

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

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Springfield National Guard unit won't go quietly

Chicago Tribune (Chicago, IL)

Stephen J. Hedges

August 10, 2005

WASHINGTON--Though made up of just a few aircraft and pilots nestled into Springfield's Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport, the Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Fighter Wing in recent years has flown combat missions over Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as airspace patrols over the Midwest.

Now the unit's 15 F-16 fighters, and the 163 full-time employees who keep them flying, are in a new fight--a political one--that threatens the wing's survival in Springfield.

The Pentagon wants to move the 183rd to Ft. Wayne, Ind., as part of a much larger effort by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to reduce and combine military installations nationwide. The plan must be finished and on President Bush's desk by Sept. 8.

But Illinois isn't going quietly, and neither are other states that will lose a total of 30 Air Guard units. Several governors have cited a federal law saying that they, not the Pentagon, have authority over state Air Guard units. Illinois and Pennsylvania have filed federal lawsuits to block the restructuring.

"These are the wrong recommendations at the wrong time for the wrong reasons," said Jack Lavin, director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs. "And on top of all that, with the Springfield National Guard base, they're doing something that is illegal."

The nine-member presidential Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which is reviewing the Pentagon's list of potential base closures, has not ruled on the Air Guard issue. A commission hearing in Washington on Thursday could provide a decision.

Although the dogfight over the Air National Guard units is the most contentious issue before the commission, it's hardly the only one.

In Maine, Republican Sens. Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins are angry over Pentagon plans to close the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, where submarine repairs are made, as well as a plan to scale back operations at the Brunswick Naval Air Station.

Snowe has put a hold on the nomination of Gordon England, Rumsfeld's choice to be his second in command, over what aides say are concerns about diminishing funding for the Navy in general and its facilities in Maine in particular.

Meanwhile, Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) blocked passage of the 2006 Defense Authorization Act this summer with a proposal to delay base-closing decisions until U.S. troops come home from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as Europe and Asia, and the Pentagon finishes a review due early next year.

Thune wants to keep open Ellsworth Air Force Base in Rapid City, S.D., home to 29 B-1

bombers. The Air Force wants to move those planes to Texas.

"We shouldn't be closing bases here in this country at a time of war when we haven't determined what our base requirements are going to be overseas or here at home," Thune said. "We think when we bring folks home, they may determine they're going to need bases for those people to go to."

In Connecticut, Democratic Sens. Joseph Lieberman and Christopher Dodd are fighting to save the Navy's submarine works in Groton. The facility, which the Pentagon wants to close, employs 8,000 people.

Those are just the big battles. Across the country, federal, state and local politicians are scrambling to save installations from Pentagon plans to close or consolidate 62 of its 318 major military bases and shift missions and resources at more than 700 smaller facilities.

There have been four previous rounds of base closings since 1988, the last one in 1995. None has been easy. But the 2005 version has been hampered by incomplete data from the Pentagon, questions over the cost savings and the logic behind consolidating military units, and the sudden application of political pressure, particularly in the Senate.

The Pentagon announced its closing and realignment list in May, predicting that it would save taxpayers \$ 49 billion over 20 years. (A Government Accountability Office audit has suggested those savings may be overstated.) After the base-closing commission makes changes, if any, and sends the list to Bush by Sept. 8, the president will forward it to Congress for an up-or-down vote on the entire list. In Illinois, state officials took quick exception to the Pentagon's proposal to reduce jobs at the Army's Rock Island Arsenal, the Navy's Great Lakes Training Center in North Chicago and to move the 183rd to Ft. Wayne.

The Air Force has recommended moving both the 183rd and an Air Guard unit in Hulman, Ind.,

to Ft. Wayne. Its proposal noted that both sites "ranked low in military value."

And though Ft. Wayne ranked even lower than those two, the service argued that it should be kept "because of its record of recruiting and its proximity to Hulman-- allowing experienced airmen there to remain available." It estimated that the moves will cost \$ 20 million and produce savings of about \$ 6.3 million over 20 years.

Lavin and other Illinois officials have argued that it makes no sense to move the Springfield unit to a facility that ranks lower in military usefulness. And the cost of the move, he said, will erase any savings.

"The Pentagon set up the criteria and then didn't follow the criteria," he said. "Of course we want to keep the jobs, but it's about military value and homeland security, national security."

Last month Gov. Rod Blagojevich drove that point home by filing a federal lawsuit against Rumsfeld and the base closing commission. The suit cites a federal statute saying, "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 response to the Illinois and Pennsylvania lawsuits, the Pentagon said it "believes its recommendations, including those affecting the National Guard, are in accordance with all applicable legal requirements and consistent with actions taken in prior [base-closing] rounds."

At least one base-closing commissioner, Chicago attorney Sam Skinner, a former U.S. attorney and Cabinet member, agrees with the Pentagon lawyers.

"I've looked at all the law," he said. "I don't believe those governors will win on that issue. My opinion is that the [base-closing] statute gives the commission ample authority to deal with the secretary's recommendations."

Apart from the law, Skinner said, the commission has to consider Air Force plans to shrink the number of active and Air National Guard fighters in the coming years.

"What we're wrestling with is the fact that the Air Force, over time, is going to reduce substantially the amount of airplanes that are going to be available to the Guard and the active forces," he said. "The F-16, they're going to take out over 100 of these airplanes. The older models are going to be retired."

In South Dakota, Thune faces a similar dilemma with the aging B-1 bomber fleet. His amendment to delay a final decision on closures will be taken up after Congress returns to Washington on Sept. 6.

"There are enough questions among members of Congress about the process itself that this amendment might get some traction," Thune said.

State urges preparation for new Fort Meade jobs

The Capital (Annapolis, MD)
Vanessa Franko
August 9, 2005

West county's schools, roads and stores aren't prepared for the possible arrival of up to 20,000 jobs expected to shift to Fort George G. Meade over the next decade, the state's top economic development official said yesterday.

Aris Melissaratos, secretary of business and economic development, told more than 70 residents, politicians and government officials that county schools need to target math and science programs, more money needs to be pumped into public transit and roads and more upscale retailers need to open.

The first wave of 5,400 jobs would come from Northern Virginia, New Jersey and Florida if the Base Realignment and Closure Commission's recommendations are approved by President Bush and Congress. An additional 10,000 to 15,000 are expected to follow as the Pentagon

shifts its Washington-area agencies to secure locations over the next decade.

Already home to the National Security Agency, Fort Meade is the county's largest employment center, with 40,000 jobs.

Mr. Melissaratos urged Howard and Anne Arundel counties, Fort Meade and the city of Laurel, to work together to accommodate the growth.

"It's a matter of land-use planning, it's a matter of transportation planning, it's a matter of education planning," he said.

Col. Kenneth O. McCreedy, Fort Meade installation commander, told the crowd at the Maryland City fire station that Anne Arundel County has to make a case for being as good or better a place to live than areas such as Fairfax County, where some of the jobs will come from.

While working in Northern Virginia, he said he often played a round of golf after to work to avoid driving in the area's notorious rush hour traffic. That makes traffic one plus for Anne Arundel.

"We need to sell them and convince people that we have competitive school systems," said Col. McCreedy, who has a daughter at Meade High School.

Mr. Melissaratos pointed out the draw of the Science and Mathematics Academy at Aberdeen High School and said a similar school should be considered in Anne Arundel County.

Gregory V. Nourse, assistant superintendent for business and management services for the county's public schools, said the county school board is discussing a proposal to add an International Baccalaureate program at Meade High School to fill that need. The county already has programs slated to open this month at Annapolis and Old Mill high schools.

Another issue Mr. Melissaratos and the audience discussed was transportation.

"Now we have congestion at rush hour. We're going to have congestion around five to eight years from now," he said.

Mr. Melissaratos mentioned ways of alleviating the traffic problem, including extending the Washington Metro to Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Fort Meade and eventually to BWI Airport. Col. John W. Ives, former Fort Meade installation commander, proposed a bus Metro bus link to Fort Meade in June.

Greg Welker, an engineer with the State Highway Administration, said the state recently completed removing the traffic signals from Route 32 in front of Fort Meade and the NSA. SHA improvements are also in the works for adding lanes to the Baltimore-Washington Parkway between Interstates 695 and 195 at BWI.

There is also \$12.5 million earmarked for improvements on Annapolis Road from Route 170 to the parkway.

Mr. Melissaratos said the road in front of Fort Meade needs work, too.

"A lot of (Route) 175 coming out of Fort Meade looks like it did 50 years ago. We can't have that anymore. ... We need to make 175 look and appear and make Fort Meade look like the modern high-tech installation in the world," Mr. Melissaratos said.

He urged members of the audience to push for upgrades to shopping centers bringing in bigger retail brand names.

"We need to upgrade our service shop, the bagel shop, the doughnut shop, the restaurants. Whether the people live here or commute to Northern Virginia, they're going to eat here. They're going to stop to shop here at lunch," Mr. Melissaratos said.

County Planning and Zoning Director Joseph Rutter said the county has west county business plans in the works.

Mr. Rutter said that service facilities around the MARC station in Odenton are an important aspect, including dry cleaners and coffee shops. He said there is also a mixed-use project proposed at Blob's Park in Jessup, a retail and residential complex dubbed Parkside.

In addition to updating retail sites, Mr. Melissaratos suggested creating more housing for the people moving to the area because of the BRAC recommendations.

"We need to find a way to have more affordable workforce housing and to upgrade the housing that exists," Mr. Melissaratos said.

Mr. Rutter said there are west county projects in the works.

"We have over 4,000 units that are approved and in the pipeline," he said.

Mr. Rutter said another 1,000 units are awaiting approval. But he said some of the new jobs would be held by people who already live locally.

The final BRAC recommendations will go to Mr. Bush next month, who will return them or send them on to Congress. Final approval could take several more months.

Ten-Gallon Hat Tossed Into Ring For Oceana Jets

The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

Louis Hansen

August 9, 2005

VIRGINIA BEACH -- Yet another state has come forward trying to woo away the Oceana Naval Air Station.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry offered the Department of Defense \$ 365 million in grants, infrastructure improvements and loans to upgrade three naval stations near the Gulf of Mexico to attract Oceana's fighter jet squadrons.

The "investment is a win-win for Texas and the U.S. Armed Forces," Perry said Monday.

The proposal was sent Friday to the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which is considering whether Oceana should be relocated because surrounding suburban growth has limited training operations and posed safety concerns.

Last week, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush lobbied to reopen Cecil Field outside of Jacksonville to accommodate the Virginia Beach-based fighter squadrons. Cecil Field was closed in 1999, partly because of urban encroachment problems.

Virginia officials said Monday that moving fighter wings to Texas -- 1,600 miles from their aircraft carriers -- was expensive, impractical and would lengthen deployments.

"I just don't see how Texas works," said Rep. Thelma Drake, whose district includes Oceana.

In a letter to BRAC Commission chairman Anthony J. Principi, Perry said coastal Texas had plenty of land and open air space for fighter pilots to train. The region "has no encroachment issues, no environmental issues, unrivaled operational air space and the ability to expand our already exemplary public/private family housing initiatives to meet DOD needs," he wrote.

Perry proposed that Oceana's operations be conducted from Kingsville Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi Naval Air Station and Ingleside Naval Station.

"Simply put, South Texas is Navy Country and we invite you and your colleagues to come and see for yourselves," he wrote.

A commission spokesman could not be reached for comment Monday.

Four commissioners toured Oceana last week and noted that the region had made progress to curb residential and commercial growth around the Navy's busiest air base.

Commissioner James T. Hill, a retired Army general from Texas, voted to consider Oceana

for the base closure list because of training, safety and noise concerns.

In remarks after his base tour, Hill acknowledged that the Navy had investigated several bases to replace Oceana, including Kingsville, but had not found good alternatives.

The commission will recommend base closures and realignments to President Bush by Sept. 8.

Oceana serves as the East Coast hub for the Navy squadrons of attack fighters, including Hornets, Super Hornets and the soon-to-be-phased-out Tomcats. It employs about 12,000 military and civilian workers and has a large economic impact on the region.

Drake said Virginia's elected representatives are concerned about other states trying to pull the master jet base out of Virginia Beach. But she said she believes that the Navy remains committed to Oceana.

