

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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Department of Defense Releases

DoD has no right to shift Air Guard units, BRAC lawyer says

Air Force Times
Gordon Trowbridge
July 15, 2005

Federal law bars the Air Force from shifting Air National Guard units without consent from state governors, according to a legal memo that could throw the Air Force's base-closing plans into doubt.

The memo, written by a member of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission's legal staff, is a huge boost to state officials and members of Congress who had bitterly opposed the Pentagon's base-closing plans for the Air Guard. The plan would eliminate flying wings at 22 of the 70 Guard bases now housing aircraft, in most cases leaving only much smaller support units.

Pentagon officials — including a panel of Air Force officers — will defend the proposed changes Monday during hearings before the commission in Washington, D.C.

Jim Schaefer, a commission spokesman, said Friday the memo does not represent a formal decision by the panel. It was drafted as background to send to the Defense Department, Justice Department and other agencies, all of which have been asked by the commission for information on the issue, Schaefer said.

The nine-member commission is responsible for reviewing the Pentagon's base-closing plan. By Sept. 8, it must forward its recommendations to President Bush, who may ask the panel to make changes. A final version goes before Congress; unless lawmakers pass a joint resolution rejecting the list, it becomes law.

Significant changes in the Air National Guard plan would damage a key point in the Air Force's base-closings strategy. Air Force officials say the Guard changes are crucial to consolidating the service's shrinking aircraft fleet into fewer, larger, more efficient units

Pennsylvania is the first of what could be several states to file a federal lawsuit challenging the move. Pennsylvania's suit, filed earlier this week, cites federal law that requires state approval before making changes in the "branch, organization or allotment of a National Guard unit" within that state.

The commission's legal memo recommends that if the legal dispute can't be resolved, the commission should remove the Air National Guard changes from the Pentagon's list of recommended base-closings.

"Where the practical result of an Air Force recommendation would be to withdraw, disband, or change the organization of an Air National Guard unit, the commission may not approve such a recommendation without the consent of the governor concerned," writes Dan Cowhig, the commission's deputy general counsel, in the memo.

That memo anticipates several possible defenses of the Air Force plan. The base-closings proposals — which in their final form become law unless Congress or the president rejects them — could be seen as superseding the statutes governing the combined state and federal nature of the Guard, Cowhig writes.

But "each of these lines of reasoning would require the commission to ignore the inherent authority of [governors] to command the militia of the state," he concludes.

The effect of losing the Guard changes would ripple throughout the Air Force's recommendations. For example, a recent Government Accountability Office analysis found that one realignment, removing 15 F-15s and six F-16s from Lambert-St. Louis Air Guard Station, affects five other bases — four in the Guard and one active-duty base, Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.

The BRAC panel has expressed concern about the issue from its first meetings in May. Its chairman, Anthony Principi, has asked the Pentagon to explain whether it consulted with governors and attorneys general.

Supporters challenge BRAC panelists at Texas hearing

Air Force Times
Rod Hafemeister
July 12, 2005

SAN ANTONIO — The data is wrong. That was the message repeated again and again in San Antonio July 11 by Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma officials attempting to convince members of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission that a base or unit or activity in their state should be spared the Pentagon's axe. The officials and others who packed the 1,000-seat room in an effort to save facilities or units slated for reduction or closure met with four of the commission's nine members during held a one-day regional hearing; there will be a series of public hearings across the country as the commission prepares to give its report to the president on Sept. 8.

In the packed room, supporters in T-shirts that championed their cause expressed support for the Red River Defense Complex and Naval Station Ingleside in Texas, the 188th Fighter Wing in Arkansas, and other bases recommended for closure or reductions.

In most cases, local spokesmen attacked the Pentagon's calculations, arguing that the data was incorrect or incomplete or out of date.

Retired Gen. Joe Robles, a member of the 1995 commission that decided not to close Red River, presented figures showing that, largely because of Iraq, the depot had tripled its workload since early 2003. The 2003 numbers are the basis for the Pentagon's recommendation to close the depot.

Supporters of the Arkansas Air Guard's 188th Fighter Wing, based at Fort Smith, said the wing's commander wanted to be at the hearing but couldn't because he's currently deployed to Iraq with other members of the unit.

Commissioners said all the information gathered at the various hearings, as well as that submitted directly to the commission, will be compared to the Pentagon's figures before they make their final recommendations to the president.

"We're not about making decisions here on the spot," said retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd "Fig" Newton, one of the commissioners.

By law, the commission can add, subtract or modify the Pentagon's recommendations, but their final recommendations must be either accepted in total or rejected by the president and Congress.

BRAC panel adds targets for closure

Air Force Times
Gordon Trowbridge
July 18, 2005

The Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission announced July 1 that it has added more than a dozen facilities to those it could recommend for closing.

The release of the list is a necessary first step for the panel to add any closings to those proposed in May by the Pentagon. In past base-closing rounds, most bases on the "add list" have survived. Several on this list were targets of questions from commissioners during May hearings.

Commissioners will vote July 19 on whether to add the bases to the list that eventually goes to Congress and President Bush for final approval.

Among bases that the commission wants to review:

- Galena Airport Forward Operating Location, Alaska, one of two alert bases in Alaska for air-defense jets — which the commission may consider one too many.
- Pope Air Force Base, N.C., which is recommended to merge with neighboring Fort Bragg. The Pentagon's plan would remove close-air support aircraft from Pope, a move the commission has questioned.
- Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D., which loses its aircraft but remains open, apparently as part of an Air Force plan to base unmanned aircraft there.
- Several Air National Guard locations that would close or lose their aircraft under the Pentagon's plan. The commission is seeking

information on whether those changes would damage homeland defense.

- The Naval Postgraduate School and Defense Language Institute in Monterey, Calif., and the Air Force Institute of Technology in Dayton, Ohio. Commissioners want to examine the possibility of merging the two defense graduate schools in one location.
- Army, Navy and Air Force medical commands in the Washington, D.C., area, which the commission will consider merging into one location.
- Several Defense Finance and Accounting Service offices recommended for merging. The commission has asked if the Pentagon's planned merger is the most cost-effective option.

Panel drops few hints about fate of facilities

Gordon Trowbridge
Air Force Times
July 18, 2005

The nine men and women who control the fate of the Pentagon's base-closing plan have traveled the country for weeks, listening to everyone from local chamber of commerce leaders to retired generals call that plan flawed, arbitrary, inaccurate, even a threat to national security.

But with just weeks remaining before they must finish their work, members of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission are dropping few hints about how much effect those arguments will have.

"We take all this info and data very seriously," Anthony Principi, the panel's chairman, told reporters July 7 after a regional hearing on recommendations for installations in Virginia. But, he said, no decisions have been made about the merits of arguments from communities across the country fighting to keep their bases.

Since Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and other senior Pentagon officials made their case in May, the panel has gotten what commissioner

Harold Gehman called "the other side of the story." Among the critics is the Government Accountability Office, which suggests the Pentagon's estimate of more than \$50 billion in savings from this round of closings could be wildly optimistic.

At the Virginia hearing, opponents included Sen. John Warner, R-Va., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who flatly declared that the Pentagon's plan to move defense agencies out of suburban Virginia offices violated the law he helped write.

"The law was not followed," said Warner, arguing that Pentagon officials zeroed in on Washington-area office space despite the BRAC law's requirements that all installations be treated equally.

If BRAC commissioners don't reverse that mistake, Warner warned, their decisions are likely to be challenged in federal court.

The hearing was among the last of 19 regional meetings planned before the commission begins its public deliberations on July 19. By now, the arguments have become familiar, and all prominently feature the phrase "substantial deviation" — key words from the BRAC law. To remove a base from the Pentagon's list, commissioners must find that defense officials substantially deviated from the criteria the law establishes.

Local officials haven't been shy about making the argument:

- Washington, D.C., officials told the commission July 7 that flawed and biased measures of military value led to a recommendation to close Walter Reed Army Medical Center, moving it to a new facility in Bethesda, Md. Col. Michael Pierce, who retired after serving as chief of Walter Reed's medical staff, told commissioners they were duty-bound to disregard the Pentagon's ranking of hospitals, which placed small facilities at Fort Belvoir, Va., and Hurlburt Field, Fla., ahead of the Army's premier facility.

- Adjutants general from across the country have ripped into the Air Force, which plans to close or shrink Air National Guard bases in more than 20 states. The commission held a special hearing June 30 in Atlanta to hear those concerns, and several governors have said they believe the Pentagon is legally required to get their approval before eliminating National Guard units.

- Officials in New England, perhaps the region hardest hit by the Defense Department's plan, argued that the Pentagon has vastly underestimated the cost of moves such as closing the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in New Hampshire.

The Portsmouth decision, along with a recommendation to shut Submarine Base New London, Conn., are among the most controversial before the commission. Already, the panel has asked Rumsfeld to defend the decision to close Portsmouth instead of the shipyard at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. And a number of powerful lawmakers — including Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., chairman of the House Armed Services Committee — oppose the New London closing.

But editing the Pentagon's list is not easy. In past rounds, roughly 80 percent of the Defense Department's recommendations have been accepted. It's likely to be even more difficult this year, because the commission has less time to complete its work than previous panels.

And adding a base to the list — even to balance out the cost savings lost by taking another installation off the list — will take two votes by the commission, each requiring approval from seven of the nine commissioners.

BRAC proposals reflect shift to outpatient care
Medical advances affected recommendations, official says
 Army Times
 Deborah Funk
 July 18, 2005

In developing proposals for revamping military hospitals and clinics as part of this year's base realignment and closure process, defense officials mirrored a broader shift in American health care by increasing the use of outpatient services and same-day surgeries, a top official said.

At the same time, military health officials have sought to consolidate and increase the efficiency of inpatient services in a process that was "surprisingly collaborative," said Lt. Gen. (Dr.) George Peach Taylor Jr., the Air Force surgeon general, who chaired the Medical Joint Cross-Service Group.

That group recommended:

- Consolidating military inpatient care in the Washington, D.C., and San Antonio areas.

- Combining medic training at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

- Converting hospitals to outpatient clinics with outpatient surgery services at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.; MacDill Air Force Base, Fla.; Naval Station Great Lakes and Scott Air Force Base, Ill.; Fort Knox, Ky.; Keesler Air Force Base, Miss.; Naval Hospital Cherry Point, N.C.; and Fort Eustis, Va.

- Moving health care to Fort Lewis, Wash., from nearby McChord Air Force Base.

Advances in medicine, including surgical techniques and anesthesiology, have changed the focus from inpatient care to outpatient care and same-day surgeries.

When building its BRAC plan, the Medical Joint Cross-Service Group tried to focus on patients' access to and quality of care, and to make sure the staff at any given facility had a "full, well-rounded practice," Taylor said. Even in places that would close inpatient units, such as Keesler, military doctors will still admit patients to hospitals when needed; they'll just admit them to a civilian facility, as is already done at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb., Taylor said.

While collaboration among the medical planners on the medical BRAC plan was relatively easy, the plan still faces hurdles.

“The hardest part is to overcome the perception of ‘You’re closing Walter Reed,’” Taylor said. “What we’re creating is a new Walter Reed, a new National Military Medical Center to be able to invest in the right way in our infrastructure to move us to a far superior platform” than exists today.

Under the plan, in the national capital area, Malcolm Grow Hospital at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., would become a same-day surgery center. DeWitt Army Hospital at Fort Belvoir, Va., would expand to care for a growing military and retiree population in the metropolitan area. Walter Reed would close its Washington location and its capabilities would move about six miles to Bethesda, Md., to the National Naval Medical Center campus, Taylor said. The facility will be named the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

Some critics question how defense officials made their decisions, in part because they say the value of Walter Reed was minimized. The National Association for Uniformed Services wants “an independent review” of the methodology used to recommend reshaping the medical system, including how it determined military value and related cost estimates, said retired Army Col. Charles Partridge, the association’s legislative counsel.

DoD seeks standards for multiservice bases

Army Times
Gordon Trowbridge
July 18, 2005

Pentagon officials have begun an effort to set militarywide standards for on-base services, an issue of growing importance as base realignments blur the lines between Air Force base, Army post, Marine Corps camp and naval station.

By next spring, the Defense Department hopes to have joint standards for more than 30 service

areas — from airfield management to utilities to dining halls — said Philip Grone, the Pentagon’s top installations official.

The goal, Grone said, is that “any service member can go aboard an installation and would understand ... the level of support they will receive. It shouldn’t matter what color their uniform is.”

But that’s not likely to mean Marines will live in the same style of dormitory as airmen anytime soon. Grone said the changes won’t interfere with cultural differences the services cherish.

However, families in all services will be able to depend on the same level of help in finding referrals to off-base housing, Grone said.

Varying levels of service from post to base to camp are a complication as the Defense Department pushes joint basing as a means to cut costs and improve cooperation among the services.

The base realignment and closure plan unveiled in May proposes forming several multiservice bases. In North Carolina, Pope Air Force Base would combine with the Army’s Fort Bragg, while Army, Air Force and Navy installations in central New Jersey would merge into Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.

Those mergers raise an obvious question: If the Army takes over your Air Force base, will the new base run under your service’s standards, or the new manager’s?

“In no case, I don’t think, are any of the services or anybody willing to accept lower standards at any of these installations,” Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs, told members of the BRAC commission that is working on the Pentagon’s proposals.

Even before the base-closing plan became public, installation managers were concerned that the Pentagon’s increasing push for jointness would raise such questions. A survey of financial and installation managers sponsored by the American Society of Military Comptrollers

found officials who worried that no plan was in place to work out different expectations among members of various services.

“We heard across the board that DoD needs to set minimum acceptable levels of service,” said Diane Shute of Grant Thornton, the consulting firm that conducted the survey.

But Grone said setting minimum standards is not meant to push a lowest common denominator.

Just as important as the standards service members see, Grone said, is having an agreed-upon set of measurements that the services can use to plan budgets.

Even if changes aren’t immediately apparent, he said, troops and families will get better service if planners have better information on how much those services will cost.

National News Articles

Questions raised about plans to shift Guard units

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
July 18, 2005

The Pentagon's plans to transfer 15 fighter jets from an Illinois Air National Guard base to Fort Wayne might be illegal unless Indiana and Illinois' governors approve the changes, according to a memo written by an attorney for the nation's base-closing commission.

In May, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld proposed doubling the 122nd Fighter Wing stationed at Fort Wayne by moving planes and personnel from the Air National Guard bases in Terre Haute and Springfield, Ill.

He also proposed cutting or closing about 30 other Air National Guard bases nationwide, consolidating them into larger operations.

But Dan Cowhig, deputy general counsel for the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, said in a recent memo that moving planes from one state to another without governors' approval

could be illegal - an argument a number of governors have made.

Cowhig said the base-closure process is supposed to be used to close bases, not to reorganize units.

The Justice Department is expected to issue a legal opinion. Defense Department spokesman Glenn Flood said Friday the Pentagon is urging the commission to wait for that before deciding whether to make any changes to the military's recommendations.

Gov. Mitch Daniels supports the transfer of nine fighter jets from Terre Haute to Fort Wayne, but Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich has protested moving 15 F-16 fighter jets from Springfield, Ill.

In a letter he sent to Rumsfeld on Monday, Blagojevich quoted a section of federal law that says, "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."

Under the Constitution, governors have the right to maintain militias and in peacetime are the commanders in chief of National Guard units.

U.S. Rep. Mark Souder, R-Ind., told The Journal Gazette of Fort Wayne that the question of the planes' ownership might be the key point.

"My assumption is Department of Defense owns the planes, but if they donated them to the state, it becomes problematic," Buyer said.

According to Cowhig's 20-page paper, any move to withdraw, disband or change the organization of Air National Guard units would require the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to "alter core defense policies" set in two laws.

"The Base Closure Act does not grant the commission the authority to change how a unit is equipped and organized," he wrote.

Cowhig said the independent commission does not have the right to approve the Pentagon's Air

National Guard recommendations if individual governors do not consent to moving the aircraft.

His memo seems to bolster the argument Pennsylvania made in a lawsuit against the proposed changes. Pennsylvania officials sued the Pentagon over the planned closure of one Air National Guard unit, arguing that only the governor has the authority to deactivate the unit.

The commission has until Sept. 8 to approve or alter Rumsfeld's proposal and submit recommendations to the White House.

Maine, N.H. govts to make last-minute pitch to commissioners

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
July 17, 2005

The governors of Maine and New Hampshire decided to cut short their time at the National Governors Association gathering meeting in Iowa to make a last-minute pitch to three base closing commissioners who did not visit Portsmouth Naval Shipyard or attend a public hearing on targeted New England bases.

Maine Gov. John Baldacci and New Hampshire Gov. John Lynch, along with members of their congressional delegations, planned to meet Monday with retired Navy Adm. Harold Gehman, former U.S. Rep. James Hansen of Utah and former Army Gen. James Hill in Washington, D.C.

"We continue to show a united front to fight for these vital facilities," Baldacci said Friday before departing for weekend meeting of governors.

The Pentagon has proposed closing the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard on the Maine-New Hampshire border and the Defense Finance Accounting Service center in northern Maine. It also proposed stripping aircraft and half of the military personnel from Brunswick Naval Air Station.

The meeting will come a day before the full Base Realignment and Closure Commission meets to consider whether to add bases, including Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, to the list of those under consideration to be closed or realigned.

Maine and New Hampshire officials have argued that the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is more efficient and provides greater savings than Pearl Harbor.

"The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is the most efficient of our country's shipyards and is critical to our national defense," Lynch said in a statement. "The Department of Defense was wrong to recommend closing it."

A delegation from Hawaii, including Gov. Linda Lingle, is traveling to Washington and is also expected to meet with commissioners on Monday.

While the debate appeared to be shaping up as battle between Pearl and Portsmouth, U.S. Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine said she thinks the submarine repairs can be shared so that Portsmouth does long-term work, while Pearl Harbor handles emergency repairs.

On Friday, Acting Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England acknowledged that the Pearl Harbor yard scored lower than Portsmouth in the Pentagon's assessment.

In a letter, he wrote that the "total cost attribute" favored Portsmouth while "homeport proximity" favored Pearl Harbor, which is the headquarters for the Navy's Pacific Fleet.

But he said the Hawaii base's geographic location and its ability to dock a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier "provided a higher overall military value to the department."

It would take a vote of seven of the nine commissioners to add a base to the list of facilities under consideration for closure. If that happens, then the commission would plan a site visit and hold a public hearing.

The panel has a Sept. 8 deadline to come up with its final list of recommendations and present it to President Bush.

Closed bases spread wings and grow

Pittsburgh Tribune Review

Brian Bowling

July 17, 2005

The old base hospital today is a nursing home. Manufacturers and large commercial ventures have moved into part of the 1,300-acre expanse that once was part of a military base.

About 165 miles southeast, financial and research companies have supplanted aging warehouse and office buildings in a former military-supply depot in Kettering, Ohio.

Officials in both towns said the key to turning a closed military facility from a liability to an asset is quick action.

"It's critical to have a plan and establish relationships with (federal) officials," said Jim Tidd, executive director of the Grissom Redevelopment Authority in Indiana.

The Pentagon has proposed closing two Allegheny County military facilities -- the Air Force Reserve's 911th Airlift Wing in Moon and the Army's Charles E. Kelly Support Facility in Collier. The Defense Department plan also calls for the Army Reserve's 99th Regional Readiness Command to move from Moon to Fort Dix, N.J.

The recommendations are part of a national proposal to save \$5 billion a year by closing or reducing operations at 62 major bases and 775 smaller ones. The nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission is reviewing the plan and will send its recommendations to the president by Sept. 8.

Local officials fighting to save the bases testified last week before the commission in Washington, D.C. They argued the Pentagon should keep the 911th Airlift Wing and move the Kelly Facility operations to the Moon offices that the 99th Regional Readiness Command will vacate.

Officials also proposed expanding military operations at Moon into a regional base that would support Homeland Security operations.

If the pitch would fail, local officials face the task of finding a use for the 115 acres occupied by the 911th. At stake are an estimated 1,400 military and civilian jobs that the region would lose if the base would close.

Local officials can learn from communities that have redeveloped military properties from base closings that date to 1988.

One of the main lessons is to line up early for money -- particularly federal economic-development grants -- said Reed Berger, aviation and economic-development director for the city of Rantoul, Ill.

"Get there early and get there often," he said.

The Air Force decided to close Chanute Air Force Base near Rantoul in 1988. The city picked up the 1,300 acres five years later.

Berger said economic-development officials at first hoped to find new uses for many of the base's buildings and, therefore, delayed applications for grants that would have paid to raze the structures. When officials later realized that the buildings could not be converted for private use, the grant money had dried up.

"We can't afford any of this demolition," Berger said. "We have no budget. We have no cash flow to even deal with maintaining what we have."

Despite such setbacks, Rantoul has done well.

Businesses now occupying buildings on the former base provide 1,869 jobs, compared with the 1,035 lost when the facility closed, according to a Government Accountability Office study.

"Don't spend all your money trying to prevent a base closure," advised Harry Kelso, a Richmond, Va., consultant on base closures. "You should be preparing for the closure and

gaining the expertise on how to best use the property."

The Grissom Redevelopment Authority picked up \$200 million in public and private money since taking over the Grissom Aeroplex in 1996. The 792 jobs lost when the air station closed have been replaced with 1,036 jobs, according to the federal report.

Federal money helped the redevelopment authority demolish several buildings and install water, sewer, high-speed fiber optics and high-pressure natural-gas lines for a 360-acre industrial park, Tidd said.

The development effort is far from finished.

The Grissom Redevelopment Authority aims to attract aviation business to the 12,500-foot runway that the aeroplex shares with the Air Force Reserve's 434th Air Refueling Wing. The runway is Indiana's longest.

A GAO report back on May 3 analyzed 73 base closings and found that the jobs created by redevelopment efforts at 27 bases equaled or exceeded the civilian jobs that were lost when the bases closed.

"Most communities surrounding closed bases are continuing to recover from the impact of BRAC and faring well, compared with average U.S. rates for unemployment and income growth," the report says.

Kettering's conversion of the former Gentile Air Force Station into a business park is an example. A suburb of Dayton, Kettering inherited a 165-acre site in 1997 that was an air base in name only.

Developed by the Army Air Force during World War II as a supply depot, Gentile was made up of mostly offices and warehouses, said Kettering Manager Steve Husemann. The site has no runway and is surrounded by residential neighborhoods.

Once the town lost its fight to keep the base, Kettering started developing plans for the area.

"That was the first thing we had to struggle with -- what do we want this facility to be?" Husemann said.

A warehousing center was considered, but that idea was scrapped because it would have replaced only a handful of the 2,800 jobs lost when the base closed, he said.

Kettering, instead, developed a business park -- using state and federal money to raze older buildings and to replace them with parking and landscaping. Tenants fill about half of the park's 1.2 million square feet of building space. So far, the site has recovered about 1,800 jobs.

Pittsburgh Airport Area Chamber of Commerce Sally Haas said she knows other communities have redeveloped closed military bases, but that's not something she wants to think about.

"We're not at that point yet. We're still in the battle," she said.

Many success stories from previous base closings are in areas with growing economies -- Denver, Concord, Calif., and Charleston, S.C.

"There are people who will tell you, maybe not on the record, that it might have been the best thing for a base to close," said Jack Sprott, executive director of the Charleston Naval Complex Redevelopment Authority.

Charleston lost 22,000 military and civilian jobs when the Navy base closed in the 1990s. The metro area gained 58,500 jobs -- a 27 percent increase -- between 1995 and 2004, but only 6,000 of those were at the former base.

Local News Articles

The Battle To Save Texas Bases Is Far From Over

San Antonio Express-News (San Antonio, TX)
Sig Christenson
July 18, 2005

Although the base closure commission's San Antonio regional hearing is history, some might be tempted to think there's nothing to do now but wait.

But work has only begun in Texas, where the Alamo City has much to gain and towns in East Texas and the Gulf Coast have much to lose as the 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission sorts through a mountain of data.

Next up for the San Antonio Area Military Missions Task Force is to make sure the nine commissioners, three of them with local ties, get information to an overworked BRAC staff that supports the case the city made in a 15-minute presentation last week.

That information is bound to conflict with the recommendations from this year's round, the fifth since 1988. Reversing a Pentagon BRAC recommendation requires a majority vote.

"We're engaging with the BRAC analysts now to find out what data they need and to help in any way possible," said task force chairman John G. Jernigan.

The commission meets today and Tuesday in Washington. A chief topic on the agenda is the possibility of targeting more bases and missions for closure — an action certain to rattle communities that dodged the BRAC bullet.

Much is at stake for Texas.

Naval Station Ingleside and Red River Army Depot in Texarkana, home to 7,700 jobs that are major drivers in the local economies, are to close. Fort Hood is to lose more than 8,000 troops by the end of the decade. Corpus Christi Army Depot could lose 1,000 jobs, creating a ripple.

Though San Antonio is to lose Brooks City-Base and see Wilford Hall Medical Center transformed into a clinic, overall the city stands to gain 3,500 jobs and \$1 billion in construction. Jernigan's task force is trying to save three key missions at Brooks as it gains 9,364 jobs for Fort

Sam Houston, which would become a Defense Department Center for Joint Enlisted Training.

A letter from the BRAC commission chairman, Anthony Principi, hints that the panel is skeptical of plans for a massive realignment of Air National Guard assets, which could be good news for Ellington Field in Houston. Its dozen or so F-16A fighters would be retired under the BRAC proposal, and the 147th Fighter Wing inactivated.

One commissioner, retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton, said more base tours and regional hearings will be sought if the panel calls for new realignments or shutdowns.

Newton and fellow commissioner Sue Ellen Turner said after the San Antonio hearing that they hadn't received all the information they needed before deciding how they'll vote.

The Pentagon made 2,400 separate recommendations in its 2005 base closure report.

BRAC faces a Sept. 8 deadline to send its recommendations to President Bush.

"Probably time is the biggest challenge we have at the moment," Newton said.

There's also the matter of resources. At least 600 communities in 50 states, Puerto Rico and Guam are affected by this year's round.

Jernigan said he believes panelists will reassess folding 26 Defense Finance and Accounting Service's offices into three Midwest megacenters. The move, which would cost 318 San Antonio jobs, is designed to cut the work force and increase efficiency, but drew protests at the BRAC hearing.

Yolunda Vilches, president of American Federation of Government Employees Local 1022 in San Antonio, said the megacenters are in the wrong towns — Denver, Indianapolis and Columbus, Ohio.

All the offices have suffered weather-related closures that required workers in the San

Antonio office to help process paychecks, travel payments and medical reimbursements for the Army Medical Command at Fort Sam Houston and Air Education and Training Command at Randolph AFB.

With local elected official's support, Vilchers says, the San Antonio DFAS office might survive.

Jernigan suggested establishing a megacenter at Brooks, which will have extra building space if the panel affirms Pentagon plans to shutter the facility.

Assessing Fort Belvoir's Problems And Prospects

Increased Traffic Is No. 1 Official Concern

Washington Post (Washington DC)

Elissa Silverman

July 18, 2005

Carved out of a colonial estate in southern Fairfax County, Fort Belvoir has for decades functioned like a self-sufficient island. Twenty-two thousand workers, most of them civilians, trek there for work each week, but they mostly spend their money at the base's gas station (\$2.07 a gallon for regular unleaded), its restaurants, shopping mall and commissary (at \$87.5 million in sales last year, the highest grossing base store in the world).

Military retirees roam its two 18-hole golf courses.

But since the Pentagon's Base Realignment and Closure commission released its recommendations in May, local officials say expectations are growing that this part of Fairfax County will finally come to resemble its neighbors in Tysons Corner and Reston, with sleek glass office buildings and upscale retail replacing the auto body shops and dollar stores that are now outside the base's gates.

The proposed relocation of 18,420 Army and civilian personnel to Fort Belvoir and its largely vacant Engineer Proving Ground would probably have federal government contractors

following them down Route 1, buoying that section of Fairfax.

"Ever since the BRAC announcement, there has been a heightened level of interest and activity from the commercial development community," said Richard Neel, president of the Southeast Fairfax Development Corp. "The people are coming."

"We're interested in understanding what development opportunities there are," said Margarita Foster, a vice president and market research director at Cassidy & Pinkard, one of the firms that has begun scouting the area. "We have clients who are Department of Defense contractors, and they are relying on us to keep them informed about availability of office space."

Hotel chains have also called around, looking to find available parcels. "I have no doubt that if I'm looking [other hotels] are looking, too," said Robert S. Mannon, senior vice president for development at Marriott International Inc. "We're following the jobs and the trends in the market, and they're all headed to Belvoir."

Military bases and agencies produce mixed effects on local economic development. Just as their arrival can produce spinoff businesses, their closing can open large tracts of land to private investment.

In the Washington area, Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens has referred to the area around Fort Meade and the National Security Agency as the county's "gold coast."

"There's been incredible job growth generated by both Fort Meade and NSA, which in turn attracts defense contractors," said Jody Couser, an Owens spokeswoman, referring to Lockheed Martin Corp., Titan Corp. and other defense contractors clustered in the National Business Park, an office park near the two facilities.

The District has had less success with Walter Reed Army Medical Center, and that facility's proposed closing is expected to spark interest

from developers in a newly available expanse of urban land.

"I don't think Walter Reed itself generates economic development on Georgia Avenue," said D.C. Council member Adrian M. Fenty, who represents the area around the hospital. "The proof is in the pudding: Walter Reed has been there for decades, and if it was going to spur economic development it would have done so a long time ago."

Fairfax County hopes the mix of agencies coming to Fort Belvoir will resemble the Fort Meade model. The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency and other smaller agencies now in leased space around the region rely on the kinds of technology-oriented contractors that have helped keep Northern Virginia booming, but which have failed so far to gravitate to Fort Belvoir, a hub for logistics and administration.

The arrival of contractors would in turn boost southeastern Fairfax County in an important category: top quality "Class A" office space. The highway corridor near the base has approximately 1 million square feet of office space -- only 1 percent of the total in the county. The Springfield district near the Engineer Proving Ground has another 4.9 million square feet.

By comparison, Tysons Corner has 32 percent of the county's office space and the Reston-Herndon area has 23 percent.

Increasing the daytime office population is a goal for county officials because, unlike residential development, commercial buildings add tax revenue to the county coffers without adding too much demand for trash collection, schools and other expensive services. Office workers eat lunch, drop off dry cleaning and pick up groceries on their way to and from work, which often creates a vibrant retail business sector, too.

County officials have been expecting that dynamic to develop around Fort Belvoir for more than a decade now. In the late 1980s, when the Army moved its engineering school to

Missouri, Congress approved a plan to redevelop the 820-acre Engineer Proving Ground, with private developers getting rights to build there in return for constructing office space for the military.

The plan, which some called "Crystal City South" after that suburban area's close connection between military agencies and private development, foresaw construction of 8.7 million square feet of offices, a projection since cut to 3.6 million, and, in reality, ignored: A shovel has yet to break ground.

With prospects for development increasing, Fairfax officials are starting to think about the impact, and wonder whether the federal government is going to help ensure that the transition is smooth and well-planned.

The primary challenge is clear to any observer who watches traffic exit Fort Belvoir's Tulley Gate on a weekday afternoon. Most vehicles turn left onto Route 1, clogging an already congested roadway. Add 18,420 predominantly civilian employees to the installation, potentially thousands of federal contractors to its immediate environs, and an expected 1 million visitors a year to a proposed Army National Museum opening on the base in 2009, and it's a recipe for congestion.

"When this was described to me, my reaction is that it is an incredible opportunity but an awesome challenge," said Gerald W. Hyland, who represents the Mount Vernon district on the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

"People tend to lock in on numbers. There's this number: 18,420. The \$64,000 question is: Where do these people currently call home?" said T. Dana Kauffman, a Fairfax County supervisor who represents the Lee district north of Fort Belvoir.

Fort Belvoir officials said they are trying to figure that out with Zip code surveys, but they might not be able to compile all the data in time. Even though the Pentagon outlines a six-year timeline for realignment, Army officials said that they plan to get it done in four.

County officials argue that, with the process now moving quickly, their federal counterparts should do all they can to help out. In earlier plans for the proving ground, the Army agreed to develop a transit link to Metro and put in place other traffic-easing measures to accommodate the expected increase in workers that never materialized.

The local officials note that Fort Belvoir's own chief planner was surprised by the magnitude of the base realignment recommendations, and was only weeks away from releasing a new planning blueprint for the base when the influx of new people was announced.

"BRAC is a secret process," Hyland said. "If they didn't know, how would you expect Fairfax County to know that the Army was going to send 18,000 people to Belvoir?"

But federal officials are offering little assistance at this point. At a recent public meeting on the base recommendations, Rep. Thomas M. Davis III (R-Va.) said, for example, that he didn't think a Metrorail extension to the Fort Belvoir area was likely.

And Army officials said that, while they may be bringing the people to Belvoir, it will be up to the county to make the most of it.

"What happens outside the gate," said Fort Belvoir spokesman Richard Arndt, "isn't our purview to fix."

Cantwell Slams Transfer Of F-15 Unit Away From Portland

Seattle Post-Intelligencer (Seattle, WA)

Sam Skolnik

July 18, 2005

U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., and a top National Guard officer yesterday decried the Pentagon's recommendation to transfer an F-15 fighter unit based in Portland across the country, asserting that the move would make the region less secure.

The move, proposed as part of a a national effort to close and realign bases, could endanger tens of thousands of lives in the Puget Sound, said Maj. Gen. Timothy Lowenberg, the Washington National Guard's adjutant general.

The decision that a federal commission is considering is whether to transfer 15 F-15s from the Air National Guard base in Portland -- leaving just two remaining to defend the Pacific Northwest.

The 15 F-15s would be moved to Louisiana and New Jersey.

The move would leave the Northwest with fewer air defenses than the rest of the country, said Cantwell, making the region more vulnerable to enemy attack. "That's unacceptable," she said at a news conference at the Museum of Flight in Seattle.

Cantwell and Lowenberg said that they and other top military or political leaders in the state hadn't been consulted before the Pentagon made its recommendation to the commission. The commission is set to hold hearings on the matter next week.

If the two F-15s are unable to handle a threat, said Lowenberg, the closest planes that could be called in are from Fresno, Calif. -- too far away to adequately protect the region's people and infrastructure.

Though he couldn't say precisely how long it would take those fighters to come to the region's aid in an emergency, it could take "way too long," he said. "Too little, too late."

Pentagon Stands By Finance Center Plan That Would Add Jobs Here

Indianapolis Star (Indianapolis, IN)

Maureen Groppe

July 16, 2005

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon is defending its proposal to consolidate its finance centers, a move that could bring more than 3,500 jobs to

Marion County but that has been questioned by an independent commission that must approve the idea.

In a letter to the Base Realignment and Closure commission made public Friday, the Pentagon said consolidation is "the best value solution." It wants to consolidate 26 finance centers into three, one of which would be the Defense Finance and Accounting Service center at the former Fort Benjamin Harrison in Lawrence.

The commission has raised questions about whether there are more cost-effective options that could avoid construction costs.

Acting Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England said in the letter that the consolidation would not involve new construction, although the finance center in Columbus, Ohio, would require renovation.

Earlier this week, the chairman of the commission told Indiana Sens. Richard Lugar and Evan Bayh that the commission is looking at whether to keep one or two additional finance centers open, which would still mean additional jobs for Indiana.

The commission may discuss the issue further with military officials at a hearing Monday.

The Pentagon's proposals also include transferring about 700 jobs from the Crane Division, Naval Surface Warfare Center in Martin County. Plans also call for the elimination of 138 jobs at the Air National Guard Station in Terre Haute, and adding 313 jobs at the Fort Wayne station.

**Isles Ready To Fight For Base
State leaders will try to sway commissioners
in a decision that could cost Hawaii \$1.3
billion**

Honolulu Star-Bulletin (Honolulu, HI)
Gregg K. Kakesako
July 17, 2005

WASHINGTON--Over the past two decades and four rounds of base closure decisions Hawaii has never been a target of a BRAC attack.

But this week Hawaii will be on the defensive for the first time.

Hawaii's senior U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye says that everything is on the line and more than 5,000 Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard workers have to realize that they are in a fight that is appropriate to its motto -- Fit to Fight.

As the Pentagon reiterated on Friday in a letter to Anthony Principi, chairman of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, the case to close either Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, the oldest in the Navy, or Pearl Harbor could have gone either way.

Both shipyards hire about the same number of workers -- about 5,000. Both are considered economic engines in their regions. Portsmouth, which straddles the borders of Maine and New Hampshire, has a payroll of more than \$283 million annually.

Pearl Harbor, billed as the state's largest industrial employer, has 4,297 civilian and 778 military workers who earn \$385 million a year.

However, as with Portsmouth, the ripple effect on closing Pearl Harbor would mean an economic blow to the island's economy amounting to \$1.3 billion with a 2.2 percent loss of Oahu's labor force.

Portsmouth advocates in the past have argued that the 297-acre shipyard repair facility is more efficient and can return ships to the fleet faster than expected at a rate of \$53 million a year.

It is a factor that the Pentagon acknowledged in its deliberations before it placed Portsmouth on its hit list on May 13.

However, Pearl Harbor, which was instrumental in rebuilding the nearly decimated Pacific Fleet in weeks after the Japanese attack on Dec. 7, 1941, ranked higher because of its "strategic" location.

Retired four-star Adm. Thomas Fargo, who was head of all the U.S. forces in the Pacific until May, said from a strategic standpoint "it doesn't make sense" to close the 112-acre Pearl Harbor.

"Both today and even more so in the future, the preponderance of our vital national security interests are in Asia and the Pacific," said Fargo, who headed the Pacific Fleet for several years before taking over the U.S. Pacific Command.

"From a practical and operational standpoint, the focus of discussion is adding additional naval capability to the Pacific. Closing one of its two major U.S. shipyards in the Pacific would add to the cost to intermediate maintenance and impact our readiness and speed of response."

In responding to Principi's July 1 request for more information which led Pentagon planners to favor Pearl Harbor over Portsmouth, acting Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England, who also served for many years as civilian head of the Navy, said that the Oahu seaport is both critically located in the Pacific and is the home of 29 warships and submarines. Pearl Harbor has four drydocks able to service all types of naval vessels up to nuclear aircraft carriers, including, with modification, the USS Ronald Reagan.

There are no warships homeported at Portsmouth and its sole function has been to maintain the Navy's nuclear submarine fleet.

Tomorrow in a Senate hearing room, the Pentagon's Michael Wynne and Adm. Robert Willard, vice chief of naval operations, will have to defend its decision to close Portsmouth. Following the hearing Gov. Linda Lingle, Mayor Mufi Hannemann and Inouye will meet in private with several BRAC commissioners.

"The hope is try to get at least three commissioners on our side," said Maj. Gen. Bob Lee, who heads Hawaii's Army and Air National. He will be in Washington, D.C., when the matter comes up for a vote on Tuesday.

Lee was referring to the requirement that it will take seven of the nine BRAC commission

members to add Pearl Harbor to the hit list when it takes up the matter.

Rep. Ed Case noted that "on paper the arguments would favor us," but he warned that it is "a very fluid situation."

During the past two decades where there have been four rounds of BRAC deliberations, Case said, Portsmouth has been on the list at least one time before.

About a decade ago, the Pentagon closed Long Beach Naval Shipyard in California because there was not enough work. Portsmouth also was on that list, but spared by another BRAC commission.

In May the Pentagon recommended closing 33 large bases and realigning the work of 800 other installations to generate \$48.6 billion in long-term savings. The hardest hit region was New England, where job loss would be the highest in any region, with about 14,000 jobs.

Jim Tollefson, the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii president and chief executive, has said that a coalition of business, labor and military leaders are ready to make a full court press if the commission decides to add Hawaii to the list. "We're prepared to go the whole nine yards to be successful."

Tollefson said the presentation to the panel will focus on Pearl Harbor's military importance when the commissioners come to the islands for a hearing.

"We feel that Pearl Harbor, being located in the middle of the Pacific and being homeport of the Navy in the Pacific, it makes great tactical and strategic sense to maintain a shipyard here," he said.

But Gov. Linda Lingle said she is confident that Pearl Harbor would be kept off the list.

"It's important to Hawaii's economy, obviously, but equally important to the nation's defense," she said. "As long as the decision is made on the

basis of the country's security, I think we'll be fine."

The commission has until Sept. 8 to submit its recommendations to President Bush, who has two weeks to accept or reject the recommendations.

Ninety-seven installations were shut down in four rounds of closings since 1988, including Barbers Point Naval Air Station on Oahu.

As of now, Hawaii stands to lose 213 civilians at the Defense Finance and Accounting Service on Ford Island and another 65 civilians at Pearl Harbor's Human Resource Service Center .

But uncertainty faces many Pearl Harbor shipyard workers like Mario Fernandez, who after securing what he believed was a long-term job, got married, started a family and bought a home in Waikele.

Today, 50-year-old Fernandez, who has been at the shipyard for 22 years, faces the uncertainty that he may have to relocate to the mainland because he doesn't think he could find a comparable job in the private sector.

South Dakota gets grant to plan for potential BRAC transition

Aberdeen News (Aberdeen, SD)
July 17, 2005

SIoux FALLS, S.D. - The U.S. Department of Labor has awarded a \$1 million grant to South Dakota to aid early planning and help civilian workers that could be affected by the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure recommendations, the department said in a release.

"The Department of Labor is providing these grants to help workers who may be affected by the BRAC recommendations gain early access to services in the public workforce investment system," Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao said.

"These funds will help communities develop their transition plans and, in some instances, enhance the economic development program

that will be key to helping workers and communities adjust and create new opportunities as the BRAC process moves forward."

The money is part of more than \$28 million awarded to 35 states.

South Dakota applied for funds in late May. The planning grant will help start early community transition planning, the Labor Department said. Using the funds will have no impact on any subsequent BRAC-related recommendations or actions, according to the release.

The Pentagon has recommended that Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City be closed.

BRAC vote could affect Ellsworth AFB

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (Rapid City, SD)
July 17, 2005

The group trying to keep Ellsworth Air Force Base open will turn its attention to Washington this week when the Base Closure and Realignment Commission decides whether to add to the list of military facilities slated to be closed or realigned.

Ellsworth is already on a Pentagon list of bases to be closed.

The BRAC vote, to take place Tuesday, will follow testimony from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and others on Monday.

The commission will vote on whether to add more bases to the list. A decision on removing military bases from the list will come in August.

But adding bases to the list, especially those viewed as competitors to Ellsworth for some missions, would be a significant development and could signal hope for a reprieve for Ellsworth.

The action the commission takes on Tuesday will "change the nature of the competition," said Pat McElgunn, director of the Ellsworth Task Force at Rapid City.

The commission has demonstrated that they are "very independent in their thought processes," he said.

"Monday and Tuesday will be interesting days for us," McElgunn said. "The mind-set is changing on what is the real core and essence of this round of BRAC closures."

The commission must give the Department of Defense 15 days to comment on its proposed changes to the list, he said.

Lingle to lobby for Pearl Harbor shipyard

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Honolulu, HI)

Jaymes Song
July 17, 2005

Gov. Linda Lingle is joining other Hawaii leaders in Washington, D.C., this week to lobby an independent panel weighing the future of the state's largest industrial employer.

Lingle, Sen. Daniel Inouye, D-Hawaii, state Adjutant General Robert Lee and Honolulu Mayor Mufi Hannemann, plan to meet with several members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission Monday to emphasize the importance of the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard to regional and national security.

On Tuesday, the full commission meets to consider whether to add bases, including the Pearl Harbor shipyard, to the list of those under consideration to be closed or realigned.

In May, the Pentagon recommended that 33 major bases across the country be closed and 29 others realigned to save nearly \$50 billion. The Pearl Harbor shipyard was not on the hit list, allowing Hawaii officials to breath what turned out to be a temporary sigh of relief.

But in a July 1 letter to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, commission chairman Anthony Principi asked the Pentagon to justify why it recommended keeping the Pearl Harbor shipyard open when military value scores

avored the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard on the Maine-New Hampshire border, which was on the commission's list.

At a hearing in Boston the following week, Maine and New Hampshire officials also cited examples of Portsmouth having greater efficiency compared to Pearl Harbor.

This put Hawaii leaders on the defensive, forcing them to quickly formulate a plan to keep Pearl Harbor from being added to the list.

The Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii's military affairs council formed a high-powered subcommittee and hired a lobbyist. Hawaii's political leaders wrote letters to the commission and solicited assistance from military officials.

Their message to the commission is simple: The Pearl Harbor shipyard plays a crucial role for the U.S. military in the Asia-Pacific region and closing the base would weaken the Navy's readiness and homeland security.

In addition to the military consequences, closing the Pearl Harbor shipyard would have a major effect on Hawaii's economy. A report commissioned by the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii estimated that the state would lose \$1.3 billion and nearly 10,000 jobs if the shipyard is closed.

The Pearl Harbor shipyard is Hawaii's largest industrial employer, with 4,355 civilian earning an average of \$75,000 per year.

The Pentagon is also backing the 97-year-old installation, which has the ability to handle an aircraft carrier in drydock.

In a letter to the commission last week, Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England said Pearl Harbor "is strategically located to support (Department of Defense's) current and future mission capabilities in the Pacific. Loss of this critical asset will have an adverse impact on operational warfighting capability, training and readiness."

Lingle has said she is confident that Pearl Harbor would be kept off the list if the decision is based on the nation's security.

Pentagon officials are also scheduled to meet with the members of the base closure commission on Monday. So are the governors of Maine and New Hampshire, who cut short their time at the National Governors Association gathering meeting in Iowa to make a last-minute pitch to three base closing commissioners who did not visit the Portsmouth shipyard or attend the Boston hearing.

Seven of the nine commissioners would have to vote in favor of adding a base to the list of facilities under consideration for closure. If that happens, then the commission would plan a site visit and hold a public hearing.

The base closure commission will review the list of proposed changes and make its recommendation to President Bush by Sept. 8.

BRAC: Tuesday vote to determine GFAFB's future;

Rumsfeld to explain decision to realign base at meeting
Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
Elisa L. Rinehart
July 17, 2005

With Air Force officials ready to defend Grand Forks Air Force Base's strategic value for drone operations, base retention leaders are preparing to face yet another milestone in the Base Realignment and Closure process.

A hearing to discuss the future of eight bases, including Grand Forks, will begin at 8:30 a.m. EST Monday in Washington, D.C. The end result could be that Grand Forks or any of the other seven bases could end up on the base closure list, along with the 180 military facilities the Pentagon put there May 13.

The hearing is particularly touchy because Air Force officials already targeted Grand Forks Air Force Base for closure at one time but changed their minds, deciding instead to put the new

unmanned aerial vehicle mission here, according to a Pentagon letter released Thursday.

The hearing was scheduled in response to a July 1 letter from Anthony Principi, BRAC commission chair, to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. Principi asked for the rationale behind several of the recommendations, including Rumsfeld's decision to realign rather than close Grand Forks.

Under the recommendations released May 13, Grand Forks would become a UAV unit, but the base's tankers and 80 percent of its personnel would be transferred to other bases around the country.

Monday, Rumsfeld will testify in front of the BRAC Commission as to what motivated him to make that decision.

Up or down vote

At 1:30 p.m. Tuesday, the commission will vote on whether to add Grand Forks or any of the other bases to the Pentagon's closure list.

After discussing the installations in question, a staff person will read out loud the names on the list one by one, and Principi will call for a motion to add each base to the closure list. If there is no motion to include it, the installation will escape the chopping block.

If one person supports the motion, the team of experts will deliberate and vote on it.

The commission needs seven votes to close a military installation that was not on the secretary of defense's list. That means that if three of the nine vote to keep a base open, the installation will be spared.

Jim Schaefer, director of communications for BRAC, said that Tuesday's vote is not final. Communities targeted for closure shouldn't interpret the decision as a point of no return, he said.

"Those bases will be selected for further consideration," Schaefer said. "It doesn't mean that they will be included in the final report."

Second visit

If spared in Tuesday's vote, Grand Forks would move on to the final voting round with a clean slate. If not, the commission will decide if its needs to visit the base again.

Probably two commissioners would tour installations added to the Pentagon's closure list.

The commission is expected to begin final deliberations Aug. 22. Some BRAC experts said the concluding report could be finished a week before the Sept. 8 deadline.

In 1995, the Pentagon recommended 146 bases for closure. The BRAC commission approved only 123 of those, but added nine others, for a total 132.

Base panel questions changes;
Issues raised in a report echo those of officials
who have sued to keep a Guard unit in Pa.
 Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, PA)
 July 17, 2005

Pennsylvania officials who have filed suit to save an Air National Guard unit at Willow Grove were encouraged Friday that the base-closing review commission has raised similar legal questions.

Defense Department decisions to close and move nearly 30 Air Guard units nationwide - including the 111th Fighter Wing of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard at Willow Grove - may be illegal, according to the legal counsel for the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

A 37-page report prepared by the counsel for BRAC said relocating, disbanding or moving Air National Guard units from one state to another could be beyond the commission's authority and might be unconstitutional,

CongressDaily, a Capitol Hill publication, reported Friday.

Gov. Rendell and the state's two senators filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday saying the Constitution and federal law forbid the Pentagon from closing the 111th or any National Guard unit without state consent.

That suit is independent of state efforts to prevent the closing of the entire Naval Air Station and Joint Reserve Base at Willow Grove.

Denying it has done anything illegal, the Pentagon said the Justice Department would be issuing its own ruling shortly and "we respectfully ask the commission to refrain from revising or eliminating any of the department's recommendations until it has received the [Justice Department] opinion."

The Pentagon in May recommended closing Willow Grove and reassigning nine of the 15 planes attached to the 111th to Maryland, Idaho and Michigan. The remaining six would be taken out of service.

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes