

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

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Department of Defense Releases

USAF Moves To Adopt Brownfields Approach At BRAC, Waste Sites Initiative known as 'BRACfields'

Inside the Air Force

Alex Kuli

July 1, 2005

The Air Force is moving to incorporate elements of state and federal brownfields programs into future environmental restoration projects, including cleanups at bases slated for closure in

the upcoming base realignment and closure process.

The service is developing implementing guidance for its 2004 cleanup policy that was modeled on brownfields redevelopment methods -- such as making cleanup decisions based upon future land use in cooperation with private developers. Air Force officials recently asked EPA and state waste regulators to review the guidance, which is expected to be complete by early autumn, an Air Force spokeswoman said.

Sources say Air Force officials also are considering incorporating many of the brownfields redevelopment concepts into a new program, informally known as BRACfields, to speed redevelopment of contaminated BRAC sites. The concept appears to be based on brownfields cleanup and redevelopment programs for certain categories of sites. For example, EPA has a redevelopment program for sites contaminated by leaking underground storage tanks (UST) known as USTfields, while the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration runs an interagency program -- Portfields -- aimed at cleaning up urban shorelines.

At present, BRACfields is "just an idea," a spokesman for the Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence said, adding that the center's director of environmental programs is only "vaguely aware" of the concept.

But it is unclear whether the Air Force's efforts will prove acceptable to EPA officials and state regulators, who have already raised serious concerns about the Air Force's proposals to transform its cleanup practices in the 2004 policy document. Officials with the Association of State and Territorial Solid Waste Management Officials (ASTSWMO) say the policy, as drafted, allows the service to waive enforceable cleanup requirements and inappropriately assumes that a contaminated site's land use will not change.

ASTSWMO did not return calls seeking comment on whether the negotiations over the implementing guidance would satisfy their

concerns. However, an EPA source is expressing doubts. "I'm not sure what the outcome will be," the source says. "I'm a little unconvinced one way or the other."

It also is unclear whether the new approach would win support from local reuse authorities -- local government bodies charged with drafting redevelopment plans for former DOD sites. In the past, DOD and some local reuse authorities have clashed when the local bodies have sought, for example, to turn contaminated DOD sites into residential zones.

In a June 13 interview with sister publication Defense Environment Alert, Maureen Koetz, the Air Force's principal deputy assistant secretary for installations, environment and logistics, held up brownfields as an example of a cost-effective, results-oriented cleanup program for the private sector that the Air Force wants to incorporate into its own practices.

"We believe the brownfield program has provided useful experience in risk-management decision making that balances effective reuse of resources and restoration requirements," Koetz said. "It also gives recognition to the benefit of avoided greenfield conversion through wise use of property already dedicated to economic activity. Both factors are important to consider when reusing military installation assets."

She had earlier voiced support for the concept in a memo attached to the Air Force's 2004 cleanup policy. Koetz noted a possible expansion in DOD cleanup obligations due to new contaminants and stricter standards. She suggested that industry, state and federal brownfields programs have developed "streamlined, performance-based approaches to the cleanup process" that could provide a way to increase DOD program efficiencies.

Air Force sources say that in the past, the Air Force has not always taken advantage of the multiple remediation options available to the private sector. "It would appear that . . . private industry gets a better deal from state and federal regulators than they're willing to give DOD," a source involved in prior Air Force BRAC

cleanups said. The source explained that in the BRAC process, some local reuse authorities “look at DOD as a vast wasteland of money” and insist that DOD remediate its closing bases to residential levels, only to erect an industrial facility after cleanup is complete.

However, an EPA source doubts whether a BRACfields approach would work with many DOD facilities, especially those that are listed on the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) of worst contaminated sites. “Brownfields and federal facilities on the NPL are the opposite sides of the cleanup spectrum,” the source says. “Brownfields tends to be small, non-complicated cleanups, which is why the states are generally comfortable dealing with them under their voluntary programs. Sites that are more contaminated warrant more regulator involvement, such as state enforcement cleanup programs.”

Also, EPA regulators address such sites with requirements laid out in the National Contingency Plan, the EPA source adds. “These may or may not be the same as those that govern brownfield sites,” the source says.

The Air Force spokeswoman counters that brownfields programs have been successfully used to address sites that are far worse contaminated than many Air Force properties. She points to the example of Emeryville, CA, where local authorities have successfully been using the state’s brownfields law to purchase contaminated property, clean it up and resell it to a developer, while simultaneously pursuing reimbursement from the responsible polluters. Properties in Emeryville were frequently more contaminated than properties in the Air Force’s inventory, she says.

An attorney who consults local communities on base closures calls BRACfields “a smart idea” -- so long as the Air Force respects local governments’ right to determine the end use of the property.

National News Articles

C-130 Plan Draws Protests

Fayetteville Observer (Fayetteville, NC)
Henry Cuningham
July 1, 2005

ATLANTA - National Guard officials registered their protests Thursday of a Pentagon plan to redistribute their aircraft.

The proposal includes replacing aging C-130 cargo airplanes at Pope Air Force Base with newer models from the reserve forces.

The top National Guard generals from nine states criticized the Pentagon proposal to shift Air Guard and Air Force Reserve aircraft. The two-star generals spoke during a public hearing before members of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center.

Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke - adjutant general for Nebraska - said state Guard leaders believe the commission should set aside the proposals. He said state officials, the National Guard Bureau and the Air Force should work together on a new plan.

Lempke said the Guard airplanes sometimes serve state needs. National Guard cargo aircraft have federal and state missions. They might ferry supplies to disaster-stricken areas in their home state, or supply troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The state adjutant generals, who wear Army and Air Force uniforms but answer to their state governors, said the recommendations were slanted toward the needs of larger active-duty bases at the expense of smaller Guard operations. They said the proposal does not take into account the role Air Guard units play in homeland security.

Lack of communication

Samuel Skinner, a former U.S. secretary of transportation who serves on the commission, said he was "surprised and disappointed" at the lack of communication between the Defense Department and the Department of Homeland Security on the role of the airplanes.

Maj. Gen. Frank Vavala, the adjutant general for Delaware, said the process was "being used by the Air Force to solve an aircraft inventory problem."

Pope's 43rd Airlift Wing flies aging C-130s. The Air Guard unit from West Virginia and the Reserve unit from Pittsburgh that would move to Pope under the proposal have newer models. Pope would be taken over by the Army under the Pentagon plan.

Maj. Gen. Allen Tackett, the adjutant general for West Virginia, does not like the plan, calling the eight C-130s the Air Guard unit uses "the most valuable resource that we have in the state of West Virginia."

West Virginia is the most flood-prone state, he said.

"Those aircraft are an essential resource for us to take care of the citizens of the state of West Virginia," he said.

Pittsburgh and West Virginia have different C-130 models. "Totally different aircraft as far as the cockpit and the way that they are supposed to be flown," Tackett said.

The Pentagon report said the goals of the closure and realignment plan include basing similar types of aircraft together.

"It really goes against the Air Force process of what the BRAC process is supposed to make happen," Tackett said.

He said the Pentagon made its recommendations on the assumption that the C-130 was being phased out. President Bush did not include money for the C-130J, the next generation of the cargo aircraft, in his budget plan for 2006. But in the face of congressional pleas, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld agreed to restore spending for the program.

Pentagon Base-Closing Budget Will Fall Short Of Upfront Costs

National Journal's CongressDailyAM
Megan Scully
July 1, 2005

Pentagon officials intend to set aside more than \$13 billion to cover the upfront cost of base closures over the next several years, but that pot of money will be far short of the total price tag, forcing the services to raid their budget plans to pay for additional costs.

For the Army alone, that might amount to between \$500 million and \$1 billion annually over the next four or five years, a senior military official said Thursday, adding that officials do not yet know where the money will come from.

The \$13 billion "wedge" Defense Secretary Rumsfeld is expected to ration to the services is merely "down-payment money," the official said. "It doesn't cover all the costs in the first six years."

Pentagon leaders have said the tab for this base-closure round will come to \$24 billion, including the costs of military construction projects and the relocation of military personnel and families. The consolidation of bases will ultimately generate \$49 billion in savings, Michael Wynne, the Pentagon's acquisition secretary, told the commission in May.

Base closures "may have a 20-year payback, but you have to pay in the first year," the official said.

Rumsfeld released his BRAC recommendations in May, which include the closure of 33 major domestic military installations.

The independent BRAC commission is evaluating the secretary's recommendations and will submit its own list to the White House Sept. 8.

On top of the shortfall in the Pentagon BRAC fund, the services must pay for environmental cleanup, which was not fully calculated in the

department's base-closure cost analyses, the official said.

In previous base closures, environmental cleanup amounted to roughly 40 percent of total BRAC costs, though those figures differ widely per installation, depending on individual communities' plans for the land. Turning a base into a factory, for instance, would require less cleanup than making the installation into a park.

"It really depends on if we make it National Park Service-clean," the official said.

The services already have been through an intense round of budget cuts, with officials from Rumsfeld's office hoping to drastically cut and scale back major military programs through 2011 as part of a wider effort to trim federal budgets.

Now, they must comb through their budget plans once again, attempting to find excess money in their projected accounts.

The goal, the official said, is to take the money "from wherever is the least painful place to take it at the time."

A Pentagon spokesman said he had no information about funding the services would have to put forth to pay for BRAC.

"If the Army is thinking that they might need something else, that's for them to address," the spokesman said.

Each of the services is "putting things on the table, putting very close guesstimates [together] and trying to crystal-ball it as to what's going to happen not only on BRAC, but on everything," he added.

House Armed Services Readiness Subcommittee Chairman Joel Hefley, R-Colo., said the panel is waiting to see how much BRAC ultimately will cost.

"We are keeping watch over it," he said. "If more money is necessary to close bases, we'll put more money in."

Hefley, who initially opposed this BRAC, added that base closings should be funded out of savings the Pentagon has generated in previous rounds in the 1990s. The Pentagon, Hefley said, is "still realizing" the extent of those savings.

Residents rallying across country to save military bases from closure

Scripps Howard News Service

Lisa Hoffman

June 30, 2005

Grand Forks, N.D., welcomed visiting military base-closing commissioners with an arcing spray of red, white and blue water spewed by three fire hoses.

In Fairbanks, Alaska, 3,000 residents - many wearing "America Needs Eielson" Air Force Base T-shirts - showed up two hours early for seats at a hearing to show commissioners their devotion to the base.

And in Las Cruces, N.M., hundreds lined the route traveled by closing panel members to a public hearing there on the fate of the Army Research Laboratory at the White Sands Missile Range. State officials treated the commissioners to a sumptuous steak and wine spread.

As members of the Base Realignment and Closing Commission crisscross the country to visit all 33 major bases slated for shuttering by the Pentagon and the 29 picked for substantial realignment, they are being met by orchestrated and spontaneous efforts designed to show the vital importance of the military facility to the communities that could lose them.

While city and state officials pepper the commissioners with facts and figures to rebut the Pentagon's contention that their facility is expendable, rank-and-file folks rally to demonstrate how vital the base is for jobs and regional economies.

When commissioners visit Texas bases next week - including Lackland Air Force Base, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi, and Naval

Station Ingleside - such public support is certain to be shown as well. The same is expected when panel members travel to Naval Base Ventura City and Naval Support Activity Corona in California on July 13.

But will such outpourings of public passion make any difference in the assessments by the nine-person panel, which has until Sept. 8 to endorse or reject the Pentagon's picks? In past base closing rounds, commissions have changed no more than 15 percent of the Defense Department's selections.

Lloyd Newton, a former Army general on the commission, implied to a newspaper in Tonawanda, N.Y., that the community pep rallies do have an effect.

"This commission is not just about sterile cost accounting," Newton said after a visit this week to New York's Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, which is slated for closing. "We are very, very much attuned to what people bring to the process here."

Commission spokesman Robert McCreary said public displays of flag-waving, sign-carrying support for the installations is impressive, and conveys the importance of the difficult task facing panel members. But in the end, the commission will make its decisions based on facts and figures, particularly those that have to do with the facility's military value, he said.

"They understand the stakes involved for families and businesses," McCreary said Thursday. But the commissioners "have to do what's right for the country."

Under the criteria Congress directed the Pentagon to use to guide its choices for closings, the economic effect on communities ranks sixth on the list of the eight categories. No. 1 is the "current and future mission capabilities, and the impact on operational readiness" of a facility.

Even so, base backers across the country are encouraging the displays of public interest, which, if nothing else, give citizens an opportunity to contribute to the base-saving

efforts. Some communicate the point in creative ways.

In Fairbanks, for instance, where some 2,800 airmen and their 3,300 dependents would be lost if Eilsen closes, commissioners had to pass under a red, white and blue balloon arch to get in the building hosting the public hearing. A lone man there played "Johnny Come Marching Home" on a tin whistle.

In South Dakota, which stands to lose Ellsworth Air Force Base, about 150 motorcyclists hit the road en masse to demonstrate their backing for the base. City and county employees got the day off, and an estimated 8,500 assembled at the June 21 hearing in Rapid City.

And in Texarkana, Texas, which is fighting to save the 5,000 jobs at the Red River Army Depot, thousands lined the road from the airport. Mindful of the fact that the depot survived the last base-closing round in 1995 despite being on the Pentagon's list, many wore yellow T-shirts that read: "It still ain't over."

New England Council President Calls on BRAC Commission to Keep New England Bases Open

Business Wire
June 30, 2005

The New England Council President James T. Brett today requested the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) reconsider the Department of Defense's proposal to close several military bases in New England, resulting in the loss of more than 14,000 defense jobs and having "a detrimental effect on the region and on our nation's military."

The BRAC Commission is meeting July 6 to review the proposed closures and realignments in New England. The DOD proposes closing the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine, Naval Submarine Base New London in Connecticut, Otis Air National Guard Base in Massachusetts, and realigning the Naval Air Station Brunswick in Maine.

Brett, who heads up the nation's oldest regional business organization, noted in a letter to the Commission that New England has suffered more than other parts of the country in previous military base reductions.

"New England has experienced disproportionately deeper reductions in military personnel and infrastructure in prior base closing and realignments," Brett said. "About five percent of the nation's population lives in New England and only 1.2 percent of the nation's active duty military personnel is based here. In the current proposal, the cuts in New England are larger than those proposed for any other region. Connecticut would lose the most personnel of any state in the country and Maine would be second."

Brett said any further reductions in personnel and infrastructure would have a detrimental impact on the region's security and the nation's warfighting capabilities.

"New England's small military presence cannot be reduced further without impacting military readiness and mission capabilities. The region cannot afford further closures without compromising the region's sense of security," Brett said. "The DOD's recommendation would literally gut New England's air defenses. Their proposal significantly realigns New England's only active duty military airfield - Naval Air Station Brunswick - and closes Otis Air National Guard Base, which provided the fighter jets that were first to arrive on the scene in New York City on September 11. Similarly, the closure of the submarine bases in Connecticut and Maine would have severe homeland defense consequences."

Brett said the future of the military's technological warfighting ability is also at risk with the proposed closures.

"The military must maintain a presence in New England in order to take advantage of the region's technology and academic cluster. Military technology facilities are crucial to the strategic realignment of U.S. warfighting forces.

The future development of advanced technology defense systems is dependent on military bases' proximity to technology clusters," he said.

New England, he added, is home to one of the world's leading technology clusters with federally-funded research and development centers, cutting-edge academic expertise and a significant concentration of high-tech industrial partners. Four of New England's six states rank in the top 11 on the 2004 Milken Institute State Technology and Science Index with Massachusetts ranked first in the nation. This Index ranks states on research and development inputs, technology and science workforce and technology concentration and dynamism.

The Department of Defense's most recent Base Structure Report noted that not one of the nation's 93 "large installations" is located in New England. Also, only three of the 99 "medium installations" are located here.

According to the Northeast- Midwest Institute, from 1987 to 2002, the number of active duty military personnel based in New England was reduced 58 percent, exceeding reductions in all other regions as well as the national average of 24 percent.

The federal government initiated the BRAC process with a goal towards cost savings. The Commission has until September 8, 2005 to review the list and visit the bases before sending a report to the President. On September 23, 2005, the President will present his approval or disapproval of the recommendations to the Commission and Congress, which will vote to accept or reject the request.

The New England Council is the nation's oldest regional business organization.

Local News Articles

Base Backers Make Case

Georgians dispute savings projections
Atlanta Journal and Constitution (Atlanta, GA)
Christopher Quinn
July 1, 2005

Georgia's political leaders left out emotional pleas about lost jobs and damage to local economies Thursday as they tried to poke holes in the Pentagon's arguments for closing four state military bases.

The military says the closures are based on hard numbers and measurable effects on military efficiency — not politics, not job losses.

So Gov. Sonny Perdue, members of Georgia's congressional delegation and other speakers spent their time talking numbers while addressing a committee of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center.

They told the committee that closing Fort Gillem or Fort McPherson in metro Atlanta, Naval Air Station Atlanta or the Navy Supply Corps School in Athens wouldn't save the Pentagon as much money as it thinks, would hurt military operating ability and would damage national security.

For example, retired reserve Marine Maj. Gen. Larry Taylor noted that the Pentagon's numbers showed it would save money by eliminating jobs at Naval Air Station Atlanta.

But, Taylor pointed out, 307 of those jobs the Pentagon listed have already been moved or eliminated. Those ghost salaries and benefit costs throw projected savings off by \$25 million, he said.

Over 20 years, the Pentagon estimates that savings from its proposed closings would be \$910 million for the Naval Air Station, \$895 million for Fort McPherson, \$421 million for Fort Gillem and \$21.8 million for the Navy Supply Corps School.

The military estimates it would cost \$79 million to build facilities to house offices and soldiers moved from Fort McPherson to other bases.

"But we think the actual cost to rebuild is \$277 million," retired Army Brig. Gen. Phil Browning said.

Browning heads up the state's Military Affairs Coordinating Committee, whose job is to save Georgia's bases. Members have been gathering numbers, information and documents to fight the closings for months.

Closure committee members listened for two hours, scribbled notes and asked the speakers to provide their evidence in written form. They will take the information back to the full commission for final discussion this summer.

The commission also may make last-minute additions to the list this month.

Rep. David Scott, from Georgia's 13th District, said he felt Georgia made progress toward persuading the commission to change its mind. "I think we have turned the ship a little. We have not turned the corner, but we have scored some points," he said.

Other Georgians in attendance had an easier job. They presented the committee evidence that bases like Fort Benning and the submarine base at Kings Bay were ready to absorb soldiers and sailors being moved from closing bases.

The commission must present a final closure list to President Bush for consideration by Sept. 8. The president can send the list back to the commission for reconsideration with comments and suggestions, but the commission does not have to heed them. It must give a final closure list to the president no later than Oct. 20.

The president must approve the list and forward it to Congress by Nov. 7. He can effectively veto the list by not passing it on, and the process will stop.

Congress has 45 working days to consider the list. It can reject it in full by joint resolution, but it cannot change the list. The list becomes law if Congress does not reject it.

NM Congressman Says White Sands Should Keep Lab

El Paso Times (El Paso, TX)

Chris Roberts

June 30, 2005

A proposal to move the Army Research Laboratory at White Sands Missile Range to Maryland would probably cost taxpayers more money in the long run and could ultimately weaken the nation's defense, a New Mexico congressman said.

"I think it's going to create a higher operating expense rather than a neutral one," Republican Steve Pearce said.

The laboratory would move to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland under the Pentagon's proposed Base Realignment and Closure list. The consolidation of laboratories would "provide greater synergy across technical disciplines," according to the Pentagon, and create an annual savings of \$41 million a year after moving costs are paid over four years.

Although the number of jobs to be moved from White Sands is listed as 178, the lab's entire work force, the proposal calls for leaving "the minimum detachment required to maintain the test and evaluation functions."

Pearce said the projected savings didn't seem realistic. Estimates of the actual number of jobs that would be lost has ranged from 40 to 100, he said. The exact number is still being worked out, said Brig. Gen. Robert P. Reese, White Sands commander.

"They'll keep whatever size team here we need to continue our testing, so we don't believe that ... any programs will fail to test at White Sands or be forced to go somewhere else," Reese said. "Our goal is to change as necessary to remain relevant and ready."

Pearce said living and operating costs would be higher in Maryland.

At a hearing last week in Clovis, N.M., state officials asked the BRAC Commission to change the Pentagon's recommendations. Commissioner Philip Coyle acknowledged that some of the lab's testing would require open

spaces available only at White Sands, which has 2.2 million acres and all the airspace over it.

"Would moving people to Aberdeen, perhaps having them travel back to White Sands, would that increase the cost and perhaps discourage them from using White Sands?" Coyle asked.

Pearce said it would increase costs, potentially hurting projects vital to the nation's defense and the safety of its soldiers.

"Absolutely. To keep within budget, you begin to shut down your research," Pearce said, "or you wait until next month."

Keeping a unit open at White Sands means funding two operations. "If they keep a tenant unit open, there are fixed costs that will be the same for 10 people as for 50 people," Pearce said. "In a building, you have to heat and cool to the same temperatures. ... You drive the cost per employee up. The economic or fiscal sense escapes me."

Moving the lab would also cost New Mexico State University about \$10 million a year in research grants, said Don Birx, director of the school's Physical Science Laboratory. That's about 7 percent of the university's total, he said.

Now, about 60 faculty and students are working on laboratory projects, Birx said.

"The work that ARL (Army Research Laboratory) is doing is some of the most advanced that is going on at White Sands Missile Range," Birx said. "It's a very significant part of the research at NMSU."

Birx said the research, including weather forecasting and analysis of battlefield systems' vulnerability to jamming techniques, is about half computer modeling and half field-testing. He said lab contracts account for about 95 percent of the school's involvement with White Sands.

"If that were to go away, the involvement between White Sands Missile Range and the university would be significantly decreased,"

Birx said. "White Sands Missile Range has been a significant component for employing students. Their research has a lot of synergy with the university. I think from our perspective, it would be a significant blow."

Reese said NMSU's participation in White Sands projects has fluctuated over the years since it began in the 1940s. He said the relationship is important and believes it will rebound if the lab is moved.

"There's a potential for them to play a bigger role in support of the Army's White Sands Test Center," Reese said.

Las Cruces, which fights for every job it gets, would feel the impact of the move, officials said.

"All of the jobs that ARL has are filled locally," Reese said. "That's one of the reasons why losing an element like ARL is difficult for a community like ours. ... They are integrated into our community not only in the testing that we do but in day-to-day activities."

Former New Mexico Gov. Garrey Carruthers told the commissioners at the Clovis hearing that about 75 percent of the lab personnel said they would rather stay in New Mexico by retiring or trying to find other jobs.

Pearce said he would continue to fight for keeping the laboratory at White Sands and would, if necessary, step up recruiting to bring more jobs to the area.

"Only 15 percent of these cases are ever reversed, so we know it's a very steep hill we have to climb," he said. "But we don't mind fighting the hard fights."

Area must wait to hear fate of Southside bases

The 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.

Fort McPherson is in East Point and Fort Gillem in Forest Park, but both bases employ residents of Fayette and Coweta counties and have an economic impact on the entire Southside.

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.

If the president accepts them, he'll forward the report to Congress. The list would become final within 45 days unless both the House and Senate disapprove.

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.

Guard commanders take aim at Pentagon's closure plan

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Atlanta, GA)
Kristen Wyatt
June 30, 2005

The Pentagon's plan to trim airplanes and service members from 29 state Air National Guard units was criticized Thursday by a group of state adjutant generals, who said the cuts will make the Air Force dangerously concentrated at a few big bases.

Taking aim at a base realignment plan that calls for some of those Air National Guard units to be left with just a few people and no planes, the generals complained the Air Force is trying to squeeze out the state units. The Air National Guard responds to state emergencies such as wildfires and hurricanes and can also be called to help fight wars.

Maj. Gen. Mike Haugen, adjutant general of North Dakota, said the plan to move planes to fewer, bigger Air Force bases would leave wide swaths of the country vulnerable.

"Is our primary goal to protect our citizens, or just to have a more streamlined way to go to war?" Haugen said.

The generals vented to three federal commissioners who will help decide whether the base closure plan put out by the Pentagon last month will be changed. Three commissioners were holding a regional hearing in Atlanta to learn more about proposed closings in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee, and afterward they called a special hearing of state adjutants general because of a deluge of complaints about the Air Force plan.

"We believe it is seriously flawed and potentially harmful to the United States," said Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke of Nebraska, president of Adjutants General Association of the United States.

Among their chief complaints: the Air Force, they say, was trying all along to shut down its small National Guard units and so used an evaluation formula that hurt small installations.

For example, runway length was used as one factor in determining which bases should be scaled back, and some Air National Guard units fared poorly but said their runway lengths are

fine for their needs. The evaluations were "biased against small Air National Guard bases," said Maj. Gen. Allen Tackett of West Virginia.

Another gripe Thursday was that the Air Force is trying to avoid backlash by not closing the units outright, but calling them "enclaves," leaving a few men behind with little capability.

"Is this any way to run the greatest military machine in the entire world?" asked Maj. Gen. Frank Vavala of Delaware, who went on to call the Pentagon's plan "ill-conceived" and "last-minute."

The generals, who answer to state governors and are freer to criticize the Pentagon than other service members, also complained the scale-backs would damage Air National Guard recruitment and retention. Part-time military members, they said, won't move when their local unit is transferred, they'll just quit or retire.

"Most of our long-timers are not going to be moving to follow their aircraft," said Maj. Gen. Greg Wayt of Ohio.

The commissioners were receptive to the complaints, and said they called the hearing just because Air National Guard members had reason to worry.

"There was so much concern raised by so many states with so much velocity," said commissioner Samuel Skinner.

The commissioners wouldn't say, however, whether they'd go along with the generals' suggestions that all the Air National Guard cuts be stopped in this round of base closures.

"It's one thing to complain about something, but it's another thing to come up with a better idea," commissioner Harold Gehman said.

Grant to help if base cuts hit; State will plan for bad news without giving up fight.

Anchorage Daily News (Anchorage, AK)
Tataboline Brant
June 30, 2005

Thanks to a check expected today from the feds, the State of Alaska has more than half a million dollars to help plan for the thousands of jobs that will be lost if four Alaska bases on the Pentagon's chopping block are closed or cut back.

The award comes prior to any final decision about the four installations and amid an energetic battle by Alaska's congressional delegation, governor and others to save one of them: Eielson Air Force Base, outside Fairbanks, is slated to lose nearly all of its roughly 3,000 military personnel.

Acceptance of the \$615,000 emergency planning grant from the U.S. Department of Labor should not be taken as a sign that anyone has given up on keeping Eielson at full staff, according to a written statement Tuesday from Rep. Don Young, who helped secure the grant.

"The delegation is doing everything in its power to stay this decision," Young said.

Alaska officials, in applying for the labor grant, in no way admit defeat or that they agree with the Pentagon's proposal to gut Eielson, said Pamela Day, a senior legislative assistant to Young who was reached Wednesday in Washington, D.C.

All states facing the possibility of massive layoffs due to base closures or realignments were eligible for the grants, said Corine Geldhof, director of the Division of Business Partnerships in the state department of labor.

Thirty-five states, the District of Columbia and Guam were awarded similar grants, according to federal labor officials, who said the total amount doled out was more than \$28 million.

If Alaska is taken off the Pentagon's list, the state does not have to refund the money, officials said.

The grants are designed to help communities analyze their work forces and come up with a transition plan should there be massive layoffs.

The money cannot be used to lobby for or against the base closures.

Geldhof said the state applied for its grant earlier this month and was awarded the exact amount it asked for. "We just got the announcement this morning," she said Wednesday.

Geldhof said the state will focus primarily on the Fairbanks area, which would take the hardest hit under the Pentagon's plan, and to a lesser degree on the other Alaska installations on the list: Kulis Air Guard Base in Anchorage and its neighbors, Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson Army Post.

Some of the proposed cuts at those three bases sound severe -- Kulis is slated for closure, for example -- but are less so upon examining the details. Most of the personnel at Kulis, for example, would be stationed at Elmendorf under the Pentagon's plan.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which visited Alaska earlier this month, has not yet said if it agrees with the Pentagon's recommendations for the four bases. There was little if any public protest about the base changes in Anchorage, but thousands of people turned out for a hearing in Fairbanks in support of Eielson.

The commission's recommendations to the president are due no later than September.

Federal officials say the grant money should arrive by today. Geldhof said the state plans to use it to do a lot of analysis over the next six months. That probably would include surveying businesses, conducting focus groups and analyzing skills levels to see how many people might need to be retrained and in what, should there be massive layoffs.

Targeted for closure, Portsmouth Naval Shipyard gets award

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Kittery, ME)
Tim McCahill
June 30, 2005

The nation's oldest federal shipyard, targeted for closure by the Pentagon, received bittersweet recognition of its work Thursday: a commendation from the Navy acknowledging the shipyard's "invaluable contribution" to national security.

The Meritorious Unit Commendation was given to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for its "phenomenal record" of refueling and overhauling nuclear submarines ahead of schedule, the Navy said.

Then-Navy Secretary Gordon England awarded the commendation on May 12, one day before the Pentagon released its list of recommended base closures.

The commendation was presented formally to the yard at a ceremony Thursday, just days before a critical hearing in front of an independent panel that will help decide the shipyard's fate. New England lawmakers will make their case before the Base Closure and Realignment Commission on Wednesday in Boston.

"In the back of our heads we get this incredible award and we wonder, 'Why are we on this list?'" said Paul O'Connor, president of the shipyard's Metal Trades Council, a labor union group with 2,300 members.

Officials chose to overlook that detail Thursday.

"The Navy and the country need you to keep doing what you're doing," said Rear Adm. Anthony Lengerich, acting commander of the Naval Sea Systems Command. "And I mean by that your professionalism, your reputation, your innovation and your enthusiasm for giving to the taxpayer the value they well deserve."

Hundreds of workers were in the audience and some shouted "We're number one!" at the end of the ceremony. The commendation is for service between Sept. 11, 2001, and Aug. 30, 2004.

Speaking to reporters afterward, Lengerich sidestepped a question about whether Portsmouth deserved to be on the Pentagon's list.

"That's not a question for me to answer," he said. "We're talking about a celebration for these folks, for what they've done, and the performance they've had and we're happy to celebrate that."

The Pentagon says it no longer needs four bases where ships are repaired and refueled. It says shuttering Portsmouth will save \$21 million initially, then \$129 million annually by shifting work to yards at Norfolk, Va., Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and Bremerton, Wash.

Critics of closing Portsmouth question the Pentagon's projected savings. They argue that the base fixes and overhauls submarines faster than the other shipyards, saving the military tens of millions of dollars per vessel.

Instituted in 1967, the Meritorious Unit Commendation is only given to "high performing units," said Pat Dolan, deputy director of public affairs at Naval Sea Systems Command.

Tennessee officials make their case to base-closing commission

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (TN)
Hilary Roxe
June 30, 2005

Tennesseans, protesting at a regional hearing Thursday on the military's plan to move eight planes from the Nashville-based 118th Airlift Wing, cited performance, price and errors in the process.

U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper said the decision to divide the C-130H planes between facilities in Peoria, Ill., and Louisville, Ky., was based on out-of-date information about the facilities, and did not account for the distinguished service of the unit or the quality of its base.

"The ... recommendations from the Pentagon seem to be deeply flawed regarding the 118th,"

said Cooper, a Democrat from Nashville. "They're breaking up one of the best performing units in the Air Guard, and sending airplanes to lower performing bases."

The regional hearing of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission in Atlanta covered Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee, and came more than a month after the Pentagon issued its recommendations on how to slim down military assets.

The military's plan would leave the 118th with about 500 personnel, but no planes. The Pentagon justified its suggestion by saying Nashville had a low military value, and shifting the aircraft would create two "right-sized squadrons" from three undersized ones.

But Maj. Gen. Gus Hargett, Tennessee's adjutant general, said that reasoning ignored several factors, including a new, \$24 million hangar and seasoned air crews that flew 7,000 combat hours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Tennessee is the Volunteer State, and, as you can see, the Nashville unit has lived up to our state motto," Hargett told commissioners.

The 118th shares the cost of airport runways, fire protection and tower services, paying just \$36,000 per year. Hargett said those expenses are among the lowest in the Air National Guard.

Commissioners have until September to issue final recommendations in the base-closure process. In past years, 85 percent of the Pentagon's suggestions have remained on the final list, but hearings give states a chance to lobby for changes.

"You can't ever predict what a commission will do, but I think we laid out the best possible case," Cooper said.

North Dakota Job Service Gets Grant To Cope With Job Losses From BRAC

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
Stephen J. Lee
June 30, 2005

North Dakota's Job Service will get a \$ 1 million grant to help the Grand Forks area respond to losing about 2,700 civilian jobs at Grand Forks Air Force Base under the realignment announced recently by the Pentagon.

It's part of more than \$ 28 million from the U.S. Labor Department announced Tuesday that will go to 35 states, the District of Columbia and Guam to help civilian workers affected by the Base Realignment and Closure process.

The Pentagon's plan, subject to review by the BRAC Commission, is to close 33 major military bases and realign 29 more.

The Pentagon's May announcement that it plans to transfer out the 50 KC-135 air refueling tankers from Grand Forks, along with about 2,200 of the 2,800 airmen and 355 civilian employees, would mean a total loss of 5,000 jobs to the region, or 7.4 percent of the work force.

That figure was arrived at by the Pentagon counting another 1,200 or so civilian jobs directly connected to the base and 1,300 other jobs indirectly dependent on local business from civilian and military workers connected to the base.

The Pentagon estimated the base had an economic impact on the region last year of \$ 380 million.

According to The Associated Press, Illinois -- slated to lose 737 civilian jobs, and Indiana, slated to gain more than 2,600 civilian jobs, each got the most: \$ 1.5 million. Maine, to lose more than 4,000 jobs, gets \$ 1.27 million and Maryland, gaining 9,000 jobs, gets \$ 1.24 million.

South Dakota, which will lose 411 civilian jobs if Ellsworth Air Force Base is closed and its B-1 bombers and more than 3,000 military personnel are transferred to a Texas base, is getting \$ 1 million of the Labor Department grant.

Minnesota is getting \$ 500,000 of the Labor Department grant.

Job Service North Dakota will administer the \$ 1 million grant.

"Most of it will be spent here, related to planning for the Grand Forks Air Force Base," said Tom Fetsch, manager of the Grand Forks office of Job Service.

So far, there's little indication that jobs will be lost by the change in mission slated for the Air National Guard facility in Fargo.

The approximately 2,700 civilian jobs threatened by the proposed realignment at Grand Forks -- which won't be final until this fall and won't be completed for a few years -- including snow removal and lawn mowing at the base, supermarket workers, office support, engineers and janitors.

But the \$ 1 million isn't primarily for those folks.

"It's designed to be a planning grant to work with local leadership in the community to prepare for what training might take place," said Maren Daley, executive director of Job Service North Dakota. "It's a secondary backup planning grant. The main emphasis still is on retaining the tanker mission and the expansion of the base's new mission."

The Pentagon says that the new mission is as a key base for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

The grant money could be used to develop training programs for contractors to get a workforce ready for the base's new, high-tech mission, Daley said.

It also could be used to develop programs to retrain or relocate workers who lose their jobs because of realignment at the base. Area communities also could obtain some of the money by developing jobs training or development, Daley said.

But nothing is certain yet and Job Service needs to meet with community leaders to scope out a plan for the effect of realignment.

The money should arrive in July. Although final BRAC plans won't be known until this fall, Daley says it's not too early to begin to plan.

"If we don't do some contingency planning now, you lose some valuable time and opportunity. We don't know the exact direction the base is going yet."

Panelist questions base plan

Montgomery Advertiser (Montgomery, AL)
Ana Radelat
June 30, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Supporters of the Operations and Sustainment System Group will stress the military value of the Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base's high-tech unit today at a regional base closure hearing in Atlanta.

But one of the commissioners who will hear the pitch to keep the unit in Montgomery has questioned whether the Defense Department has fully considered the economic impact of its recommendation to move OSSG to Massachusetts.

Retired Navy Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr. toured Maxwell on May 26. His report on the visit, released by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission on Wednesday, showed he asked the Pentagon several questions about its decision to move OSSG to Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts.

He also seemed skeptical about some of the research the Pentagon did before making its decision to move OSSG.

"Preliminary information shows that as many as 669 contractor personnel may not have been considered by the ... realignment," Gehman wrote.

He said the contractors help maintain the unit's specialized computer software systems. But the

same type of mission does not exist at Hanscom. Gehman said the proposed move "may be inappropriate, since Hanscom only supports research and development operational systems."

"The support of legacy systems at Maxwell involves more than \$ 700 million and would have devastating economic impact should it be moved to Hanscom. Again, the belief is that this was not considered in the BRAC data," Gehman wrote.

Four of the nine base closing commissioners whose job it is to review the Pentagon's recommendations will be in Atlanta today.

Gehman and three other base closing commissioners will hear testimony from Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Tuscaloosa, and other Alabama lawmakers and representatives from all of the state's military bases.

Retired Air Force Gen. Paul Hankins, who is serving as a consultant to those who want to keep the OSSG in Montgomery, said the main argument that will be made to the commissioners is the military value of the keeping things as they are. But he said witnesses from Alabama also will point out the Pentagon made several errors in calculating the savings and economic impact of the proposed move.

"There were significant things that the Defense Department did not consider," Hankins said.

In testimony to the BRAC commissioners in May, the Pentagon's Technical Joint Cross Service Group, which reviewed all of the military's high-tech missions, said it decided unanimously to move OSSG to Hanscom to "consolidate technical facilities to enhance synergy and reduce excess capacity."

"These decisions were made carefully through a rigorous process," the testimony said. "We believe implementation of these ... recommendations will enable the department to provide advanced, agile and adaptable technical capabilities for our warfighters."

Opinions/ Editorials

Cleveland keeps military connected

The Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH)

Regina Brett

June 29, 2005

Gary Moore sits in a cubicle all day in downtown Cleveland, talking to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Thank you for calling DFAS Cleveland," he says over and over into a headset. "My name is Gary. How may I help you?"

There are 1,200 reasons not to close the Defense Finance and Accounting Service pay center in Cleveland. Gary Moore is just one of them.

He answers 120 to 150 calls all day. Soldiers call on satellite phones from mountaintops in Afghanistan. Spouses call about creditors ready to repossess cars and trucks. Wives worry about threats to foreclose on a home. Gary makes a few calls and saves the day - and the home.

One soldier called from Iraq about a new household account for his pregnant wife. The soldier had just received an e-mail saying his mother-in-law had taken his wife to the hospital.

"I made a couple calls and found out where she was at," Gary said. "She'd had her baby that morning."

When the hospital put him through to her room, Gary asked her, "Do you want to talk to your husband?"

"Oh, my God, yes," she cried.

As soon as they said hello, Gary got off the line.

"It was nice," he said.

A few years ago, a girl called from New York City. She was 13 and hadn't seen or heard from her dad in six years. She saw an ad about retiree pay and called.

Gary ran the man's name through the computer. The man lived in Cleveland. Gary called, and he will never forget that conversation:

"Your daughter is trying to track you down," he said.

"You're kidding," the man said.

"Would you like to talk to your daughter?" he asked. "I have her on the other line."

"God, yes," the man said.

Gary connected them. Her father whispered her name.

"Daddy?" she asked. "Is that you?"

There was dead silence, then tears.

Gary goes the extra mile because he knows what soldiers go through. He served in the Army for 31 months, 15 in Vietnam.

One of the worst calls he ever got came from a retiree who called about his pay.

"I served with him," Gary said. "He suffered from Agent Orange."

Before the agency could get everything finalized for the man's compensation, his wife called to report his death.

"That's one day I didn't go on to the very next call," Gary said.

Some soldiers frustrated with military red tape complain, "Do you know what it's like?"

"Yeah," Gary answers.

"These guys are out there on the front line," he said. "You don't know how long they're gonna be there or if they're gonna make it back or not."

On good days, returning soldiers call and he gets to say, "Welcome home." On bad days, he hears from widows.

He worries about the disruption it will cause them if the Cleveland office is closed, if the government has to train new people to handle the calls.

He worries about the ripple effect on restaurants and businesses if 1,200 jobs disappear.

To save the DFAS Cleveland jobs, contact www.brac.gov/feedback.aspx or write The Honorable Anthony J. Principi, Commission Chair, 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, 2521 S. Clark St. Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22202.

Tell him that our men and women at war and their families deserve the best. Tell him they're already getting it in Cleveland, from people like Gary.

Additional Notes

Senator John Thune attempts to save Ellsworth Air Force Base from closure

National Public Radio (NPR)

June 30, 2005

STEVE INSKEEP, host:

This is MORNING EDITION from NPR News. I'm Steve Inskeep.

RENEE MONTAGNE, host:

And I'm Renee Montagne.

When Republican John Thune toppled the powerful Democratic leader of the Senate, Tom Daschle, this freshman senator from South Dakota became national news. His agenda was the president's agenda. His new term began with the president's second term. Senator Thune, in short, offered a window into the politics of the majority party. We profiled John Thune as he was due to be sworn in and still trying to find his new office in the Senate.

Senator JOHN THUNE (Republican, South Dakota): I'm trying to remember. Let's see,

which way did I come from? Dirksen is that a way, right?

MONTAGNE: Now six months into his term, Senator Thune has to find his way around a much bigger challenge.

Crowd: (Chanting) Ellsworth! Ellsworth! Ellsworth!

MONTAGNE: These are John Thune's constituents who have taken to the streets of Rapid City, South Dakota, hoping to save Ellsworth Air Force Base. A few miles out of town, this home of the B-1 bomber is the area's biggest employer and, after 65 years, as much a part of Rapid City's identity as Mt. Rushmore. Last month the Pentagon put Ellsworth on its list of bases to be closed. Mayor Jim Shaw said none of the area's leaders saw it coming.

Mayor JIM SHAW (Rapid City): On the fateful day, which was Friday the 13th, most of us felt that we would have some coffee and doughnuts and then we'd go about our business. So we were surprised. We were shocked that Ellsworth was on the list for closure, simply because we'd been working for 10 years to try to ensure that not happening.

MONTAGNE: The effort to keep Ellsworth open began with a political moment famous in South Dakota. In 1995, then Senate Leader Tom Daschle got wind that Ellsworth was marked for closure. Daschle lobbied President Clinton, and when the base closing list came out, Ellsworth was not on it. When he ran for office last fall, John Thune suggested he could work that same political magic with President Bush. After all, the White House had urged him to take on Tom Daschle. During the campaign, Majority Leader Bill Frist stood with John Thune at Ellsworth vowing support.

Sen. THUNE: To the extent that there was a political component to these decisions, I believe we had that base covered.

MONTAGNE: We're sitting with Senator Thune backstage at the Rapid City Convention Center. The independent commission that reviews the

Pentagon's recommendations is meeting here. The Base Realignment and Closure Commission, known as BRAC, hears arguments about why a base should stay open. It responds mostly to military and economic arguments, but a certain amount of politics can be brought to bear, which is why ads like this one ran for days on local radio and TV.

(Soundbite of ad)

Sen. THUNE: I'm Senator John Thune, and you have the opportunity to show your support for this important military base by attending the BRAC Commission's hearing at the Rushmore Plaza Civic Center. Be there for your community; be there for your country.

MONTAGNE: This was John Thune's ad. Others featured the voices of the mayor, the governor, South Dakota's lone congresswoman and its other senator, Democrat Tim Johnson. Yes, there is another senator, but it's John Thune who's carrying the burden of his thus far failed promise to save Ellsworth. Tom Daschle, back in Washington, DC, allows that he may not have been able to keep Ellsworth off the list this time. Still...

Former Senator TOM DASCHLE (Democrat, South Dakota): The critical time is that time just prior to the point when the list is released. I hope and I assume that Senator Thune talked directly and personally to the president. I've been told that that may not be the case, but that's really the time I think when one can do the most good and weigh in with the greatest degree of real impact.

MONTAGNE: In Rapid City, I asked John Thune about this critical time, his first six months in office.

What were the efforts that you personally had engaged in...

Sen. THUNE: Well, we...

MONTAGNE: ...in order to keep the base open?

Sen. THUNE: We...

MONTAGNE: Have you talked to President Bush directly, personally?

Sen. THUNE: We had made--well, at different times, but, well, we had made lots of contacts within the administration. We made lots of contacts within the Pentagon. We made lots of contacts within the Air Force. We had gotten as much information in front of them as we thought necessary, and, you know, we were talking to anybody that would listen.

MONTAGNE: Did you feel, when the base did show up surprisingly on this list, that you had had the rug pulled out of you?

Sen. THUNE: I was like a lot of people, I think, when the decision came out. I was angry about it. I'm not sure angry at whom.

MONTAGNE: A few blocks from the convention center, some of Thune's constituents have ducked into Armadillo's Ice Cream Shoppe. As the temperature hits the 90s, Anthony Bradstream(ph) suggests this freshman senator is going to take some political heat.

Mr. ANTHONY BRADSTREAM: I don't follow politics a whole lot, but I know that Tom Daschle stuck up for keeping the base open, and so that means I like him.

MONTAGNE: What do you think about John Thune, that on his watch, the base has now gone on the list of closing bases?

Mr. BRADSTREAM: Well, I don't know. I think he probably could have done something about that. I mean, if Daschle did something about it, so could Thune.

MONTAGNE: Closing Ellsworth will mean that 10,000 airmen and their families in all leave the Black Hills area. That's nearly 10 percent of the population. An Air Force study estimates closing the base will cost the region \$280 million a year while saving the military an average \$90 million a year.

(Soundbite of demonstrators)

MONTAGNE: The political cost to John Thune might be better measured in small painful stories, the kind that can be found at the Black Hills Workshop, which helps adults with autism, Down syndrome and other mental disabilities. Two hundred work at Ellsworth, cleaning and stocking the shelves of the commissary.

Ms. JOLENE HOPPERDIETZEL (Teacher): Sign up. There you go. You got it.

MONTAGNE: Out in front of the convention center, teacher Jolene Hopperdietzel is helping a group of her folks from the Black Hills Workshop wave placards at the motorcade carrying members of the Base Closing Commission to town.

Ms. HOPPERDIETZEL: We need the base, otherwise, we're going to have 200 unemployed people, and if they don't have work, it's going to be devastating for them. I just hope that he can save it, he can pull a rabbit out of his hat.

MONTAGNE: One political reporter in South Dakota joked that some voters who abandoned Daschle for Thune are now having buyer's remorse.

(Soundbite of cheering audience)

MONTAGNE: But you couldn't tell that by the standing ovation John Thune got when he stepped on stage to appeal to the Base Closing Commission.

Sen. THUNE: Chairmen, members of the commission...

MONTAGNE: Rapid City did, in fact, turn out in force. Seventy-five hundred citizens filled the convention center and put on a veritable political rally for Ellsworth. John Thune echoed other speakers in arguing that consolidating America's B-1 bombers in a single base would risk another Pearl Harbor.

Sen. THUNE: The Pentagon's proposal would create the possibility that a single terrorist attack could wipe out our entire B-1 fleet. Second, the risk of natural disaster is a constant reminder

that we shouldn't pull all our B-1 assets in a single location, particularly one located in the heart of the Tornado Alley.

MONTAGNE: Tornado Alley? It's a sly reference to Dyess Air Force Base in Texas, which is slated to take in the B-1 bombers from Ellsworth. It's not lost on this South Dakota crowd that President Bush's home state stands to gain what Ellsworth would lose. And John Thune has made it clear that if it takes going against the president to get his attention, Thune will. He's hinted that he may break ranks with the White House on several important issues, and he's already taken the politically drastic step of saying if it comes to a vote, he will cast his vote against John Bolton, the president's choice for ambassador to the UN.

Sen. THUNE: Sometimes people say, 'Did you send a message? Were you making some sort of statement?' I don't know, but I wanted to raise the attention that was being paid to this issue and help people understand that it's a huge priority for me because it is. But we're going to spend an enormous amount of time on it. We've spent a lot of time on it already. It's a 24/7 operation right now in our office, so we are going to turn over every stone, fall on any spear, whatever it takes to get the right result and to keep this base open.

MONTAGNE: John Thune and South Dakota have the summer to make the case. The final list of bases to be closed will go to the president in September. We'll check back then with the freshman senator from South Dakota.

This is MORNING EDITION from NPR News.