After investigating other sites, she said, "There was no other place better than Oceana for the Navy."

A spokesman for U.S. Sen. George F. Allen said the Navy needs a base near the Atlantic Fleet.

"We're talking about an East Coast master jet base," said John Reid, a spokesman for the Virginia senator. "Texas cannot provide that."

Bob Matthias, an assistant to the Virginia Beach city manager, said moving the squadrons to Texas would add two extra weeks of moving time to the six-month deployment schedules for members of the air wing.

Matthias said the quality of life and military value of Oceana make it a better site than either Cecil Field or the Texas bases.

The three Texas bases are located near the Gulf of Mexico on Corpus Christi Bay. Two of the installations are facing closure or downsizing under BRAC.

The Defense Department recommended closing Ingleside and moving its operations to bases in San Diego. It also called for shifting an anti-mine helicopter squadron and other support operations from Corpus Christi to Norfolk.

BRAC commissioners get the message in Monterey, Calif.

Monterey County Herald (Monterey, CA)
Julia Reynolds
August 9, 2005

At the end of a marathon visit to Monterey, members of the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission gave few clues on how they'll vote in two weeks, but one commissioner indicated that merging Monterey's two military schools may be one of the scenarios.

The issue came up at the end of the day, when Commissioner Philip Coyle of Los Angeles was asked if he'll recuse himself from the voting because he is a California resident. He abstained from voting in July when the Defense Language Institute and Naval Postgraduate School were added to the closure list.

Coyle disputed rumors that he won't vote, saying he'll only voluntarily recuse himself if the vote would cause California to gain or lose a base. But if the commission makes a recommendation for an "intra-state" consolidation, he said, he will vote. Monterey city officials have proposed merging the two schools into a national security research university, which would be such an intra-state consolidation.

If the goal of local officials Monday was to show the commissioners things they could not glean from Department of Defense number-crunching, they apparently succeeded.

"We learn more from these visits than we would ever get from Department of Defense data," Coyle said.

Commissioner Harold Gehman agreed.

"I was impressed by the breadth of the functions carried out at both (NPS and DLI)," he said,

adding that the schools do far more things than "one-caption headlines" can show.

Their comments came at the end of a trip that would test anyone's endurance. For 24 hours, the four base closure commissioners in town for Monday's BRAC hearing were barraged with messages of Monterey's military value. Commission Chairman Anthony Principi had also planned to attend, but an aide said he had to cancel due to a family illness.

They were feted Sunday night at a reception with local officials at the Marriott Hotel. Two of them went to dinner with former Central Coast Congressman Leon Panetta and current Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel.

From 7:30 a.m. to noon on Monday, they took tours of the Defense Language Institute and the Naval Postgraduate School. Then they were swept into the Steinbeck Forum at the Monterey Convention Center for a five-hour hearing on possible closures or consolidation of bases in Monterey, San Diego, Alaska and Colorado.

Gov. Schwarzenegger was a no-show, but the California entourage there to lobby the group included David Berteau, a Washington consultant hired by the state, who has followed the commissioners' rock-star pace through many of the hearings held all over the country.

After the California delegation broke for lunch, Berteau stayed on in a side room, checking messages on his Blackberry device and working on a laptop.

Berteau is a former Pentagon official and a BRAC veteran. He worked on the opposite side of the closure fight from Panetta when Fort Ord was up for closure in the 1990s. His job now, he said, is to work with the state to make California a better host and partner to the military.

"Look what Monterey has done for DLI," he said, referring to the city's contract to provide fire protection and other services at lower cost to the base. That's the kind of support other communities in the state could be giving, he said.

The workload in this BRAC round, he said, was far more complex than before.

"In the '90s, we were drawing down the force," he said. This time, most of the cutting that could be done has already happened, so now it's more about consolidation.

"It's less obvious what your choices are," he said, adding that each closure or consolidation affects several other bases.

Alfie Kahlil, president of the American Federation of Government Employees at DLI, thinks the choice is clear -- his mission is to keep the commissioners from voting to move either of the schools to the Air Force School of Technology (AFIT) in Dayton, Ohio.

He stood in the aisle greeting city and state officials who filtered in while the audience swelled before the hearings began.

Moving DLI, he said, "is like moving the Empire State Building from New York to Ohio. And the Sears Tower, if you're looking at NPS, too."

The proposal to move the schools out of state took on momentum when BRAC commissioners toured the Air Force school in Dayton last week. Commissioner Samuel Skinner asked the Dayton Development Coalition to come up with numbers to show possible costs or savings if the Monterey schools were relocated there.

John Nauseef, chief executive officer of the coalition, attended the Monterey hearing and has been bird-dogging other BRAC hearings at areas across the United States.

"We have a good relationship between AFIT and NPS," he said. The faculties of both have forged friendships and have even negotiated programs to avoid duplicating each other's courses, he said.

The idea that the Navy school might be moved to Dayton or the Air Force Institute might be moved to Monterey popped up after the list of

closure candidates came out in May, Nauseef said, and is not something that the Dayton Development Coalition wants.

Monday's hearing covered closure issues in California, Colorado and Alaska. The California portion came first, and the room nearly emptied after Monterey City Manager Fred Meurer, Panetta and Farr testified.

While the Alaska delegation made its case for saving the Galena airfield, some BRAC staff members had left the room.

By late afternoon, only a dozen spectators remained while the Colorado delegation made its case for keeping Denver's defense finance offices open.

At 6 p.m., most of the commissioners and their entourage were ready to move on, barely having had time to bask in the balmy weather or even eat lunch. On Wednesday, they're due at another hearing in Washington, D.C., where civic leaders from Dayton will testify about the Air Force Institute.

Then, Coyle said, they'll hunker down for days, reading through stacks of data and listening to the reports of some 60 to 70 staff members, before they begin voting Aug. 23, on the fate of 190 or more bases.

They'll be voting up or down on closure scenarios through the whole week, he said, "and maybe Saturday."

The commission's recommendations must go to the president by Sept. 8.

BRAC commission hears arguments to keep schools in Monterey County, Calif.

Monterey County Herald (Monterey, CA)

Kevin Howe

August 9, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission heard repeatedly Monday that the Defense Language Institute and the Naval Postgraduate School should remain in Monterey because their

vital functions could not be duplicated anywhere else.

The hearing at the Monterey Conference Center opened with video testimony from U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, and segued to statements by Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel and former Democratic Congressman Leon Panetta, before moving on to a detailed presentation by Monterey City Manager Fred Meurer. All made basically the same points.

The arguments against moving the two military schools centered on their vital roles in the war on terror. The speakers stressed that the two institutions would take years to rebuild elsewhere and that their work can't be "privatized" at civilian universities.

"It would be a huge mistake to lose these two tremendous assets," Feinstein said. "We're in the middle of a war."

Citing the Navy school's pioneering work in developing a homeland security studies curriculum and DLI's instruction in "the world's most difficult languages," Boxer said. "It is essential that no action be taken to disrupt the work of the Defense Language Institute or the Naval Postgraduate School."

The language institute, she noted, graduates 25 times the number of Arabic linguists of all other universities in the United States combined, and teaches all of the nation's Persian Farsi linguists.

A report prepared by Meurer showed that 26 students received degrees in Arabic at other universities around the United States compared to 521 graduates of DLI's Arabic course.

In addition to the military-specific subjects taught, the two schools are able to change gears to meet changing needs, said Terry Tamminen, cabinet secretary to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

DLI "shifted faster than any college could have done after 9/11" to meet the military's sudden surge in demand for linguists who spoke Arabic, Pushtu, Farsi and other Central Asian languages,

Tamminen said, and the Navy school, "unlike any other graduate university," applies the fruits of its research directly to military needs. He cited, for example, its work with unmanned aerial surveillance drones that became invaluable intelligence-gathering tools in Afghanistan.

NPS combines technical research capabilities with access to nearby training ranges with good weather year-round at Camp Roberts and Fort Hunter Liggett, and open air spaces over the Santa Lucia Mountains, to test concepts as they are developed, he said.

Moving either the language institute or the Navy school is "a misnomer," Farr said. "What we'd be doing is dismantling and reconstructing, and find that not all the pieces are there" after such a move.

After both Monterey facilities escaped inclusion in the Pentagon's base closure list in May, they were added at the last minute to give the commission the option of closing, merging or moving them or leaving them as is. Among the scenarios the commission is exploring is merging the Navy school with its Air Force counterpart in Dayton, Ohio. Civic leaders in Dayton are urging the commission to move the Navy school east while Monterey-area officials favor the idea of moving the Air Force school here.

The Navy school interacts with more than 20 institutes of higher learning and research organizations around Monterey Bay, Farr said. "No other area supports this kind of one-stop shopping for brainpower."

He cited the nearby military training facilities and the proximity to Monterey Institute of International Studies, "the No. 1 school in the United States for translation and interpretation."

Panetta, who serves as co-chairman of the California Council appointed by Schwarzenegger to prepare arguments against further military base closures in the state, reminded the commission that Defense Secretary

Donald Rumsfeld had initially recommended against moving the two schools.

"It is our view that there is no credible evidence that moving or outsourcing these functions will result in an equivalent product on behalf of our national security," Panetta said, and "there is no credible evidence that there are cost efficiencies to be achieved through realignment. To rebuild this capacity elsewhere would not only be extremely expensive, it would be risky to our defense preparedness."

DLI's language teaching is duplicated nowhere else, he said, and NPS research projects and studies are "focused on nothing else but winning the war on terrorism."

Panetta also cited endorsements of the two institutions by Gen. John Abizaid, commander of the U.S. Central Command, and Gordon England, acting deputy secretary of defense and Navy secretary.

The two schools are targeted repeatedly for closure, he said, because the military "tends to look at educational facilities and their missions as second-class citizens" and because there is a misconception that their functions can be privatized.

"The reality is that these assets don't exist in the private sector."

While much of the commission's analysis is focusing on costs, including the high cost of living on the Monterey Peninsula, Meurer said the Peninsula is not as expensive as its reputation suggests. He also said the Navy's projections of the savings from closing NPS are flawed in a number of ways.

The Navy school gets a direct \$ 76.2 million congressional appropriation for operations, but it is reimbursed \$ 109 million in research and education grants.

Student salaries, estimated at \$ 170.9 million annually, would continue whether the school moved or not, Meurer said. And since NPS can schedule classes year-round and fit its students

into the classes they need, the students can complete graduate degrees within a year that could take up to two or three years at a civilian university.

Savings estimates don't include the \$ 26 million additional tuition costs for non-Navy students, Meurer said, and they ignore the \$ 87 million it would cost to duplicate the school's short courses and the \$ 40.3 million additional cost incurred by the longer time it takes to earn a degree at a civilian university.

The NPS Foundation has raised \$ 1 million so far this year to support NPS, he said, and other local efforts involving housing, public works services and fire protection have reduced the government's costs.

"We have solved the cost of living for soldiers," Meurer said.

The commission is scheduled to conclude its hearings in other areas this week. The commission's decision on the Monterey installations is expected by the end of the month.

At 6 p.m., most of the commissioners and their entourage were ready to move on, barely having had time to bask in the balmy weather or even eat lunch. On Wednesday, they're due at another hearing in Washington, D.C., where civic leaders from Dayton will testify about the Air Force Institute.

Then, Coyle said, they'll hunker down for days, reading through stacks of data and listening to the reports of some 60 to 70 staff members, before they begin voting Aug. 23, on the fate of 190 or more bases.

They'll be voting up or down on closure scenarios through the whole week, he said, "and maybe Saturday."

The commission's recommendations must go to the president by Sept. 8. Tuesday, August 9, 2005

McDonough: Yard has 50-50 chance

Foster's Daily Democrat (Dover, NH)
Douglas P. Guarino
August 9, 2005

KITTERY, Maine — The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard has at least a 50-50 chance of being removed from the list of proposed base closures, retired shipyard commander Capt. William McDonough told the Kittery Town Council Monday night.

McDonough, who attended the Town Council meeting in order to accept a \$10,000 check on behalf of the Seacoast Shipyard Association, said the 50-50 estimate was made by Sen. John Sununu during a conversation the two men had with Portsmouth Mayor Evelyn Sirrell during this past weekend's Peace Treaty celebration festivities.

McDonough, who is SSA's spokesman, told councilors he tended to agree with Sununu's odds, but added he was hopeful they were somewhat better than that. McDonough said he was confident that at least four of the nine Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commissioners were strongly sympathetic to the argument Portsmouth should not be closed.

The remaining five are "very tight-mouthed" but "have asked the right questions," pertaining to the yard, McDonough said. Five votes are needed to take the yard off the list.

"We think we have done everything we can," McDonough said, referring to the group of congressional representatives, governors and local activists who have lobbied on the yard's behalf in recent months.

The BRAC Commission expects to begin making final decisions on base closures the week of Aug. 22. While the schedule has not yet been finalized, McDonough predicted Portsmouth would be dealt with on Aug. 24.

He predicted the day would be either "very happy or very sad."

The BRAC Commission returns to Washington this week, with a series of hearings on

Wednesday and Thursday. On Wednesday, the commission will host hearings on those bases it recently added to the closure list, including the Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine.

On Thursday, the commission will host two hearings, one on "Environmental Stewardship of Installations Recommended For Closure or Realignment" and another on Department of Defense closure and Realignment Recommendation Impacts on Homeland Security/Defense and on Units of the Air National Guard.

McDonough said on Monday that he did not expect Portsmouth would play a significant role in any of this week's hearings.

During Monday night's Town Council meeting, McDonough, who has been traveling to Washington every Friday in recent weeks to meet congressional staffers working on the shipyard issue, assured those in the audience he would "do all I can" to keep reinforcing the advocates' message in the final weeks leading up to the decision.

McDonough noted that Saturday's picnic at the Pease International Tradeport would be the last major show of community support.

McDonough said shipyard supporters sent the BRAC commissioners "very polite and cordial invitations" to the picnic, "recognizing they are busy." He said he doubted any of the commissioners would be able to attend, but said some of their staff might.

Coalition Confronts Familiar Proposal Partial closure of sub base was considered, turned down in 1993

New London Day (New London, CT)

Robert A. Hamilton

August 9, 2005

New London — The group fighting to save the Naval Submarine Base in Groton is gearing up to fight a ghost — the specter of a 1993 base realignment and closure recommendation to pull

all the submarines out of Groton but leave the rest of the base intact.

"We've heard rumors there might be some interest in looking at some of the costs and savings associated with closing part of the lower base," said John C. Markowicz, chairman of the Subbase Realignment Coalition.

"It makes me want to go back and look at what happened in 1993, that's for sure," Markowicz said after a coalition meeting Monday morning that focused on reviewing some of the data that will be used in a computer model to estimate the cost of such a partial shutdown.

Markowicz said partial closure of the base was rejected in 1993 because it did not make financial sense, and he thinks the case against it is even stronger this year. But the coalition will do a full analysis just to be sure, he said.

The Pentagon has been arguing in favor of full closure of the Groton base and moving its submarines to Norfolk, Va., and Kings Bay, Ga., while state and local officials are trying to maintain the base as it is now or even add to it.

But the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Coalition, which will decide whether to accept a Pentagon recommendation to close Groton, has indicated on several occasions that it is willing to consider all options, which could include a partial closure.

The waterfront represents a large part of the base, including 17 submarines and their 140-person crews and the Naval Submarine Support Facility that repairs them.

But the 1993 proposal would have left the Naval Submarine School, the Naval Ambulatory Care Center, the Navy Exchange and dozens of smaller units intact.

Twelve years ago the state estimated a closure of the lower base would cost the region 8,414 jobs and \$124.8 million in gross state product — adjusted for inflation, about \$168 million today. That's a fraction of the impact the state estimates that a full closure would cost today. The

Department of Economic and Community Development puts the toll at 8,569 jobs and an economic impact of \$3.3 billion a year.

Markowicz said the 1993 estimate also did not account for the impact on Electric Boat, which 12 years ago was involved entirely in new construction but which today employs more than 500 people in jobs that have been privatized at the base. Repair work on Groton-based submarines now constitutes more than half of the work at the shipyard.

“A partial closure would be a significant impact, certainly not the same magnitude as the complete loss of the sub base, but much more significant than was envisioned in 1993,” Markowicz said.

Internal Navy documents made public after the Pentagon recommendation was released May 13 showed that a closure of the waterfront was considered and rejected as not yielding sufficient savings.

But Markowicz acknowledged that the Navy documents show only cursory consideration given to the proposal, and there are indications the base closure commission is reviewing the scenario on its own. He said when the Navy proposed closing the waterfront in 1993 it was going to move the submarines to Norfolk, where they would be moored alongside submarine tenders. But those ships have since been decommissioned, so Norfolk would have to build some expensive infrastructure to accommodate the ships.

Meanwhile, the coalition decided not to send representatives to Washington later this month when the commission deliberates and votes on the Pentagon recommendations. Those sessions are tentatively slated for Aug. 23-27.

Instead, Markowicz said the group will arrange for a room locally where it can tune in C-SPAN to watch the televised hearings together.

“These are the people we went to war with,” Markowicz said. “These are the people we want to be with if we pull off a victory.”

State Lawmakers Plan Legislation To Help Save Oceana

The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

Jon W. Glass

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VIRGINIA BEACH — Three state lawmakers announced Tuesday that they will introduce legislation to help save Oceana Naval Air Station from closure.

The proposals include creating a state program to buy development rights on land in accident-potential zones around Oceana’s runways and a training field in Chesapeake. There is no money yet available.

They also would enact land-use recommendations endorsed by Virginia Beach, Chesapeake and Norfolk in a recent joint study with the Navy to reduce new development that could threaten Oceana’s future.

The new laws would not require the cities to reject new developments around Oceana and Fentress Naval Auxiliary Landing Field in Chesapeake. They would merely require the cities to consider Navy objections when making land-use decisions – something the cities previously agreed to.

The legislators – Sen. Kenneth W. Stolle, R-Virginia Beach, and Dels. Terrie L. Suit, R-Virginia Beach, and John A. Cosgrove, R-Chesapeake – said they want to show that Virginia is serious about retaining Oceana.

Suit said members of the federal Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission wanted assurances that steps were being taken to protect Oceana. The commission last month put Oceana on a list of bases being considered for closure.

“These are exactly what the commissioners are looking for to give them confidence” that Oceana’s protection is long-term, Suit said at a news conference with other lawmakers at Virginia Beach City Hall.

Stolle and Suit said the measures were endorsed by Senate and House leaders, and they predicted easy approval in the next General Assembly session.

The three lawmakers were joined Tuesday by Norfolk legislators and city council members from Virginia Beach and Chesapeake. Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf said the city supports the effort.

“This shows a united front on behalf of all of us,” Oberndorf said.

The joint land-use study, completed last spring, outlines steps to reduce the number of new homes and other developments incompatible with Oceana, Fentress and Chambers Field in Norfolk.

Virginia Beach wants to reduce the number of homes built at the Oceanfront and under the flight path between Oceana and Fentress.

Officials said that making the study’s recommendations part of Virginia law would add weight to local land-use decisions around the Navy facilities.

Gov. Mark R. Warner endorsed the proposed legislation in a letter Tuesday to BRAC Commission Chairman Anthony J. Principi.

“Adding state-level codification, while unprecedented, is warranted,” Warner wrote. He said it reflects Virginia’s “continuing commitment” to preserve Oceana.

Warner has proposed giving a total of \$25 million to communities across Virginia affected by base closings and realignments.

Suit said legislators hope to tap that money and federal funds to buy development rights in accident-potential zones around Oceana and Fentress.

As proposed, the voluntary state program would target undeveloped land and willing sellers, Suit said. It would not involve condemning property, which Virginia Beach residents overwhelming

opposed when floated by city officials earlier in the year.

“The intent of the program is not to buy houses,” Suit said.

The program could help address Navy concerns about “by-right development,” in which property owners do not need rezonings but can develop their land according to its underlying zoning.

At the resort, especially, some tracts with single houses on them have underlying zoning that would let them be redeveloped with two or more homes. Suit said those underlying rights could be purchased.

Lawmakers acknowledged that this could be expensive.

“There’s not enough money to buy all the development rights,” Stolle said. “It would have to be targeted efforts with limited resources.”

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes