

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

July 13, 2005

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REA Says BRAC Process Overlooked Guard and Reserve Members

US Newswire
July 13, 2005

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's announcement on Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) overlooked the significance of the impact on Guard and Reserve Component in the U.S. Armed Forces.

The BRAC recommendations for closure and, more importantly, for realignment do not tell the full story of how thousands in the Army, Navy, and Air Force may no longer be able to participate and will be forced out of the service.

The BRAC announcement indicated that positions would not be lost under the realignment because they would just shift from one location to another, but that is misleading.

The people that are in those positions will not be able to move under the realignment because they are outside of the 100 miles considered as commuting distance. "In reality, some of the realignments move several states away and in some instances move into other sides of the country," said Lani Burnett, executive director of the Reserve Enlisted Association.

"The Reserve Enlisted Association supports the efforts of BRAC to reduce excess infrastructure but the BRAC recommendations cross that line and affect force structure and missions. The proposed changes can seriously affect recruiting and retention at a time when the services are already having trouble filling slots. Transition initiatives are the missing component to implementing a successful BRAC while simultaneously retaining a professional, trained force," Burnett added.

REA implores DoD and Congress to make every effort to pass transition initiatives this year so Guard and Reserve members as well as the Reserve Chiefs can start to make decisions that will not cause units to be less than mobilization ready.

Top general says courts must decide BRAC dispute with governors

Copley News Service
Otto Kreisher
July 12, 2005

The nation's top National Guard officer said Tuesday it will be up to the courts to decide the dispute between state governors and the Pentagon over changes in Guard units during the Base Realignment and Closure process.

"There are two existing laws, both with conflicting authority," Lt. Gen. Steven Blum said.

One law requires the Pentagon to get a governor's permission before making significant changes in the composition or location of Guard units in his or her state. The other law, creating the BRAC process, makes no mention of the governor's authority and specifically overrides other laws that restrict what the national leadership can do with military facilities.

"When you have two laws in conflict, the courts have to decide what has priority," Blum told a breakfast session with defense reporters.

A number of governors, including Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich, have threatened to sue the Pentagon over plans to move or eliminate Air National Guard units in their states. Blagojevich is protesting the Air Force's decision to move the 183rd Fighter Wing's F-16s from the Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport in Springfield to Indiana.

Blagojevich sent new letters to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Anthony Principi, chairman of the independent BRAC commission, Monday, telling them he does not give his permission to move the 183rd's aircraft.

"The Department of Defense did not coordinate this recommendation with either my office or the Illinois adjutant general," the governor's letter said. "This lack of consultation compromises the integrity of the process used to develop the BRAC recommendations and disregards my role as commander in chief of the Illinois National Guard."

Blagojevich added that under the law "my consent is necessary for the actions contemplated by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld with regard to the 183rd Fighter Wing."

Principi has asked U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales for a formal legal opinion on the two conflicting laws. That opinion is expected soon.

Blum agreed with the complaints by the association of states adjutants general - the top Guard officer in each state - that the Air Force did not confer with the state officials before making its BRAC decisions.

"I was not involved, nor were the adjutants general, involved in the BRAC decisions" affecting the Air Guard, he said.

Blum said he did not know why the Air Force did that, adding that the protest from the adjutants general "was a predictable event."

The BRAC commission plans two days of hearings next week in which it will address the issue of the Guard changes, among other issues, and may decide to add some facilities to the list of bases being considered for closure or adjustments.

Bases count on civilians to come to their rescue

Press Enterprise

Joe Vargo and Darrell R. Santschi

July 12, 2005

For decades, the Naval warfare assessment center in Norco and the Marine logistics base in Barstow have helped protect civilians.

Now the combat boot is on the other foot. The two bases are counting on civilians to save them from the latest round of the Base Realignment and Closure process.

The Department of Defense is recommending closing the Norco base, and scaling back the Barstow maintenance and storage center, as part of an effort to save \$ 6 billion of the Pentagon's \$ 401 billion annual operating budget. March Air Reserve Base and a Naval weapons station in Fallbrook also are facing cuts.

A nine-member commission appointed by Congress and President Bush will hold its only California hearing Thursday in Los Angeles before revising the Pentagon list.

BRAC watchers consider the chances of the list being changed after the commission rules very unlikely.

With the hearing looming, Pentagon decision-makers have placed a gag order on the military.

That leaves private-interest groups, municipal officials and residents to speak on behalf of the bases.

"We feel the community owes it to the Marine Corps to defend the Marine Corps' combat readiness," said Patricia J. Morris, assistant to the Barstow city manager who will help make the case for saving the Barstow Marine depot.

Federal base closure Commissioner James H. Bilbray is scheduled to tour the Marine Corps Logistics Base in Barstow this morning, and then join fellow Commissioner Philip Coyle at the Corona Division, Naval Surface Warfare Center in Norco this afternoon.

Closing the Norco base will cost the Inland area 1,000 high-paying jobs. Closing the Barstow base will eliminate 409 skilled jobs on the base, and another 387 support jobs off the base.

Morris won't be mentioning layoffs at Thursday's hearing.

"Everybody is crying about how many jobs they are going to lose," she said. "That's not going to make any difference. The operative consideration is the impact of the DOD's recommendations on military value."

She will try to make a case that shipping Marine tanks, truck engines, night-vision equipment and rifles to a variety of other depots, including Army depots, will hobble the ability of Marines to meet their first-in mission.

In Norco, base supporters plan a rally outside the gates of the surface warfare center to coincide with today's visit by the commissioners.

At Thursday's hearing, each community will have 25 minutes to make the case for avoiding the BRAC ax.

Supporters of March Air Reserve Base, which was almost untouched by BRAC 2005, will not speak Thursday.

The base lost 111 jobs and several aircraft, but is getting eight giant C-17 cargo planes beginning in August that supporters say assure its long-range future.

In California, 11 installations have been recommended for closure, 12 for downsizing and 12 for expansion.

Nationwide, 33 of 318 major installations are on the cutting board. The cuts are projected to save \$ 48 billion over 20 years.

Both Norco and Barstow were on earlier BRAC lists but wiggled off. Commission spokesman Robert McCreary said that means nothing in this round.

"Previous BRAC rounds focused on excess military capacity," he said. "This one is about jointness (between the services) and realignment."

THE NORCO BASE

Brian Oulman, Norco's economic development director, said America's military will suffer if the center closes and moves to Point Mugu, 150 miles away.

The shutdown, relocation and startup at the naval station in Ventura County could take years and disrupt the lives of hundreds of people.

More importantly, Norco provides independent analysis of a wide variety of missiles, bombs and ship-defense systems. The Norco base has been credited with saving \$ 2 billion in the last 10 years.

"The physical separation allows for a culture of independence," Oulman said. "If they get co-located under the umbrella of another naval facility, it would lead to a chilling effect in that culture of independence."

Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Corona, said he has lobbied five of the nine BRAC commissioners about Norco.

"I urged them to just use common sense here," Calvert said. "Look at the facts - it's the most costly base to move in the country . . . The pain ain't worth the gain."

THE BARSTOW BASE

The Marines repair and store everything ground troops use to fight, from cartridge belts to M1A1 tanks.

The Pentagon wants to shut down its maintenance of aircraft components, engines, test-measurement equipment and conventional weapons.

Those functions would go to the Corps' only other maintenance depot, in Albany, Ga., and Army maintenance depots in Alabama and Pennsylvania.

Morris hopes to dissuade the commissioners by telling them a story.

When the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment - the vaunted opposing force in war games at nearby Fort Irwin - deployed to Iraq last year, its .50-caliber machine guns needed refurbishing, she said.

The Army's Anniston Depot in Alabama offered to do the work and have them back to the 11th within two years. The Barstow Marine base did it in 30 days.

Both services do good work, Morris said. Nevertheless, her story illustrates what she contends is a fundamental difference "The Army's system is based on the economy of scale," she said. "It was designed to fulfill the needs of a large, stable, standing army.

"The Marine Corps system is based on turnaround time," Morris said. "It was designed to meet the needs of an agile, lethal expeditionary force that could be the first force called up in the event of a crisis."

In four previous base-closure rounds, 85 percent of installations on the Pentagon's hit list were scaled back or closed.

Bob Lucas, a retired Air Force master sergeant who heads the Barstow Area Chamber of Commerce's military affairs committee, acknowledged that he faces a tough fight.

"If the commission looks at military value and combat readiness, we'll be successful," he said. "If they are looking solely at saving money, we won't. That's the bottom line."

Local News Articles

Sub Base Coalition Backs Off Norfolk Strategy

Group's Efforts Will Continue To Focus On Flaws In Pentagon Plan

New London Day (New London, CT)

Robert A. Hamilton

July 12, 2005

New London— After a weekend of internal debate, the group fighting to overturn a recommendation to close the Naval Submarine Base in Groton has decided to focus on undercutting the Pentagon's arguments rather than promoting an expansion of the base.

John C. Markowicz, chairman of the Subbase Realignment Coalition, said the group would still answer any questions it receives from the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission about a proposal to move submarines from Norfolk, Va., to Groton. It would not, however, raise the issue with the commission unsolicited.

"We volunteered that we'd done some runs (of the Norfolk-to-Groton plan) and we said we would share that with them," Markowicz said. "But we haven't had a lot of phone calls from the BRAC (base realignment and closure) staff, and I don't know what to read into that."

At a hearing last Wednesday in Boston, members of the commission seemed interested

in the coalition's analysis of the proposal, which was considered early in the BRAC process but never revisited.

The Navy has proposed closing Groton and moving its submarines and shore infrastructure to Norfolk and Kings Bay, Ga. The commission will decide in late August whether Groton stays on the closure list.

For now, Markowicz said, the coalition will continue its work to show that the Navy underestimated the military value of the base and overestimated the potential savings that would be realized from closing it.

"We still need to do those calculations," he said.

Some members of the coalition were said to be worried that a strategy to promote moving submarines from Naval Station Norfolk to Groton risks angering the powerful chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. John Warner, R-Va.

"Our focus is New London, not Norfolk," said Jane Dauphinais, the district director for U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District. "The BRAC has their own staff, and they can analyze any scenario they want to, very capably. Our focus is New London."

But others argued that Warner is too astute a politician not to know that the Navy considered moving Norfolk's submarines to Groton early in the process, and would not have been surprised by the proposal's reappearance at the hearing.

Supporters of the strategy also noted that there is little downside to raising the suggestion. "What's Warner going to do, take our submarines?" asked one member who asked that his name not be used. "The Navy's already trying to do that."

In addition, they said, even the power of the Armed Services Committee can't stop a BRAC decision, as evidenced by the 1993 decision to close Naval Station Charleston, S.C., when then-Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., occupied the chairman's seat.

Several members of the coalition said the struggle between the two factions resulted in some changes during Monday's meeting.

For the first time in two years, the coalition shut the press out of more than 90 minutes of its morning meeting, and several members sat in on a briefing at the end. Typically, Markowicz answers questions at the end of the sessions.

"I think we all want to hear what's being asked, and get a chance to answer," Dauphinais said. She was the member who proposed the closed-door meeting, explaining, "It's just a top-down strategy session. We wanted a chance to work on a strategy and not have it public."

Markowicz said the coalition is under pressure to get any supplementary information to the commission by mid-July, and that he expects to submit a series of packages detailing the flaws the group has uncovered in the Navy's assessment of the Groton base.

He said it's unclear at this point whether the group will submit the information directly, or through The Washington Group, the lobbying firm hired by Gov. M. Jodi Rell to work on the campaign. Rell has assembled a state strike force to pick apart the Department of Defense analysis of the economic impact of the base closure, the potential environmental cleanup costs and other aspects of the proposal.

"One of the things we've talked about is having a coordinated message going forward," Markowicz said, so it might make sense to have The Washington Group reviewing all material that goes to the commission.

Meanwhile, the coalition is continuing with its efforts to meet with any commission members who have not either visited the base, or heard the presentation in Boston. At this point, six of the nine commissioners have either visited the base or received the coalition's briefing.

One of the remaining commissioners, retired Adm. Harold Gehman Jr., has recused himself from voting on the Groton base because he was a member of the Virginia anti-BRAC group

before his commission appointment. He has agreed to abstain from any vote involving that state.

That leaves just two voting commissioners the coalition is still trying to reach: retired Gen. James Hill of Florida, a 36-year Army veteran who was head of U.S. Southern Command, and former Republican congressman James Hansen of Utah.

Isle Chamber Officials To Miss BRAC Panel Hearing

Honolulu Star-Bulletin (Honolulu, HI)
Gregg K. Kakesako
July 12, 2005

Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii officials who recently joined the effort to keep the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard open say they will forgo a federal base closure panel's hearing in Los Angeles this week.

Jim Tollefson, chamber president and chief executive, said yesterday there "wasn't enough time" to prepare for a hearing Thursday by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Instead, chamber leaders will work with Hawaii's congressional delegation as well as Gov. Linda Lingle and Mayor Mufi Hannemann "to put together facts and background materials" for a possible meeting with commissioners in Washington, D.C., next week.

Tollefson said Lingle and Hannemann plan to be in Washington next week when the Senate is scheduled to debate the bill authored by Sen. Daniel Akaka to set up a process for the federal government to recognize a native Hawaiian governing entity.

Local business leaders also have hired Defense Conversion Resources, headed by William J. Cassidy Jr., who served as deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for conversion and redevelopment from 1994 to 2001, Tollefson said.

Cassidy handled issues for the Navy arising out of the closing of Navy and Marine Corps bases in the 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 rounds of closures.

Tollefson said Cassidy also counseled the Navy on the return of Kahoolawe and closure of Barbers Point Naval Air Station in 1993.

"He is very familiar with Hawaii," Tollefson said. "He very well known and very well regarded in these matters and very experienced."

Pearl Harbor labor leader Ben Toyama said last week he thought Hawaii should prepare for a possible fight after next week's Washington, D.C., BRAC meeting.

The BRAC commission has scheduled a hearing Monday to question the Pentagon about its May 13 recommendation to close Portsmouth rather than Pearl Harbor.

On the following day, the commission -- with the approval of a minimum of seven of its nine panel members -- could amend the closure list and add Pearl Harbor. Then it would be required to send two commissioners to Hawaii for a public hearing.

Toyama has said he believes the chamber and Hawaii political and business leaders should be working on a detailed presentation for that possibility.

Tollefson said the chamber's plan centers on Pearl Harbor's strategic military value in the Pacific.

"We see that's the reason for the entire military presence in Hawaii and for Pearl Harbor," Tollefson added.

The chamber has established a special committee -- whose members include Maj. Gen. Robert Lee, the state's adjutant general; retired Adm. Thomas Fargo, a former head of both the U.S. Pacific Command and the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor; retired Adm. Ron Hays, also a former commander of the Pacific Command; and retired Adm. R.J. Zlatoper, a

former commander of the Pacific Fleet -- to work on the first major challenge on retaining Pearl Harbor in 97 years.

Commission hears Texas petitioners

Del Rio News-Herald (Del Rio, TX)

Bill Sontag

July 12, 2005

San Antonio – Fifty-four presentations by representatives from 11 communities scattered across three states pushed a weary, over stimulated Base Realignment and Closure Commission to a hearing conclusion in San Antonio Monday afternoon.

In a cavernous ballroom atop the architectural maze of the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, thousands beseeched the six BRAC commissioners on hand to spare their bases from closure or realignment of key functions to other military installations.

Those from Texas were supported heartily by U.S. Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison and John Cornyn, Governor Rick Perry, and Representatives Henry Bonilla, Tom Delay, Silvestre Reyes, John Carter, Chet Edwards and Randy Neugebauer.

To hear and believe the often-compelling arguments Monday of retired military leaders, the analyses of professional "bean counters," and the impassioned pleas of community leaders, the commissioners seemingly had no choice other than to reject DOD data supporting base closures.

But the Department of Defense prepared the list of proposed base closures and realignments, submitting it for public scrutiny and that of the BRAC commission headed by Anthony J. Principi.

Principi was present Monday, along with Commissioners James T. Hill, Lloyd W. Newton, and Brig. Gen. (retired) Sue Ellen Turner. Five of the nine BRAC commissioners were not present.

Turner chaired the meeting, advising presenters that, “The commission is committed to conducting a clear-eyed reality check.”

Community leaders and analysts across Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma stated their hope to enhance that goal with carefully scrutinized data. With their own versions of corrected data, presenters delivered countermeasures and action proposals to the White House-appointed commissioners.

Following the pomp-and-circumstance of morning posting of colors, invocation, pledge of allegiance to the flag, introductions of VIPs and politicians, welcome to the city by San Antonio Mayor Phil Hardberger, and a ceremonial swearing-in of those scheduled to testify, a morose parade of troubled city representatives took the stage and the microphones.

The foundation of nearly all complaints about afflictions visited upon the towns and cities by BRAC recommendations was formed by four building blocks, commonly heard in all previous BRAC rounds since the process’s inception in 1988.

Allegations included errors in the BRAC “data call” focused on conditions at bases in 2003, while conditions of facilities have changed and demands for service have increased, sometimes dramatically.

So-called inaccuracies in calculations of costs of moving functions from “losing” bases to “receiving” bases were another theme of local presentations.

Inabilities of “receiving” bases to actually discharge the functions being moved was a mantra of many presentations.

Also cited often is the expected unwillingness of military and civilian employees to move to “receiving” bases. According to many presenters, many previous BRAC rounds showed that scientists and skilled workers were reluctant to leave home communities when jobs were moved elsewhere.

Show-of-force throngs sometimes filled the hearing chamber, adding applause to punctuate particularly strong presentations by those testifying on behalf of their local base. And the travelers added color to an otherwise somber hearing room.

About 2,000 traveled to San Antonio from Texarkana in support of erasing closures of the Red River Army Depot and the Lone Star Ammunition Plant. In bright yellow t-shirts with slogans such as “It Still Ain’t Over,” and “Staying Alive After BRAC 2005,” the Texarkana region residents made an inescapable impression on the commissioners.

Abilene (Dyess Air Force Base) sent 700 in their yellow shirts to the hearing, Ingleside (Naval Station) was represented by 600, also in yellow shirts, Killeen (Fort Hood) boasted “a sea of grey” t-shirts, Ft. Smith, Ark. (188th Fighter Wing, Arkansas National Guard) had a scattering of dark red shirts, and Wichita Falls (Shepard Air Force Base) arrived in light blue shirts.

Turner, hearing chair, urged the Texarkans to cease their applause, adding that it was “eating into” the carefully allotted time for the speakers. The yellow-clad cheerleaders generally ignored the advice, giving Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison a standing ovation for her forceful analyses of perceived weaknesses in DOD data.

Cornyn said that many of the DOD BRAC recommendations “are not in the best interests of national security.”

Perry told the group that the state offers thousands of square miles of open land, secure air space, deep-water ports, and in-state tuition for military dependents.

Hutchison said the biggest problem with BRAC recommendations was the DOD utilization of “old data.”

Texarkana, Red River Army Depot, and the Lone Star Ammunition Plant appeared first on the morning agenda. The Texas congressional delegation and Governor Perry all offered their

comments on the proposal. The complaints heard about RRAD decision data mirrored many heard in later presentations, and serve as an example of the tone and tenor of the hearing.

In particular, presenters focused on the depot's production of rubber parts for combat machines and transmissions of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle.

U.S. Senator Mark Pryor, Arkansas, said DOD has used data he considers questionable, possibly spurious, that he did not understand. "It raises some very serious questions in my mind that I cannot explain," Pryor said of DOD rationale for closing Red River Army Depot.

Cornyn said the BRAC recommendations propose to move functions from a "number one-rated base" to facilities that are ranked much lower or have no capability at all to handle the mission at RRAD.

Arkansans rally behind bases at hearing

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Little Rock, AR)
Amy Schlesing
July 12, 2005

SAN ANTONIO - Becky Shepard walked out of the hearing room with a big smile after hearing members of Arkansas' congressional delegation testify before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

"There is nowhere I'd rather be," she quickly said.

Shepard was a long way from her Northwest Arkansas home, spending Monday morning in a dark, cool conference room listening to other people talk about military bases.

For the Fort Smith woman and the more than 2,000 other people in attendance, the federal hearing was not about politics or military budgets.

It was personal.

The Department of Defense has pinpointed military installations across the nation it believes should be closed or reorganized. The Base Realignment and Closure Commission is an independent seven-member panel investigating those recommendations through site visits, public hearings and in-depth study of the cost and future use of each facility.

The commission must complete its work by September.

Commissioner Sue Turner, acting chairman for the meeting, assured the crowd that no decisions had been made.

"We have a responsibility to our nation ... to demand the best possible use of resources," Turner said. "The commission is committed to conducting a clear-eyed reality check of the recommendations."

On Monday, Arkansas and Texas officials testified before the commission in San Antonio, arguing against a swath of cuts that would affect both states.

Among the recommendations that could affect Arkansas was one to close the Red River Army Depot and Lone Star Arsenal, just outside of Texarkana, Texas. If approved, the move would affect 4,200 workers as well as the community that supports them. More than 500 of those workers live in Arkansas.

However, Little Rock Air Force Base at Jacksonville is recommended for expansion, gaining 77 planes and about 3,600 personnel. However, that proposal is getting battered at commission hearings by officials in the states housing the bases recommended for downsizing.

Arkansas' delegation did dedicate a few minutes to discussing the necessity of centralizing the nation's C-130 training program.

"There are no bad bases," argued U.S. Rep. Vic Snyder, D-Ark., "There are no easy decisions here. But Little Rock Air Force Base for years has been a model for how the National Guard and active-duty Air Force can work together."

Not all bases in Arkansas are as fortunate.

Under the current recommendations, the 90th Regional Readiness Command at Camp Pike in North Little Rock will no longer be one of the Army Reserve's 10 major commands. It will be downgraded to a brigade, lose command of the more than 200 Reserve units in five states currently under its wing and answer to a new command headquarters planned for California. It is unknown how many jobs could be lost in Arkansas.

And the issue was not discussed at Monday's hearing.

Arkansas officials spent most of their allotted time arguing to save the Red River Army Depot and the 188th Fighter Wing of the Arkansas National Guard, which is on the chopping block as well.

Under the Defense Department recommendations, the wing would lose all of its F-16 fighter jets, with seven going to another National Guard unit in Fresno, Calif., and the other eight planned for retirement. The move is believed to reflect Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's desire to phase out the nation's aging fighter fleet.

The recommendation does not lay out what the Fort Smith-based 188th should do without planes, however.

Officials offered unified testimony that the 188th should retain its planes until they can be replaced with the next generation of jet fighters - a move that is still a decade away.

"You should not try to accomplish policy changes through a realignment," said Asa Hutchinson, a former Arkansas congressman. "The new fighters aren't even in production yet, so the F-16s are our fighting force."

Expert testimony from retired Air Force Col. Brock Strom indicated that information presented to the commission by the Defense Department about the 188th's facilities and

available airspace is inaccurate. Strom said the data submitted with the recommendation to ground the 188th failed to mention the available practice bombing ranges nearby, and doesn't correctly detail the available airspace for the jets to use in training as well as recent improvements to its ramp and runway.

"You are working with dated and inaccurate data," Strom told the commission. Commissioners heard similar comments several times during Monday's hearing.

A button pinned to Shepard's T-shirt explained her devotion to the 188th.

The button holds a picture of her son, Lt. Will Shepard, in his flight suit. He's an F-16 pilot with the 188th Fighter Wing, which is currently deployed to Iraq. In fact, he's the youngest pilot they've got, she boasted.

Her maroon shirt had a Razorback on the front, just like those painted on the tails of the 188th's fighters. On the back were the words: "Keep 'em flying."

She and about 50 other supporters of the 188th Fighter Wing patiently listened to the testimony, quietly hoping their words would convince the commission to let the 188th keep its fighter jets.

"The military value is there," Becky Shepard said. "They're in Iraq right now, flying those very jets, doing their job, serving their country."

Almost everyone wearing the maroon shirts had similar stories.

"Most all of us have either youngsters in Iraq with the 188th or are former members," said Dick Barr. "The 188th has always been right up there with the quality of the active Air Force. In fact, we usually beat them. Now the commissioners will see that for themselves."

The maroon-shirted supporters of the 188th were actually the minority in attendance.

Men, women and children wearing yellow T-shirts that said, "It still ain't over," flooded down

the sidewalks leading to the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in downtown San Antonio.

More than 1,500 supporters of the Red River Army Depot packed the hallways and filled the chairs in Ballroom C. Yellow signs decorating the hallways said, "We build it as if our lives depend on it ... theirs do!"

Red River is the main facility for rebuilding humvees and Bradley fighting vehicles damaged in Iraq. Humvees are rebuilt to withstand the added weight of armor that keep soldiers safer on patrol.

David Hawkins, deputy director for maintenance at Red River, explained that the yellow shirts date back to 1995, the last time the facility was on the base-closure cut list. Only then, the shirts simply said, "It ain't over."

A year ago, Hawkins' shop worked on two to three vehicles a day. Now the shop rebuilds 18 a day and is preparing to increase production to 32 a day to meet the demand for vehicles in Iraq. Workers tear the vehicles down to the frames, drop in new engines and add armor.

Even with working around the clock, the repair shop still has about 6,000 vehicles in various states of repair, either waiting to be worked on or waiting to be shipped back to war.

"I call it a Detroit assembly line in northeast Texas," Hawkins said.

The facility is also the only certified producer of rubber shoes for track vehicles and M1 tank wheels.

And, without the Red River Army Depot, Hawkins said, that part of Arkansas and Texas would economically crumble.

For Don Newton, a maintenance supervisor at the depot, it's about the paycheck and about keeping soldiers safe.

The work would continue if Red River closed, but the jobs done there would be farmed out to

five Army depots that already have different responsibilities.

U.S. Sen. Mark Pryor, D-Ark., told the commission that Red River's special capabilities were overlooked, arguing that the recommendation to close the facility was based on 2003 data and misinformation.

"Unique capabilities of Red River were ignored while other facilities were pared because of theirs," he said.

In a show of unity, Texas delegates joined Arkansas' delegation in arguing in favor of saving the depot.

In expert testimony, retired Gen. Joe Robles told the commission that the demand for Red River's services have tripled since 2003. "We don't know the full impact of the current workload," he said. "We're in the middle of a war in Iraq."

The commission will continue holding hearings throughout the nation and visiting affected sites over the next week, then will convene July 19 to discuss recommendations of its own.

It will turn over its findings in a report to the president by Sept. 8. The president has until Sept. 23 to approve it and send it on to Congress or send it back to the commission for further work.

Once submitted to Congress by the president, the report becomes law if Congress doesn't enact a joint resolution rejecting it within 45 days.

Fort Smith backs 188th at base closure visit

Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (Little Rock, AR)
David Hughes
July 12, 2005

FORT SMITH - Fort Smith officials spent Monday trying to convince members of a base closure commission that the Arkansas Air National Guard's 188th Fighter Wing is too valuable a military asset to dismantle.

"We knew military value was the focus. It was the issue," Fort Smith City Administrator Bill Harding said after Monday's hearing in San Antonio.

Anthony Principi, chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, flew from the hearings in Texas to tour the Fort Smith base Monday afternoon.

Recent improvements to the base could render the Department of Defense's low rating of the base inaccurate, Principi said.

But he would not say Monday whether the improvements will change the military's recommendation to strip the 188th of its F-16 fighters and cut 670 jobs.

"I'm not in a position to say [the improvements are] sufficient to provide substantial deviation, which is the threshold we need to reverse the [defense] secretary's decision," Principi said at a news conference after a tour of the base at Fort Smith Regional Airport.

A delegation from Fort Smith went before the commission Monday morning in San Antonio to argue the Defense Department erred in its decision to realign the 188th.

The officials argued that the military rated Fort Smith's military value assets too low and based its decision on that low assessment.

According to the city's presentation, the Defense Department ranked the installation 110th out of all 154 Air Force bases on military value.

For example, the Defense Department gave the 188th 4.86 points out of a possible 22.08 on proximity of airspace supporting base mission.

Retired Col. Brock Strom, who made Fort Smith's main presentation, told the commissioners the 188th was as close as 10 miles from the Razorback Range at Fort Chaffee.

One Air Force officer with the 188th said the low rating came because the ceiling for the local

training space is 19,000 feet, but the minimum altitude for receiving a higher rating is 20,000 feet.

The Defense Department also found that the 188th had no suitable secondary airfield within 50 nautical miles.

Strom's presentation said Drake Field in Fayetteville was 50 miles away and Northwest Arkansas Regional Airport was 54 miles away.

The Defense Department conducted its analysis of the 188th's value two years ago before more than \$6 million worth of improvements were made to the base's buildings and before its aircraft ramp was expanded. The military scored the base low in both categories.

"We have to reconcile those differences to see if the military value of this installation should be raised," Principi said.

He said the commission will take up recommendations on Air National Guard bases at its July 19 meeting in Washington, D.C., or when the commission prepares to take its final vote on Aug. 22.

The Arkansas National Guard's adjutant general, Major Gen. Don Morrow, attended Principi's visit and said it was important to have Principi tour the base because the 188th had a good story to tell.

"Anytime you can get the chairman's attention and give him facts of the 188th, you're ahead of the game," he said.

About 200 people turned out for Monday's visit by Principi. Among them were Principi's son, Air Force Capt. Ryan Principi, who has been stationed at Little Rock Air Force base for the past year.

Donning Razorback red T-shirts distributed at the airport, supporters ignored intermittent rain and lined the driveway to wave and yell as Principi's motorcade passed.

Skip Robinson, a Fort Smith resident who attended the Fort Smith Regional Chamber of Commerce-sponsored rally, said he wanted to show his support for the 188th and said he hoped the unit's jobs would stay in Fort Smith.

He said he decided to attend the rally after a minister at Harvest Tabernacle in Fort Smith mentioned it three or four times Sunday during his sermon.

Leonard and Rose Hefner of Boothe in Sebastian County said the sound of the 188th's fighters flying over their home was the sound of prosperity for the area.

"We love to hear them fly over the house when doing low altitude," Leonard Hefner said. "It's good for the economy. It's good for the people."

Several political and state leaders showed up for Principi's visit, including state legislators and members of the delegation that appeared before the commission Monday: U.S. Sen. Mark Pryor, D-Ark., 3rd Congressional District Rep. John Boozman, R-Ark., and former 3rd District representative and former Department of Homeland Security Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson.

Illinois governor fights aircraft realignment plan

The Tribune (Port St. Lucie/Fort Pierce, FL)
Bill Lambrecht and Harry Levins
July 12, 2005

WASHINGTON _ Asserting his role as commander-in-chief of the Illinois National Guard, Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Monday challenged the legality of a Pentagon proposal to move F-16s from the 183rd Fighter Wing in Springfield, Ill., to Indiana.

Blagojevich declared in letters to the government that he would not consent to the Pentagon's base realignment plan for the planes, a step he contended is necessary for the plan to be carried out by the Base Realignment and Closing Commission (BRAC).

"This lack of consultation compromises the integrity of the process used to develop the BRAC recommendations and disregards my role as commander-in-chief of the Illinois National Guard," Blagojevich wrote in letters to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and commission chairman Anthony J. Principi.

Blagojevich is relying on a section of federal law that reads, "A unit of the Army National Guard of the United States or the Air National Guard of the United States may not be relocated or withdrawn under this chapter without the consent of the governor of the state..."

In an interview, Blagojevich said removal of 17 fighter jets from Springfield would threaten the security of his state and cities in Illinois and Missouri.

Blagojevich noted the presence of 11 nuclear reactors in Illinois and 28 locks and dams on the Mississippi and other rivers that are protected by the Air National Guard planes based in central Illinois.

"Moving these fighter planes jeopardizes all of our assets and puts in more peril big cities like Chicago, St. Louis and Kansas City," he said.

Several other states have protested on similar grounds since the Pentagon made its recommendations in May.

On Monday, Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell declared his intent to sue to prevent shifting planes from the 111th Fighter Wing near Philadelphia.

Like Blagojevich, a fellow Democrat, Rendell declared, "I will not agree to deactivation of this unit."

In Missouri, the 131st Fighter Wing at Lambert Field also would lose fighters under the realignment proposal. Gov. Matt Blunt, a Republican, testified last month at a commission regional hearing that the realignment "would lead to a hole in the protection of our heartland."

Blunt spokeswoman Jessica Robinson said Monday that Blunt "is certainly considering all options, but he has not made a decision whether or not to take the same path that the Illinois governor is taking."

Defense Department spokesman Glenn Flood said that the Pentagon assumed when making its recommendations that the law establishing base closure procedures superseded other laws.

Flood added that the Pentagon was awaiting clarification from the Justice Department.

Commission spokesman Jim Schaefer said the commission had requested guidance from the Justice Department on questions surrounding states' authority after hearing arguments similar to those of Blagojevich.

Schaefer said he hopes that that the commission members get their questions answered by next week. The commission expects to prepare a final list of base closings by Sept. 8; Nov. 7 is the deadline for President George W. Bush to certify the list and submit it to Congress, which has 45 days to reject it.

Richard H. Kohn, former chief historian of the Air Force and now a history professor at the University of North Carolina, said the issue could end up in court as a way of delaying base closings.

He said the Pentagon might decline to provide money for a National Guard unit in dispute. It costs the federal government tens of millions of dollars annually for each Air National Guard unit and the federal government owns the aircraft.

Blagojevich said he doubted that the dispute would get that far.

"I can't imagine the Department of Defense, which has the responsibility of keeping our nation secure, would single out Illinois because we're fighting for our National Guard unit," he said.

More than 830 of the wing's 1,141 employees are "traditional" guard members who live as far away as Chicago, and who typically serve one weekend a month plus two weeks a year.

Still, the wing's presence is deeply felt in Springfield, where people all over town to stop and look up at the piercing sound of the jets practicing maneuvers overhead on weekends. A display on the lawn near the entrance to the airport shows off three actual planes, perched on pedestals, positioned as if in flight.

The announcement earlier this year of plans to relocate the wing has prompted public rallies by local politicians and residents to show support for keeping it in Springfield.

Slidell hones case to keep defense agency; Let Virginia branch come here, they say
Times-Picayune (New Orleans, LA)
Paul Bartels
July 12, 2005

The Defense Information Systems Agency in Slidell should remain open and a DISA center recommended for closure in Virginia should be moved to Slidell, Mayor Ben Morris and others said Monday.

Such a consolidation makes more sense than a current Defense Department proposal and would save taxpayers millions of dollars every year, an informal "Save DISA" committee of political, business and other officials said.

The committee met Monday for a preview of the 20-minute presentation Morris plans to give to a regional hearing, now scheduled for July 21 in New Orleans, of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

The open hearing, in which Louisiana, Mississippi and Florida officials will argue against proposed losses in their states, begins at 9 a.m. in the Mahalia Jackson Theatre of the Performing Arts, 801 N. Rampart St.

The Pentagon in May recommended closing, consolidating or shrinking about 800 military

properties, including 33 big bases, in a move that ultimately would cut 26,000 military and civilian jobs.

Local installations proposed for closure are the huge Naval Support Activity in New Orleans and the small DISA testing center in Slidell, while the Naval Air Station-Joint Reserve Base in Belle Chasse would be expanded.

The Pentagon recommends wrapping operations of the three leased DISA facilities -- the one in Slidell and the Columbia Pike and Skyline VII facilities, both in Falls Church, Va. -- into Fort Meade, Md., and leaving a backup facility at Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

The overall consolidation of DISA operations and testing at Fort Meade, which is between Baltimore and Washington, D.C., would be 25 percent to 30 percent costlier than leaving open the Slidell facility, Morris said.

Local officials said the Slidell site would save as much as \$60 million over the next five to 10 years by relocating the 43 positions from the 33,000-square-foot Skyline VII facility in Falls Church, where building and office rentals are exorbitant.

The usual cost of leased facilities and their lack of protection against terrorist attacks are considered the most important factors among the myriad considered in the Defense Department proposal, said Gary Higgins, corporate vice president at Apogen Technologies, a contractor at the DISA facility.

Morris' presentation, still a work in progress, will hammer away at those two assumptions regarding DISA-Slidell. He also will address an array of lesser but still erroneous details in the justification analysis for closing DISA-Slidell, officials said.

DISA pays Slidell \$1 a year to use the 14-acre city-owned site at Gause and Robert boulevards for operations and testing agency-developed computer programs and applications.

And the guarded, fenced-in 100,000-square-foot facility in which about 150 people have worked for the past 10 years meets or exceeds the military's security standards, Morris and others said.

DISA-Slidell also is working on a major upgrade to its pay and personnel management system that won't be easily transferred to another location, local officials said.

As of Monday, about 1,000 residents have signed petitions to keep DISA-Slidell open, Councilwoman Pearl Williams said, and more signatures are expected.

BRAC must make its report to President Bush by Sept. 8. If he approves the recommendations, Congress will have 45 legislative days to approve or reject the final list but cannot change it.

Evidence Against BRAC Decision Mounts Coalition highlights cost inconsistencies in case against base

New London Day (New London, CT)

Robert A. Hamilton

July 13, 2005

When the Navy considered moving 11 submarines from Norfolk, Va., to Groton, its calculations included \$93 million to buy a new dry dock to handle the added repair load.

But when the Navy base realignment and closure, or BRAC, team assessed moving 11 Groton submarines to Norfolk, it decided that it could use a dry dock it already owns in Seattle, cutting the cost of the added repair capability by more than half.

In moving the 11 submarines from Norfolk to Groton, the Navy estimated it would have to add 240 repair workers at a cost of \$57 per hour. When it looked at moving 11 boats from Groton to Norfolk, it calculated it would need 106 workers at \$29 an hour — or about 75 percent less.

Relying on those conflicting estimates, the Navy built a case that it makes more sense to shut down the Naval Submarine Base in Groton and add to bases in Norfolk and Kings Bay, Ga., the Subbase Realignment Coalition maintains.

The coalition outlined both inconsistencies in a meeting last month with two key staff members of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, the lead analyst on the Groton recommendation, Hal Tickle, and Navy Team Associate Analyst Michael Kessler.

Details of the meeting were released this week by the commission, which makes all its internal documents available to the public.

“Yes, there was that meeting that took place,” said coalition Chairman John C. Markowicz, who declined to comment further on it. “It’s a public document, and it’s fairly self-explanatory. We look forward to more meetings.”

As the coalition works its way through the Pentagon’s justification for closing the Groton base, it is finding other instances in which the Navy seems to have underestimated the cost of the shutdown and overestimated the savings that would be achieved.

Coalition members have said the miscalculations usually seem to favor Norfolk, which would gain two of the three submarine squadrons in Groton, and Kings Bay, which would gain the remaining Groton squadron and the Naval Submarine School.

In recommending that Groton be closed, the Pentagon said the up-front cost would be just under \$680 million, while the move would yield annual savings of \$192.8 million.

But coalition members and representatives of the state’s congressional delegation showed the commission staff that the up-front cost would approach \$850 million, while the savings would be no more than \$67 million a year, and possibly much less.

The goal is to convince the commission that the Navy recommendation to close Groton is so flawed it should be overturned.

The coalition made the same argument during a hearing last week in Boston, but the meeting June 28 at the commission’s headquarters in Arlington, Va., yielded far more specifics about the inconsistencies in the Navy’s case. For instance:

- The Navy estimated the cost of rebuilding the Sub School in Kings Bay at \$211 per square foot, about what it costs to build a high school. But Sub School must be a sturdier building because of all the trainers and other equipment that are housed there. Construction involving the specifications that the school would have to meet has been running about \$325 a foot, boosting the price for the 415,000 square feet of new buildings by \$47 million. In addition, sandy soil in Georgia requires specialized foundation work that could add another \$13 million to the Navy’s estimate, the coalition contends.

- The Navy estimated the cost of building new piers at Kings Bay at \$1,998 a square yard. For a pier in Norfolk, it expects to spend more than twice as much — \$4,387 a yard.

- The Navy estimated the cost of refrigeration that it would need in Kings Bay at \$1,200 a ton, while a prominent construction company’s cost calculator uses a rate of \$3,200 a ton for commercial refrigeration of the type that would be used.

The base backers at the June 28 meeting also attacked the Navy’s estimates of the savings from consolidating Groton personnel at the bases in Kings Bay and Norfolk — which accounts for almost all the savings from closing the Groton base.

The coalition’s argument is that the savings are overstated because many of the personnel would be needed at the new bases. Sailors who move from Groton to Norfolk, for example, still would need medical care. The Navy said it now has about 528 medical personnel caring for 7,096 military personnel in Groton, a ratio of about 1

to 13. But it proposes to move just 62 of those medical jobs with 6,485 transfers, a ratio of about 1 to 105.

Norfolk has said it would need 91 of 197 security personnel stationed in Groton, while Kings Bay said it would only need one.

**Base closure method illegal, senator says
Claims bolster case to save Cleveland DFAS**

Cleveland Plain Dealer (Cleveland, OH)

Becky Gaylord

July 13, 2005

An architect of the law creating the Pentagon base closure process contends the Defense Department acted illegally when weighing whether to close some facilities, including a huge Cleveland military pay office.

Sen. John Warner of Virginia says the Pentagon incorrectly docked points from operations that lease their office space. The Cleveland office of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service, where 1,200 people work, leases 14 floors in the Federal Office Building at East Ninth Street and Lakeside Avenue.

The issue is crucial for Cleveland DFAS supporters because the best way to get an office off the Pentagon's hit list is to show that the Defense Department deviated significantly from the law.

Warner's credibility as a critic is high: He helped draft legislation that created the Base Re-alignment and Closure Committee, and the Republican chairs the Senate's Armed Services Committee.

Local politicians and community leaders have criticized the plan to dismantle Cleveland DFAS as flawed and a waste of taxpayer money.

New information released by U.S. Rep. Steve LaTourette this week shows that by some crucial measures, Cleveland's office matches or beats the three DFAS centers scheduled to gain thousands of workers through the Pentagon's base closure plan.

Cleveland's DFAS would lose more than 90 percent of its highly paid workers under the plan, which would shutter or shrink military facilities in every state.

Leased military offices in Warner's state also are on the hit list.

"The goal to vacate leased office space was the guiding principle for many of these recommendations - not military value, cost savings or any other legislated criteria," Warner testified before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission late last week. "This is not permitted by law."

LaTourette says Warner's testimony is "more than significant. I think it's huge." It adds to mounting evidence favoring DFAS Cleveland.

"The weight has swung over to Cleveland's side," said LaTourette, a Republican from Concord Township.

He draws some confidence from a recent letter that Anthony Principi, chairman of the base closure panel, sent Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asking whether keeping DFAS facilities open in Columbus, Indianapolis and Denver, while closing all others, was the only option considered.

DFAS Cleveland's supporters will plead their case today with the base closure commission's chief staff analyst, Marilyn Wasleski.

One argument will be that the Pentagon grossly overstated rent paid for the Cleveland office. The rate the Defense Department used is 50 percent higher than the rent actually charged, according to information given to LaTourette by the General Services Administration, DFAS' landlord.

The flawed figures made Cleveland's rental costs appear to be the most expensive of all 26 DFAS sites. Operating costs represent one-third of the points the Defense Department used to rank bases to close.

"The fact that the Department of Defense can't get their facts correct in assessing the rent is one reason why DoD's recommendation to move over 1,000 jobs out of Cleveland DFAS needs to be reconsidered," Ohio Sen. George Voinovich said in a statement Tuesday.

Cleveland came out on top in other areas, too, the data from LaTourette's office show. Cleveland DFAS can fill vacancies in less than 10 days - more quickly than the three DFAS sites that would gain workers.

Other discrepancies LaTourette pointed out include the Defense Department's anti-terrorism standards. DFAS Cleveland does not meet them and got downgraded for it. Yet those standards don't take effect until 2009, and the federal office that houses DFAS is scheduled to undergo a \$30 million modernization by then. LaTourette believes some of that money would address the anti-terrorism standards.

In previous base closure rounds, about one in 10 of the offices initially targeted by the Defense Department got taken off the list by the base closure commission.

The panel must give its recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8.

**BRAC: UAV experts visiting
Team will help build case for unmanned
flight mission at GFAFB**

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
Elisa L. Rineheart
July 13, 2005

A site survey team will inspect Grand Forks Air Force Base today with an eye toward its suitability as a home for unmanned aerial vehicles, according to Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D.

The inspection comes just one week before Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld testifies on his decision to realign Grand Forks Air Force Base rather than close it. Grand Forks will be one of eight bases discussed during the hearing that begins 8:30 a.m. Monday before the Base

Realignment and Closure Commission in Washington, D.C.

Commission Chairman Anthony Principi twice has questioned Rumsfeld's decision on Grand Forks Air Force Base. In a letter released July 1, the commission asked for more information on Grand Forks, an indication that commissioners could be considering closing the base altogether.

The skepticism arises in part because the base was removed from the Pentagon's closure list at the last minute, said Sen. Kent Conrad, D-N.D. Doubts persisted because Principi's question wasn't answered completely and forcefully the first time around, he said.

"What is the number of UAVs planned for assignment to Grand Forks AFB, ND, and what is the timing of the potential deployment?" Principi asked in the letter.

Building the case

Lt. Gen. Stephen G. Wood will answer those questions when he testifies "in favor of Grand Forks" Monday, Dorgan said. Wood is Air Force deputy chief of staff for plans and programs.

The seven-member site survey team, six department of defense civilian employees and one Air Force active duty member, arrived in Grand Forks late Tuesday for a two-day visit.

The group is comprised of experts from various Air Combat Command directorates, said Lt. Amy Hutchisson, a spokeswoman for the Air Combat Command.

Dorgan said Air Force officials assured him the site survey team came to "evaluate the facility, not to decide whether or not the UAVs will be placed in Grand Forks."

Dorgan also said he will try to add money to a defense spending bill that would fund UAV research at UND's Center for Aerospace Science.

Conrad said base retention leaders have been meeting in the past two weeks with top Air

Force officials who said they will defend their decision to base Predator and Global Hawk UAVs in Grand Forks.

Base examination

Conrad said the site activation experts will focus on the military construction that needs to be completed at Grand Forks Air Force Base to host drone operations.

Hutchisson said that the team's visit is "predecisional." She said that the team has been instructed to examine the base's facilities in regards to future missions.

The data they collect and their analysis will not be released to the public, Hutchisson said.

But Gen. Michael Haugen, North Dakota National Guard commander, said that inspection is probably related to Monday's BRAC hearing.

"They are probably trying to get more information for the secretary of defense to bring forward to the commissioners," Haugen said.

Opinions/ Editorials

Let's Hope We Remain Sub Capital Of World

New London Day (New London, CT)
Emmy Llewellyn
July 13, 2005

In response to your continuing articles on the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission as well as the Save Our Subbase coalition, I would like to express my gratitude and hope.

For 16 years I have used the New London submarine base. As a child of two Navy parents, I was transferred a few times in my 20-year lifespan. I was young, however, when my father left the Navy and my mother went into the Navy Reserves. As a college student, I still appreciate the value of the base and the facilities that dependents can use.

I have stickers on my car windshield and a dependent ID. I shop at the commissary, the Navy exchange and I use the gymnasium. One could say that I am spoiled to have been able to use the base this long and not have been in the military myself. I feel lucky and I know that the military has been a big part of my family.

I am proud of the citizens of southeastern Connecticut who are actively taking part in the "Save our Subbase" campaign, as well as our state government, which is spearheading the effort. The history is evident at our naval base, and that is why it is the "Submarine Capital of the World."

I am counting the days until it is determined whether our base is closed or not. And, I'm fervently praying that the New London submarine base remains the "Submarine Capital of the World."

Pa. Suit to Save Willow Grove

Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, PA)
July 13, 2005

Pennsylvania's misguided lawsuit to block the proposed closure of Willow Grove Naval Air Station is a reminder why Congress 17 years ago decided politics had to be taken out of the process.

The Pentagon earned its reputation for cost overruns and profligate spending. But when the Army and Navy in the 1980s tried to trim costs by closing bases, politicians repeatedly rebuffed them, fearing voter reaction to the economic impact of a base closure.

That pattern didn't change until 1988, when Congress passed a law setting up a Base Realignment and Closure Commission process that gave base-closing authority to an independent panel.

The BRAC, through hearings and other study, determines which facilities can be consolidated and which are no longer needed. Once the BRAC list is final, neither Congress nor the President can cherry-pick a favorite base from it.

They must approve the list or reject it in its entirety.

States understandably don't want to lose a base, whose economic impact can go well beyond the enlisted and civilian personnel who work on it. Revenue-producing businesses near a base also are hurt.

The BRAC process allows states to make their best case for keeping a base open. The case for Willow Grove must be weak, though, given Gov. Rendell's attempt to hijack the BRAC process before it is complete. No state has ever filed suit to keep a base open. Pennsylvania didn't need to break that ground.

Rendell and Attorney General Tom Corbett have found a line in federal law that says governors must consent to any reassignment or withdrawal of a National Guard unit. Rendell says he won't consent to reassignment of the 111th Fighter Wing, which is based at Willow Grove.

OK, but the U.S. government can and has "federalized" National Guard units and deployed them as it sees fit. Remember what happened to the Alabama guardsmen Gov. George Wallace thought would be standing with him to block integration? More recently, look at all the National Guard units being sent to Iraq.

America doesn't need state lawyers fighting federal lawyers over who can move National Guard units.

It needs a thorough process to determine which bases are needed and which can be shut down. BRAC provides that process. It doesn't deserve Pennsylvania's legal attack.

Additional Notes