hearing at the request of the Adjutants General Association of the United States.

"The adjutants general were shut out of the Air Force BRAC process," said retired Brig. Gen. Stephen M. Koper, NGAUS president, who plans to attend the event. "This hearing will be, for most of these generals, their first real chance to formally contribute to this process. We commend the commission for this opportunity."

Some BRAC commissioners and many in Congress have already expressed concern over the impact of the Pentagon's recommendations on the Air National Guard.

The scheme would eliminate all of the aircraft from 29 Air National Guard flying units and leave six states without a flying unit. It may also force thousands of the Total Air Force's most experienced air crews and maintainers to leave military service.

The commission invited a representative panel of adjutants general to testify tomorrow. On the agenda are the top Guard officers from Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Nebraska, Ohio, Vermont and West Virginia.

They are set to outline the significant flaws in the Air Force's data-collection and analysis and the overlooked high cost of cutting Air Guard units. They also will present BRAC's potential consequences to recruiting and retention and homeland and national security.

"Some of the adjutants general testifying aren't from states significantly affected by the BRAC recommendations," said General Koper. "But as a group they see a flawed process and the devastating impact BRAC could have not only on the Air Guard, but the nation."

The hearing is set for 1:30 p.m. tomorrow at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center.

Labor Department announces grant for BRAC transition assistance

The Associated Press
Jun 29, 2005

The U.S. Department of Labor on Wednesday announced a \$500,000 grant to help civilian workers and spouses that could be affected by the Pentagon's base closure recommendations.

The National Emergency Grant will help workers who may be affected by the Base Realignment and Closure recommendations gain access to services and help communities develop transitional plans, Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao said in a release.

The grant can also be used to help create economic development programs for affected areas, Chao said.

South Carolina applied for the grant in late May.

The Pentagon has recommended closing the Defense Finance and Accounting Service and the South Naval Facilities Engineering Command in Charleston, moving 1,100 jobs out of the state.

Local News Articles

Connecticut Sub Center Has Sinking Feeling

Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Atlanta, GA)
Dan Chapman
June 30, 2005

Groton, Conn. -- Nothing's sacred and nobody's exempt in eastern Connecticut's battle to save the country's oldest submarine base from closing and moving many of its men and machines 1,047 miles south to Kings Bay, Ga.

Preachers beseech the Almighty for spiritual intervention to keep open Naval Submarine Base New London. Politicians bluster about fairness, patriotism and economic ruin.

Ex-sailors now commissioned as community leaders exhort the citizenry to wave flags, buy "Save Our Sub Base" T-shirts and turn out in large numbers to show support for the Thames River base.

Schoolchildren have been enlisted. And Connecticut officials have dispatched spies to Georgia to size up their rival.

Today, Georgia will reinforce its case for Kings Bay at a Base Realignment and Closure Commission hearing in Atlanta. Connecticut will have its say Wednesday in Boston.

The Pentagon announced May 13 that the Navy's shrinking East Coast submarine fleet would be better served if operations were consolidated at Kings Bay and Norfolk, Va. No community would be hit as hard as Groton, population 40,000, across the Thames from New London. With 8,600 military and civilian jobs and an annual payroll of \$452 million, the New London base is the Pentagon's largest target in this round of closings.

The Defense Department estimates that transferring the base's 18 fast-attack subs and support services would translate into \$1.6 billion in savings over 20 years. It notes that Kings Bay possesses ample room to grow and is better located strategically in the post-Cold War era than New London, a Navy yard since 1868.

A study commissioned by the state of Connecticut concludes that 31,500 jobs and \$3.3 billion in economic activity would ultimately vanish if the base, its submarine school and the nearby Electric Boat submarine-building factory close. Gov. M. Jodi Rell established a base-

saving "strike force" and the legislature put up \$1.5 million to fight the Pentagon. State lawmakers also approved \$10 million in upgrades, if needed, to deepen the Thames.

Rell questions whether coastal Georgia offers enough jobs, schools, doctors and video stores. Her spokesman, Rich Harris, was quoted as saying: "When you look at a map, it's kind of rural down there."

Connecticut sent three employees to Camden County earlier this month to gauge Georgia's ability to handle the growth. Walt Yourstone, executive director of the nonprofit Camden Partnership, says he was surprised by the Northerners' surreptitious visit. "I don't know why they were being so secretive," said Yourstone, a former commander of the Kings Bay Naval Base. "The mere fact that they seem to be grasping for a straw tells me they are desperate."

James Abromaitis, Connecticut's economic development commissioner, said the fact-finding mission's goal was to verify Pentagon data on housing, schools, hospitals and more.

"Why would [the Pentagon] want to rebuild what's already in place at Groton base?" he asked.

Experience might be Groton's best weapon. The Pentagon tried three times in the 1990s to close or downsize the base. John Markowicz, an ex-submariner partial to quoting Winston Churchill and Admiral Nelson, helped win the battle each time.

"My focus, basically, is take no prisoners," said Markowicz, executive director of the Southeastern Connecticut Enterprise Region in New London. "Don't give up the ship and all that. Because, overall, the impact would be quite devastating."

But some locals seem resigned this time to the base's demise.

"I had a young man in his 30s who has worked at the base for 17 years come to me the day the

announcement was made. He was just really depressed. It seemed final to him," recalled Jim Schneider, pastor of Pleasant Valley Community of Prayer and Praise. "The community is fearful."

Schneider worries about filling the parish's food closet and Christmas baskets if the base closes.

Sharlene Aspinwall frets about selling her \$375,000 colonial house in nearby Waterford. "The first two days on the market, the real estate guy said, 'I don't think it will last the weekend,' " Aspinwall recalled. "Now, ever since the sub base announcement, I'll get one [inquiry] a week and during a recent open house only one person came."

Her father owns Pop's Kitchen, Pop's Car Wash and Mum's Washtub Laundromat in a strip of shops along Route 12 leading to the base. Business was off 30 percent in May, says Pop, also known as Norbert "Bud" Fay.

A handmade sign in the laundry, drawn by schoolchildren from nearby Ledyard, reads: "Don't close the navy base. We really do care. It affects us kids too you know."

Fay, 77, knows. Which is why he cajoled a printer into making 9,000 placards, a nearby casino into providing buses for a rally and the local Coca-Cola bottler into donating water.

His enthusiasm is contagious. The Groton utility department donates space for Fay's war room equipped with computers and telephones. A T-shirt shop printed 8,000 "Save Our Sub Base" shirts at cost.

Fay knows, though, that historically only one base in 10 escapes the base-closing list.

But Groton will persevere. It has since the dark days of the Revolutionary War, when a turncoat named Benedict Arnold led British troops against the patriots in the Battle of Groton Heights.

It was Sept. 6, 1781, when the redcoats sailed up the Thames and laid siege to Fort Griswold.

"We will not give up the fort," said Col. William Ledyard, "let the consequences be what they may."

Ledyard and 88 men died in battle.

Base Backers To Be In Suspense For 2 Months

Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Atlanta, GA)

Add Seymour Jr.

June 30, 2005

Now the tough part is about to begin for backers of Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson.

They've gotten their final face-to-face opportunity to lobby members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission who will make recommendations as to whether the two Southside bases should close.

But after elected officials such as Gov. Sonny Perdue, Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, Forest Park Mayor Charles Hall and members of Georgia's congressional delegation speak to the commission today during the regional hearing at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center, the forts' supporters will have to wait until September to hear the commission's conclusions.

"I'm sure there will be anxiety among community members who have bases that have been recommended for closure," said retired U.S. Army Col. Fred Bryant, deputy executive director of the Georgia Military Affairs Coordinating Committee.

BRAC commissioners will decide whether to accept the Defense Department's national base closure recommendations or make changes to the list.

Naval Air Station Atlanta in Cobb County and the Naval Supply Corps School in Athens are the two others recommended for closure.

Pentagon officials hope to save millions of taxpayer dollars by streamlining and reorganizing the base structure. Closing Fort

Gillem would save an estimated \$421 million over 20 years, and shutting down Fort McPherson would save \$895 million over the same period, according to Defense officials.

After the final regional hearing is held in Los Angeles on July 14, the process will go primarily behind closed doors.

Commissioners will go over the Defense Department recommendations and what they've heard from base supporters. With discrepancies between the Defense Department figures and the numbers provided by base supporters, Bryant said, backers also will send any supporting data commissioners may need during their deliberations.

Commissioners will forward their recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8. The president then passes it on to Congress for final approval. Congress must accept or reject the list as a whole; it can't change the list.

The list should be final by early November.

But from now until September, local officials will continue preparing for the worst.

Bryant said in addition to supplying commissioners with additional data, local officials will be working on redevelopment plans for the bases in case they do close.

For the past few months, Forest Park officials have been working on a preliminary redevelopment plan that would leave one-fourth of Fort Gillem's 1,500 acres undeveloped while equally splitting the rest of the land among residential, commercial and light industrial uses.

Tina Marie Coria, a board member with the Save Forts McPherson/Gillem Foundation, hopes it doesn't come to that. "Their missions are crucial not only for Atlanta but for the nation, so we don't want to lose Fort McPherson and Fort Gillem," she said.

BRAC Told Data Incorrect

Fayetteville Observer (Fayetteville, NC)

Don Worthington
June 30, 2005

Advocates for two air wings slated to come to Pope Air Force Base say the secretary of defense used incorrect data when making base closure recommendations.

They want the Base Closure and Realignment Commission to expand, not end, C-130 operations at Pittsburgh International Airport and Yeager Airport near Charleston, W. Va.

They also said the move to Pope would make it impossible for the wings to perform other missions, most importantly those associated with homeland security.

"This is the original sin in BRAC life," said James T. Hill, a retired Army general and a BRAC commissioner. "They are accusing the secretary of defense of not following the criteria."

Advocates said each base is capable of expanding from eight to 16 C-130 planes, the number of planes the Pentagon said is needed for a cost-effective airlift wing. They said the airfields can also serve larger cargo planes such as the C-5 and C-17.

West Virginia's Joe Manchin is one of 30 governors who have asked the commission to determine whether the secretary of defense's office overstepped its authority with recommendations about Air National Guard units.

"I have a duty to ensure the safety of West Virginians, and the 130th Airlift Wing is one of our most valuable assets," Manchin told BRAC members during a public hearing Tuesday in Charlotte.

The commission is scheduled to have a special meeting at 1:30 p.m. today in Atlanta to hear from governors, members of state Air National Guards and representatives from the federal Homeland Security Department.

The meeting follows an 8 a.m. public hearing where representatives from Georgia and Alabama will speak about BRAC recommendations.

Georgia is slated to lose U.S. Army Forces Command and U.S. Army Reserve Command to Fort Bragg. Georgia officials are expected to argue that those commands should stay within the state.

Pope proposals

The BRAC recommendations also call for the 43rd Airlift Wing at Pope Air Force Base to become part of the 324th Airlift Wing at Little Rock Air Force Base in Jacksonville, Ark.

Cumberland County officials oppose the plan.

They want to keep the wing at Pope.

They told the commission that losing the wing could cause problems when the military is in "crisis mode" and the Army's rapid-deployment troops such as the 82nd Airborne Division need to depart Pope quickly.

They also said the Air Force's rankings of Pope capabilities were flawed.

The 43rd would be replaced by an associate wing comprised of active-duty and reserve personnel.

Planes for the wing are scheduled to come from the 130th Airlift Wing of the West Virginia National Guard and the 911th Airlift Wing in Pittsburgh.

"The Air Force approach to BRAC was what's good for the full-time, regular Air Force," said Keith Dorman. "That's not necessarily what's good for reservists, those in the guard."

Dorman is the spokesman for Pit-BRAC, a group trying to keep the 911th and other military units in Pennsylvania.

Pit-BRAC and other groups from Pennsylvania are scheduled to present their opinions to the BRAC panel on July 7 in Washington.

Dorman estimated the BRAC recommendations could cost the Pittsburgh area as many as 1,800 jobs with an economic loss between \$60 million and \$90 million.

West Virginia officials estimate the move could cost the state 814 jobs with an economic loss of about \$22 million.

The 130th Airlift Wing has a longstanding relationship with Pope and Fort Bragg, said former wing command Bill Peters, a retired colonel.

Peters was one of the wing's pilots who helped move the 82nd Airborne into position for the Desert Storm operations in January 1991.

The 130th moved more tonnage in 12 days than was moved during the entire Berlin Airlift.

Peters said the wing's C-130H aircraft frequently make the 45-minute flight from Yeager to Pope to meet the needs of the 82nd Airborne Division and special forces.

The wing is on its 11th rotation supporting operations in Iraq, he said.

Dorman and Peters said the proposed BRAC changes would mean a loss of experienced pilots and crews.

Many members of the 130th wing have more than 20 years experience flying and maintaining the C-130s, Peters said.

The 130th has 104 percent of its authorized strength and a retention rate of 97 percent, said Maj. Kevin Ray of the West Virginia Air National Guard.

Moving the C-130s to Pope would mean 130th Wing members would have to travel between four and six hours to other reserve or guard units for drills, Peters said.

"All we want is the opportunity to serve," he said.

State lobbies against base changes

Military commission hears alternatives

Myrtle Beach Sun News (Myrtle Beach, SC)

Tim Whitmire

June 29, 2005

CHARLOTTE, N.C. | Commissioners overseeing the Pentagon's base closing process were urged Tuesday to overturn recommendations to give North Carolina's Pope Air Force Base to the Army and to move key naval offices out of Charleston.

The lobbying effort by state and local officials came during a regional hearing presided over by four of the nine members of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

"North Carolina is ready to meet its pledge to continue to be the most military-friendly state in the nation," Gov. Mike Easley told the commissioners, citing estimates that the military has an \$18 billion impact on the state's economy. "Each of our base communities has the full support of the state of North Carolina."

West Virginia also made its case to the commissioners Tuesday.

S.C. leaders said they were generally pleased with the Pentagon's proposals for closure and realignment. The plan released last month left major installations in that state mostly untouched and would add 700 military jobs in the state.

But speakers urged the commission to reverse a proposal to move 1,100 jobs away from Charleston, which lost an estimated 20,000 jobs when its naval base and shipyard were closed in 1993.

"I dare say the Charleston community probably understands the [Base Realignment and Closure] process as well as any in the United States," North Charleston Mayor R. Keith Summey said.

"In 1993, we were 'BRAC-ed.' Today, we are held up as a model community for having experienced BRAC and lived to tell about it."

Among the proposals N.C. speakers urged the commissioners to undo were:

a proposal to move some aircraft maintenance responsibilities from Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, costing the largest industrial employer in eastern North Carolina some 630 civilian jobs;

a recommendation to put Pope Air Force Base under Army command and move more than 4,000 Air Force personnel from the base, with the 43rd Airlift Wing's C-130 cargo planes shifting to Arkansas; and a plan to close the Army Research Office in Durham's Research Triangle Park and move it to Maryland, where similar offices for the Air Force and Navy are already located.

"Please, don't mess with a good thing," U.S. Rep. David Price urged the commissioners, arguing that proximity to N.C. State University, Duke University and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill gives the Army research facility "intellectual synergy."

Retired Brig. Gen. Paul Dordal, the former commander of the 43rd Airlift Wing, told commissioners that moving the unit would hurt the military's ability to deploy rapidly, an assessment echoed by Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue.

Perdue added that the state strongly supports a proposal to move the headquarters of the U.S. Army Forces Command and U.S. Army Reserve Command to Bragg from Fort McPherson, Ga.

"Our bases, together, are the military's power projection platform on the East Coast," Perdue said.

"We welcome additional missions and the expansion of the military presence on our state."

Commission members seemed particularly interested by the recommendation that the Army

and Air Force share command of Pope, instead of handing the base over to the Army.

Chamber Looks To Pack 4 Buses For BRAC Hearing Next Week

New London Day (New London, CT)
Robert A. Hamilton
June 29, 2005

The Subbase Realignment Coalition has arranged for four buses to bring people to the base closure hearing in Boston next week, and is looking for people who want to demonstrate their support for the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, which the Pentagon recommended be shut down.

“We're looking to fill all four buses,” said Thomas A. Sheridan, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, a coalition organizer. “There have been thousands of hours put into this project, and we'd like to make sure we at least have 200 area residents there to support the people who have worked so hard.”

Groton businessman Norbert V. “Bud” Fay, another member of the coalition, said the cost of the buses will be paid out of a state grant received by the chamber, and riders will get a box lunch and bottled water paid for out of donations, so there will be no cost to anyone participating.

“I think it's extremely important that we fill the buses,” Fay said. “We have heard that Portsmouth, N.H., will have something like 50 buses and a motorcycle cavalcade. I certainly don't anticipate needing that many, but 220 people would be a comfortable contingent.”

Coalition Chairman John C. Markowicz said not only will the trip provide an opportunity for supporters of the submarine base to see the base realignment and closure, or BRAC, hearing first hand, but it will provide moral support to the people who will be making the case and answering questions before the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, which will decide the fate of the Groton base.

“What impression it makes on the BRAC commission, you'd have to ask them,” Markowicz said. “But certainly, the absence of any participation would be noticed.”

The buses will be decorated with “Save Our Sub Base” signs, Fay said, “and hopefully, every person on the bus will be wearing a ‘Save Our Sub Base’ T-shirts.” The shirts are available at Liberty Bank, Chelsea Groton Bank and CorePlus Federal Credit Union branches, Pop and Mum's on Route 12 in Groton, and Groton Utilities at the Groton Municipal Building.

The shirts are available for \$6 at every branch of Liberty Bank, Chelsea Groton and CORE Credit Union. Half of the money from each sale goes back into a fund used to underwrite coalition programs, he said.

The buses will arrive at the Groton City Municipal Building at 295 Meridian St. at 5:30 a.m. Wednesday, when volunteers will decorate the buses.

The buses depart the municipal building at 6:15 a.m., stopping at two other locations in southeastern Connecticut — departing at 6:30 a.m. from the Crystal Mall in Waterford, and at 6:45 a.m. from the Ames parking lot in Norwich, at Exit 80 East off Interstate 395.

The buses are expected to return around 2:30 p.m. Reservations made after noon on Friday will be subject to availability.

Date changed for hearing on base closings

Observer-Reporter (Washington, PA)
June 29, 2005

The date for a regional hearing of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission has been changed to allow for full participation from elected representatives.

U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter's office requested the hearing be July 7 to allow the senator to attend the hearing and testify, according to William Reynolds, Specter's director of communications.

Specter, R-Pa., has a chemotherapy appointment scheduled for July 8 and would have been unable to participate on that day, Reynolds said.

The BRAC Commission will hear testimony from both Pennsylvania elected leaders and Pit-BRAC Task Force at 10 a.m. in the Ronald Reagan Building, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. Washington, D.C. Both groups will have a total of 11/2 hours to make their case against closing or realigning Pennsylvania bases that appeared on the Department of Defense's list of bases or units to be closed or merged with other facilities and outfits.

In addition to the BRAC Commission hearing, a congressional hearing will be held July 28 and 29 before a final recommendation reaches President Bush's desk, according to Mark Carpenter, spokesman for U.S. Rep. Tim Murphy, R-Upper St. Clair.

Local leaders upbeat about BRAC staff visit

The Macon Telegraph (Macon, GA)
Gene Rector
June 30, 2005

Wednesday's brief Robins Air Force Base visit by a BRAC commission senior analyst was not open to the media, but community leaders who attended a session-ending luncheon said all of the reactions appeared to be positive.

Tim MacGregor, the visiting BRAC staff member, spent most of the morning receiving missions briefings, touring the C-5 depot maintenance line and talking with officials from the 19th Air Refueling Group. But Perry Mayor James Worrall said MacGregor's questions at the luncheon focused on the community: Can Middle Georgia accommodate the projected gain of 749 new jobs programmed for Robins under BRAC 2005?

"Of course, we told him we were more than ready," said Worrall. "We told him we have infrastructure in place and we have houses being built on every farm in the county. I thought it was a very positive meeting."

Chip Cherry, president and chief executive officer of the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce, said MacGregor explained that the commission had committed to visit communities with significant gains or losses from the BRAC recommendations announced by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld on May 13.

"He wanted to make sure we can handle the additional employees," Cherry said, "and I think he walked away with a good feeling."

With 180 U.S. military installations recommended for closure and hundreds more for realignment, the independent BRAC commission has a formidable, time-sensitive process ahead of them. The nine-member panel must complete its analysis and present final recommendations to the president by Sept. 8.

Robins' gains did not warrant a visit by one of the commissioners, said Ron Carbon, director of the 21st Century Partnership. The partnership, consisting of area political, business and government leaders, has spearheaded Middle Georgia's BRAC preparations.

"But the commission did make a commitment to put people on the ground, see the situation firsthand and validate what the recommendations say," Carbon said. "And from what I saw Wednesday, there were no disconnects. He saw what he expected to see and seemed to be very pleased."

Cherry said MacGregor's comments appeared to vindicate the local area's extensive BRAC preparations.

"He said if communities wait to get ready when BRAC happens, they're not going to fare very well," Cherry said. "There are no bad bases anymore. The bad bases were closed during previous BRAC rounds."

What sets bases apart now are communities that look at encroachment and zoning issues along with other factors important to military value. "We've tried to never lose sight of that and it makes a difference," Cherry said.

N.C. to get \$1 million to help communities hit by base closings

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Raleigh, NC)
Margaret Lillard
June 29, 2005

North Carolina communities that suffer job losses or other economic problems due to military cutbacks will share in a \$1 million federal grant announced Wednesday - months before the Pentagon's realignment plans are finalized.

The grant from the Labor Department is intended to help workers, businesses and communities that take a hit under plans to close or realign military facilities. If the money is not needed due to the military reorganization, the state Commerce Department can spend it to help workers who lose their jobs for other reasons, a spokeswoman for Sen. Elizabeth Dole, R-N.C., said.

The Defense Department's realignment proposals, announced May 13, are being considered by a commission that heard public comment Tuesday in Charlotte. The panel will make recommendations in September to President Bush, who will decide with Congress whether to accept the plans or demand a new report.

Even though the final decision isn't due until autumn, states had a June 10 deadline to apply for the grants, Commerce Department spokeswoman Alice Garland said.

"We were not going to miss the opportunity," she said. "If (the original) recommendation sticks, we will definitely have needs we will want to meet."

The money must be used by the end of the year.

In all, the state would lose 568 military positions and gain 307 civilian jobs if the initial Defense Department proposals were implemented as

written. But some individual communities could see significant job losses.

Changes proposed for the Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point would add 48 military positions but cut 656 civilian jobs. One civilian job and 182 military positions would disappear due to changes proposed for Camp Lejeune and Marine Corps Air Station New River. The loss of the Army Research Office in Durham would cost 113 civilian jobs.

In all, 35 states, the District of Columbia and Guam shared in more than \$28 million in grants, the Labor Department said Wednesday. The largest amounts, \$1.5 million each, went to Illinois and Indiana. North Carolina was one of 15 states to win a \$1 million grant.

Military-base supporters, lawmakers attend hearing in Charlotte, N.C.

Charlotte Observer (Charlotte, NC)
Kerry Hall
June 29, 2005

Brenda Wilson of Havelock has traveled the East Coast in support of her local Marine Corps base and Naval Air Depot since 1988.

So it was a given that she would rise at 6 a.m. Tuesday, board a bus and head to Charlotte for the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's hearing on the future of military bases in the Carolinas and West Virginia. A real estate agent, her livelihood depends on military families. Her husband is a retired Marine.

But the Pentagon says such devotion is supposed to be a minor consideration.

The BRAC is an independent group that will make recommendations to President Bush and Congress for which bases to close or realign. Congress designed the base-closing process to "rationalize" the decision-making and reduce the inherent political and economic tensions, says Paul Taibl, director of policy with Business Executives for National Security, a Washington group that encourages communities to reduce their dependence on local bases.

Congress can only vote yes or no on BRAC's entire set of recommendations -- it cannot modify the recommendations.

Commissioners are supposed to focus on "military value," according to Defense Department criteria. Economic impact ranks No. 6 out of eight criteria.

But lawmakers usually talk about base closings in the form of lost jobs and the burdens that displaced families would face.

On Tuesday, the conversation took a different tack, with N.C. lawmakers largely talking in technical, military terms.

More than 400 supporters and a dozen top Carolinas lawmakers attended the hearing in a conference room at Central Piedmont Community College's west campus. BRAC members listened to more than four hours of testimony.

Sen. Elizabeth Dole, R-N.C., spoke about operational readiness. A retired brigadier general from Pope Air Force Base praised the base's ability to "mobilize and surge."

Still, the heart of the issue -- the jobs that a military base provides -- was reflected in the busloads of people who rose in the wee hours to travel to the hearing from mostly rural Eastern North Carolina communities whose lifeblood depends on the military's presence.

"If it weren't for the military, the town would fall into the ocean," said Barbara Whiteman, a resident of Havelock who, like Wilson, will gladly travel to support "her" Marines.

Indeed, the military has become an important economic driver for North Carolina, pumping an estimated \$ 18 billion into the economy each year. In Havelock, Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point and the Naval Air Depot are estimated to provide one in four jobs for the region. Those jobs pay upwards of \$ 50,000 a year, easily the best-paying ones east of I-85.

As Gov. Mike Easley told BRAC commissioners: "Our economy depends on a strong military presence in this state."

The Carolinas fared relatively well when the Pentagon released its list of suggested base closings and downsizings earlier this year, losing only four bases, none of them major. The Naval Air Depot stands to lose more than 600 of its 3,800 jobs under the Pentagon's proposal.

On Tuesday, N.C. lawmakers took a defensive stance -- reminding the commission of how N.C. bases have contributed to the nation's military successes.

They also asked for more: more missions and more personnel at various bases.

BRAC Commissioner James Hill, a retired general, conceded that economics always lurk in the background.

"We understand this is a whole lot more than dollar figures, planes and bases," Hill said to reporters after the hearing. "This is about human beings."

Job growth in Connecticut is stagnant, report says

Connecticut Post (Bridgeport, CT)

Pam Dawkins

June 29, 2005

Add job growth stagnation to the list of what Connecticut is tops in, according to a report by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp.

"Connecticut has undergone a transition to a service economy," following the loss of manufacturing jobs since the 1990s, said Paul Driscoll, a Boston-based FDIC regional manager.

And from 1990 through the first quarter of 2005, service job growth was narrowly mixed, and total employment is only slightly more than at the beginning of the 1990s, according to the FDIC's state profile for Connecticut, released with those of the rest of the nation Tuesday.

"No other state in the country has had such stagnation in employment," the report read.

"It has been relatively stagnant," said Todd Martin, economic adviser to People's Bank. But, he said, the state has added 22,000 jobs since this time last year, for a growth rate of 1.3 percent, compared to 1.7 percent nationally.

"That's not that bad," considering the state's lower rate of population growth and lower starting jobless rate, Martin said.

The slower job growth, Driscoll agreed, is partly a function of the state's slower population growth.

Nationally, job growth in business and professional services has been better than in Connecticut, said John Tirinzonie, labor economist with the state's Department of Labor.

"We've had some problems," he said, and growth on the financial services side has been flat. But, he added, Connecticut has more workers employed in financial services than many other states, and, as home to many corporate headquarters, is more easily affected by mergers and acquisitions that result in layoffs.

In 2004, Tirinzonie said, "We had growth in the manufacturing sector," while national employment fell.

"I just don't think it's anything critical," Tirinzonie said of the job growth lag.

In addition to employment, the report looked at per capita personal income -- Connecticut is the highest nationally, with Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk the highest in the metropolitan areas -- house price appreciation and the health of state-chartered banks.

Since 2000, house prices have grown 57 percent, but rising mortgage rates in the future could change this, the report said.

"Boom does not necessarily lead to bust," said Richard Brown, the FDIC's chief economist, but "severe local economic distress" could put a dent in the housing market.

One possible source of this distress could come from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which recommended closing the Groton sub base and sub school.

But, Driscoll said, the effect this has on the state's economy is uncertain, because it is still just a proposal and, if approved, the closing would take years to complete.

As to the state's banks, Driscoll said that as long as their underwriting stays solid, they should remain in very good shape.

Banks are generally positioned to do fairly well, Brown added, but a "boom-and-bust cycle" can be the biggest threat they face, such as after the economy sank in 1989. However, Driscoll said, the banks' bases are stronger now, and they are well-capitalized and earning decent money.

Overall, Brown said, he would describe the state's economy as "stable, not stellar," while Driscoll said, "Connecticut is chugging along."

Congressman sees strength in numbers BRAC visits to area bases start on July 7 Lining Up Support for Ingleside

Corpus Christi Caller-Times (Corpus Christi, TX)

Fanny S. Chirinos

June 29, 2005

Supporters of Naval Air Station Corpus Christi and Naval Station Ingleside were urged to line South Texas streets on July 7 and 8 when Base Realignment and Closure commissioner James T. Hill tours area bases. That was the main message at a Tuesday news conference by Americans for Gulf Security, a community group aimed at keeping area bases open.

The Pentagon recommended the closure of Naval Station Ingleside and four other Texas military facilities on May 13. It also

recommended the realignment of Naval Air Station Corpus Christi and the Corpus Christi Army Depot. The closure and realignment would affect 8,000 civilian and military jobs.

Standing on the Harbor Ferry dock in front of the American Bank Center, Lencho Rendon, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Solomon P. Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi, said a great show of support could make a difference with the BRAC commissioners when they visit area bases next week.

Hill, a retired Army general, will visit Naval Air Station Corpus Christi on July 7 and Naval Station Ingleside on July 8. BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony Principi will tour Naval Station Ingleside on July 10.

"We want them lined up in support of Ingleside so they see we mean business," Rendon said.

Ortiz, who also attended and helped organize Tuesday's news conference, addressed skeptics who have said Naval Station Ingleside would close no matter what efforts are made.

"The commission isn't closing as many bases as the Department of Defense recommended," Ortiz said. "We're very much in this and we're not giving up. This is not only Navy country, it's military country and it has been so for the past 50 years. We need everyone to come out. We will salvage Ingleside."

Americans for Gulf Security members - which include people from the South Texas Military Facilities Task Force, the Port of Corpus Christi and various civic organizations - asked supporters to line up along Chaparral Street between Interstate Highway 37 and the Congressman Solomon P. Ortiz International Center on Harbor Street by 7:30 a.m. July 7 to greet Hill. On July 8, when Hill visits Naval Station Ingleside, the group asked that supporters line up along Highway 361 between Gregory and the base by 7:30 a.m.

A reception for Hill will be from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. July 7 at the American Bank Center with music, entertainment, food, drink and guest

speakers, whose names will be released early next week.

"We'll show our unity and commitment," Ortiz said. "They all know what it means when we come out in numbers."

Americans for Gulf Security has been collecting signatures from base supporters for almost three weeks. More than 30,000 signatures have been collected to date and will be presented to Hill during his visit to the area.

Connecticut lieutenant governor praises state businesses' efforts to save base

New London Day (New London, CT)

Anthony Cronin

June 29, 2005

Lt. Gov. Kevin Sullivan on Tuesday thanked the state's business community and chambers of commerce for their letter-writing campaign opposing the proposed closing of the Naval Submarine Base in Groton.

Sullivan, who organized the campaign with the Connecticut Business and Industry Association and chambers from around the state, said the proposed closing of the Groton submarine base would threaten the statewide economy and create potential job losses in the tens of thousands.

"Businesses and workers throughout the state know that this is a threat to all of us," he said. "And we know that the economic loss will move through the entire state like a tidal wave in terms of all the businesses that supply the base, submarine industry and Navy families in so many ways."

A coalition of more than 50 business groups from across Connecticut sent the letter earlier this month to the federal Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, which is the independent panel investigating the Pentagon's proposed list of base shutdowns and consolidations.

Those who signed the letter took issue with the Pentagon's fairness and objectivity in their recommendation to shutter the Groton base, which employs more than 7,500 sailors and thousands of civilian and military contractors.

The business coalition's letter to Anthony Principi, chairman of the BRAC commission, said the closing of the Groton base, which accepted its first submarines in 1915, "is clearly not in the strategic military, federal budgetary or national economic interests of our nation."

The signers included numerous chambers from around the state, including the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, which has led efforts to overturn the Pentagon's recommendation for the naval submarine base. Other local chambers involved in the fight, including the Greater Mystic Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Norwich Chamber of Commerce, also signed the letter.

The commission will hold public hearings on Wednesday, July 6, in Boston, which are expected to draw a large contingent from Connecticut to show support for those leading the fight to save the Groton base, the nation's oldest submarine base.

On May 13, the Pentagon announced its 2005 round of base closings and consolidations, which was its fifth round of BRAC-related shutdowns since 1988. The Pentagon is recommending moving the Groton submarines to existing bases in Norfolk, Va., and Kings Bay, Ga. It also wants to move the submarine base to the Kings Bay facility.

Numerous other commands at the Groton base would be moved to those two southern bases or other military sites under the Pentagon's base-closing recommendations.

RAFB backers gear up for BRAC visitor

The Macon Telegraph (Macon, GA)

Gene Rector

June 29, 2005

The main thoroughfares in this bustling Middle Georgia community are spruced up and ready for today's Robins Air Force Base visit by a staff member from the independent BRAC commission.

The roadside and median grass is cut. Banners spell out the area's decades-old rallying cry: "Every Day in Middle Georgia is Armed Forces Appreciation Day." Other signs and marques just carry the acronym: "EDIMGIAFAD."

Some merchants tout military discounts. A few use their own words to emphasize the importance of Robins and its \$4.2 billion in annual economic impact.

It's all to make sure Tim MacGregor's brief visit leaves no unanswered questions.

"We want to stress that this community is focused on supporting Robins," said retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Ron Smith.

Smith is a consultant to the 21st Century Partnership, a group of Middle Georgia business, political and civic leaders who have spearheaded the area's preparation for BRAC 2005, the federal process for identifying military installations for closure or realignment.

Robins was not one of the 33 major bases recommended for closure by the Department of Defense on May 13. But the BRAC commission has the authority to add additional bases before submitting its final report to the president by Sept. 8. The local base will be realigned if the Defense Department's recommendations stand - losing some functions, gaining others but posting an increase of about 750, largely contractor jobs.

According to base officials, MacGregor will spend about four hours at Robins this morning receiving presentations, touring the massive C-5 depot maintenance line and visiting the 19th Air Refueling Group. The 19th, with 12 KC-135 aircraft and about 500 people, will be transferring to McConnell Air Force Base, Kan., under the current BRAC gameplan. The BRAC

official also will have lunch with base and community leaders.

Smith said the community group wants to stress that support for Robins is not in reaction to BRAC.

"We're not a BRAC-popup organization," he said. "Obviously we work harder during BRAC, but the community and the base have had a 65-year partnership. The base and much of the area grew up together."

Houston County Commissioner Tom McMichael has chaired the partnership's BRAC reception committee, the group that organized the fix-up, spruce-up campaign.

"To tell you the truth, it was the easiest committee I've ever chaired," McMichael said. "We had people who were experts from advertising to roads and streets. They've done a tremendous job. There's been a great spirit of cooperation. We're ready."

Houston County road superintendent Travis McClendon has worked with Jesse Fountain, director of community development for Warner Robins, to schedule and coordinate work on the main access roads.

MacGregor visited Moody Air Force Base on Tuesday and is expected to use Interstate 75 and Russell Parkway to reach the local installation.

Both McClendon and Fountain said the thoroughfare work was nothing unusual.

"We cut the grass along Russell Parkway and Highway 247 every other month," said McClendon, "so we haven't done anything out of the ordinary. We just did it a little out of cycle."

Fountain said the push has been successful.

"Things are looking pretty good," he said Tuesday afternoon. "We got the grass cut, the illegal signs picked up and we've gotten fairly good cooperation from the business community. We do this all the time. We just wanted to do it before he comes."

Ron Carbon, partnership director, said MacGregor will be given a booklet at the luncheon that will document the area's long-standing support for Robins.

"We wanted to make a small but pointed impression that we're not asleep at the wheel," Carbon said. "We wanted him to know that we've been active over the last 65 years. Whether it was a day to celebrate or go to work, we've been here to do it."

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes