

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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Most BRAC '05 Environmental Restoration Remedies in Place

American Forces Press Service
Gerry J. Gilmore
August 11, 2005

WASHINGTON— The Defense Department has identified and provided remedies for environmental restoration issues associated with most of the installations on the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure list, a senior DoD official told the BRAC commission today. "From a base-reuse perspective the department will enter implementation of BRAC '05 with a mature restoration program," Philip W. Grone, deputy undersecretary of defense for installations and environment, told BRAC committee members at a hearing here.

Among the installations recommended for closure under this BRAC round "84 percent of those sites, over 1,000, have remedies in place" that address environmental restoration issues, Grone said.

And at installations possessing information on environmental conditions, "restoration projects are already identified and in various stages of completion," Grone said, noting that "required funding and goals have already been established to achieve required environmental actions."

DoD "has mature relationships" with federal and state regulators and local communities involved with the 2005 BRAC process, Grone pointed out.

"In each of the states where DoD has recommended an installation closure, the department has signed agreements to engage and

financially support state agencies to assist us in restoration efforts," he said.

Half of the 180 major and minor installations recommended for closure under BRAC 2005 contain environmental restoration sites, Grone reported. Those 90 installations contain more than 1,200 individual restoration sites, he said, with 6 percent involving military munitions clean-up sites.

If implemented, the department's 2005 BRAC recommendations would close just over 10 percent of today's existing military bases, Grone had said June 6 at a community redevelopment association meeting in Denver. The 2005 BRAC recommendations propose closing 33 major stateside bases, as well as 29 major realignments and 775 minor closures and realignments.

There are 843 environmental restoration sites among the 33 bases recommended for closure, Grone reported, noting that 78 percent of those sites "report either response complete or remedy in place."

The certified estimate for the cost to clean up all the installations recommended for closure "was approximately \$1 billion," Grone noted. That figure is based on fiscal 2003 data as reported to the BRAC commission, he said.

"This figure includes both the cost for traditional clean up as well as for the military munitions response program," Grone said.

In this BRAC round DoD wants to quickly transfer BRAC-affiliated property "by using the full range" of tools available in the public and private sectors," Grone said.

DoD is applying knowledge gained from previous BRAC rounds to conduct more rigorous processes for transferring property within the federal government, Grone noted. The department will also employ a wider variety of property disposal methods, integrate environmental clean up and redevelopment more closely, and share full information on the condition of property early in the process with all interested parties, he said.

Grone noted that DoD's environmental strategy for BRAC 2005 consists of four main elements:

Streamlining the process consistent with existing laws and regulations;
 Making the process more market-oriented by using the full range of tools available for property transfer;
 Leveraging existing environmental assessments available for each installation to provide critical environmental information early to all parties for planning purposes; and
 Involving DoD components and all interested parties in early planning.
 "The department will use early transfer authority to the maximum extent practicable," Grone pointed out, to return property "to productive use as quickly as possible."

Early transfer of formerly DoD-owned properties allows "reuse to occur in advance of the environmental cleanup being completed," Grone explained. However, such transfers "do not eliminate the department's responsibility to ensure that all necessary response action will be taken," he emphasized.

"And it is a responsibility we take very seriously," Grone concluded.

National News Articles

Hearing on base closings raises questions about homeland security

St. Louis Post-Dispatch
 By Philip Dine
 August 11, 2005

(KRT) - WASHINGTON - Controversy over the Defense Department's plan to close a number of Air National Guard stations around the country intensified on several fronts Thursday.

Members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission said that consolidating Air National Guard bases into a few large ones, as the Pentagon wants to do, would put homeland

security at risk in an age of unpredictable terrorism.

"There's a lot of concern around the country. But there is more to it than the perception of the public - the national defense is being hampered," said commission member James Bilbray, a former congressman from Nevada.

BRAC commissioners said they were frustrated by the failure of Air Force and Pentagon officials to reach an agreement with the Air National Guard over how to proceed, as the commission had instructed them to do last month.

"Obviously it's not happened," said commission Chairman Anthony Principi, who served earlier as secretary of veterans affairs under President Bush. "Those negotiations have not borne fruit, and it does make our job a little bit harder."

The commission has to provide its list of base closings and realignments to Bush by Sept. 8.

Other developments at Thursday's BRAC Commission hearing also raised questions about homeland security as well as the future of the base-closing process, including:

The chief of the National Guard Bureau, Lt. Gen. Steven Blum, testified that whatever the outcome of the BRAC process, he would reopen Air National Guard bases to ensure that every state in the country has at least one working base. That led to confusion about whether the base-closing process, regarding Guard facilities, is meaningless.

Air Force officials acknowledged that they did not formally consult with the Department of Homeland Security about how closing Air National Guard bases would affect homeland defense. That prompted concerns about a lack of communication among agencies vital in the war on terror.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff refused to attend the hearing or send a high-ranking official.

Thursday's session was billed by the commission as its look at the impact of the Pentagon's base-closing recommendations on homeland security and on the Air National Guard. Top Pentagon, Air Force, National Guard officials testified, but Chertoff - despite being listed on the agenda - declined.

"I'm shocked we didn't have a high official from the Department of Homeland Security to assist us in these deliberations," said commissioner Sam Skinner.

"As we know from 9/11, these issues are as important as any we face. I know Secretary Chertoff is a busy man, but I was a Cabinet secretary, and I don't think I would've missed this opportunity."

Asked why the Department of Homeland Security didn't take part in the hearing, officials initially referred a reporter's questions to the Coast Guard, where a spokesman said he had no idea why Chertoff hadn't testified.

Katy Montgomery, a spokeswoman at homeland security, later said that the agency sent no one because a Coast Guard official who advises Chertoff had testified to the commission last month.

"It would be much better if homeland security had decided to be a player," Bilbray said, "but unfortunately they've chosen not to be."

Rep. William Delahunt, D-Mass., deplored statements by Pentagon officials that they hadn't formally consulted with homeland security officials about the effect of Air National Guard base closings on protecting the nation from terrorists.

"It's certainly reminiscent of the stove-pipe mentality that Congress addressed in breaking down the walls that existed between the CIA and the FBI," Delahunt said in an interview. "We didn't create the Department of Homeland Security to exist in a vacuum."

Adm. Timothy Keating, commander of U.S. Northern Command, testified that even with

longer distances to travel as a result of small Air National Guard bases being consolidated into fewer, larger ones, he still could scramble jets and get them quickly to the site of a potential terrorist attack.

But commission members said that required having reliable intelligence, if fighter jets are farther away. And while Air Force and Pentagon officials said consolidating Air National Guard planes in fewer larger units would save money through economies of scale, commissioners said that wasn't the most important factor.

"We're a nation at war," Principi said. "Sometimes you have to sacrifice a little (economic) efficiency."

Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States, said it would be "irresponsible" to accept the Pentagon's recommendations and that it was "critical to communicate with those who see homeland defense from a state and regional basis."

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich said the hearing showed that closing Air National Guard bases "will make our homeland less secure at a time when the threat of an attack is ever present."

Base commission hears final arguments over planned Air National Guard cuts

Columbus Ledger-Enquirer

Sam Hananel

August 11, 2005

WASHINGTON - Defense Department leaders told a skeptical base-closing commission Thursday that a Pentagon plan to close or restructure dozens of Air National Guard units - including one in Missouri - would not compromise homeland security.

But National Guard leaders said the closures would jeopardize national defense and remove critical support from governors during state emergencies.

The hearing before the Base Closure and Realignment Commission was the last chance for both sides to make their cases on one of the most controversial aspects of the Pentagon plan to make the military leaner and more efficient.

Later this month, the nine-member commission will decide which parts of the Pentagon's plan to change before sending its final report to President Bush and Congress.

Missouri officials have condemned the recommendation to close the Guard's 131st Fighter Wing at Lambert Field in St. Louis, saying it leaves the region without critical air defense. Gov. Matt Blunt said he might file a lawsuit to halt the transfer of fighter jets and about 250 jobs from the 131st to bases in Nevada and New Jersey.

At the hearing Thursday, defense officials assured BRAC members that the Air Guard proposal would not hinder the country's security.

"It is important to understand that in making its recommendations, the department focused on its ability to defend the nation as a whole ... rather than on a state-by-state basis," said Peter Verga, a deputy assistant secretary of defense.

Commission chairman Anthony Principi appeared unconvinced.

"Our nation is comprised of 50 states, and the Air Guard and the National Guard play a very, very important role in that, and at the state level in the event of a terrorist attack, or for that matter, a natural disaster," Principi said.

"It's not just perception, it's fact that our national defense will be hampered by the proposals of the Air Force," added James Bilbray, a former Nevada congressman.

For their part, state adjutants general, who oversee the Air Guard in states, argued that the plan will prevent units from fulfilling their homeland security missions, including protecting the skies and supporting governors during statewide emergencies.

Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States, said the proposal will take the Air National Guard down an untested and uncertain path, leading to a "ripple effect on personnel, readiness and an inability to support homeland security needs, which in our view would be irreversible."

He urged the commission to review an alternative state-by-state proposal the organization offered, which specifically rejects the plan to close the 131st Fighter Wing.

Defending the Pentagon plan, Michael Dominguez, assistant secretary of the Air Force, testified there is no military or homeland security need for an Air Force flying wing in every state and, defended the efficiencies gained by consolidating units into larger squadrons in fewer locations.

"It is a complex and layered defense and does not require two F-16s stationed in every state around the country," Dominguez said.

Both Pennsylvania and Illinois already have filed suit to stop the National Guard closings, arguing the Pentagon can't shift units without seeking the consent of each governor. The commission's legal counsel also has questioned whether BRAC has the legal authority to approve the moves.

"Certainly a lawsuit remains an option for Missouri," Blunt spokeswoman Jessica Robinson said Thursday. "It's one that the governor is considering and continues to keep open as the process moves forward."

Robinson said Thursday's hearing shows the commissioners "are really taking to heart the arguments that Gov. Blunt and other governors have presented."

Panelists say Guard bases are key to national security

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Philip Dine

August 11, 2005

WASHINGTON - Controversy about the Defense Department's plan to close a number of Air National Guard stations around the country - including those in St. Louis and Springfield, Ill. - intensified on several fronts Thursday.

Members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission said consolidating Air National Guard bases into a few large ones, as the Pentagon wants to do, would put homeland security at risk in an age of unpredictable terrorism.

"There's a lot of concern around the country. But there is more to it than the perception of the public - the national defense is being hampered," said commission member James Bilbray, a former congressman from Nevada.

BRAC commissioners said they were frustrated by the failure of Air Force and Pentagon officials to reach an agreement with the Air National Guard about how to proceed, as the commission had instructed them to do last month.

"Obviously it's not happened," said commission Chairman Anthony Principi, who served earlier as secretary of veterans affairs under President George W. Bush. "Those negotiations have not borne fruit, and it does make our job a little bit harder."

The commission has to provide its list of base closings and realignments to Bush by Sept. 8.

A base in every state?

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base-closing process, regarding Guard facilities, is meaningless.

Air Force officials acknowledged that they did not formally consult with the Department of Homeland Security about how closing Air National Guard bases would affect homeland defense. That prompted concerns about a lack of communication among agencies vital in the war on terror.

Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff refused to attend the hearing or send a high-ranking official.

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"I'm shocked we didn't have a high official from the Department of Homeland Security to assist us in these deliberations," commissioner Sam Skinner said.

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"A nation at war"

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Justice Department Backs Pentagon On Air Guard Changes

New York Times
Eric Schmitt
August 12, 2005

WASHINGTON, Aug. 11 - The Justice Department has concluded that the Pentagon has the authority to move National Guard units without the consent of the state governors, who share control with the president over use of those units, state and federal officials said Thursday.

The legal opinion from the Justice Department is a victory for the Defense Department, which is seeking to revamp more than two dozen Air National Guard units nationwide in what the Air Force says is an effort to make the Air Guard more relevant for today's national security missions.

Two dozen states have complained that the Pentagon's plan would close local air-defense units, leaving their communities more vulnerable to terrorist attacks, and hamper their ability to call on Guard units to fight forest fires or deal with hurricane damage.

Officials from Pennsylvania and Illinois, which have filed suit in federal court to challenge the Pentagon's authority to relocate Guard units, sought to play down the Justice Department opinion as just one of many that had no decisive impact.

"We have a solid legal case that we will continue to fight because the law and common sense is on our side," Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich of Illinois, a Democrat, said in a statement. "What the Pentagon is proposing flies in the face of reason."

Adrian R. King Jr., deputy chief of staff to Gov. Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania, a Democrat, said in a telephone interview: "The D.O.J. opinion is like any other opinion. At the end of the day, the state believes the only opinion that matters is that of a judge in a court of law."

The Justice Department opinion had been sought by the nine-member, independent commission that is now assessing the Pentagon's plan to close nearly 180 installations and offices, including 33 big bases, from Hawaii to Maine in the first major restructuring of the nation's vast military network in a decade. Some of its own lawyers had concluded that the governors' argument had legal merit.

The chairman of the commission, Anthony J. Principi, told reporters after a daylong hearing on Capitol Hill on Thursday that the panel had received the opinion on Wednesday, but he declined to discuss it until commission lawyers had reviewed it with Justice Department lawyers.

A senior Pentagon aide and a top-ranking commission official, speaking on condition of anonymity because the opinion has not yet been made public, confirmed its conclusion in the Pentagon's favor.

Mr. Principi spoke after a spirited afternoon session in which four state adjutants general urged the commission to reject the majority of the Pentagon's recommendations concerning the Air Guard, saying that they would jeopardize homeland-defense missions, hurt recruiting and yield far fewer savings than projected.

"You take the air out of Air National Guard, and you take out our heart and soul," said Maj. Gen. Francis D. Vavala, adjutant general of the Delaware National Guard.

Maj. Gen. Roger P. Lempke, the Nebraska adjutant general and president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States, said experienced pilots who had set down roots would probably quit the Guard if their local unit lost its planes, rather than relocate to another state that gained the aircraft.

Air Force officials testified that its fleet would be reduced in coming years as more advanced aircraft like the FA-22 replaced aging fighters, but in smaller numbers. The Air Force wants to use the base-closing process to assign new

missions to the Guard, including information operations and flying remotely piloted Predators.

The adjutant generals said they embraced the new missions but argued that the base-closing process offered too little planning and transition to the new roles, and urged commission members to consider that as they prepare to make their final decisions, beginning Aug. 24, on the Defense Department recommendations.

Commission members have criticized Air Force leaders for not collaborating better with the Air Guard and state officials, but on Thursday they expressed impatience with some of the adjutants general's arguments and frustration with both sides for not reaching agreement by now.

"We're just trying to see our way through the blizzard of rhetoric," said Harold W. Gehman Jr., a retired four-star admiral who is on the panel.

The state officials received a show of support from the chief of the National Guard Bureau, Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, who oversees the Army National Guard and the Air Guard. General Blum said that while he would honor the decisions of the base-closing panel, as approved by the president and Congress, he promised to use his authority to ensure that all 50 states would eventually have Air Guard flying units.

Base-Closing Plan Defended Changes Won't Compromise Air Defense, Pentagon Says

Washington Post
Bradley Graham
August 12, 2005

Struggling to save what has become the most controversial part of their base-closing plan, senior Pentagon officials yesterday disputed suggestions that broad changes proposed for the Air National Guard would compromise the nation's air defense.

But skeptical members of the federal commission, charged with reviewing the Pentagon plan, appeared unconvinced after a

lengthy afternoon hearing intended to reconcile differences among the Defense Department and state political and military officials.

With the commission due to make its recommendations this month, several members voiced frustration after the hearing at the inability of Pentagon and Air National Guard authorities to reach a common position.

Leading Guard representatives, who also testified, reiterated concerns that the Pentagon's plan would lead to sharp drops in membership in the affected units and seriously impair national security without affording any significant savings. They offered an alternative proposal that amounted essentially to a rejection of most of the Pentagon's recommended changes.

The dispute left the commission with no apparent middle way out.

"We will solve this problem, we will act decisively," Anthony J. Principi, a former secretary of veterans affairs who heads the commission, told reporters. But he added that not having a negotiated compromise "does make our job more difficult."

The proposed restructuring would leave 29 of the Air Guard's 88 flying units without aircraft. The plan has enraged both Guard members and many lawmakers and governors, who worry their states will lack aircraft to deal with not only terrorist threats but also such natural disasters as forest fires and hurricanes.

Pentagon officials defended the proposed changes yesterday as part of a larger effort to restructure the Air Force into fewer squadrons that would be bigger and hence more efficient. In time, they said, units without planes would receive new missions such as handling remotely piloted Predator aircraft.

Peter Verga, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense, told the commission that every state does not need military planes to ensure the protection of U.S. airspace. Adm. Timothy J. Keating, who heads Northern Command and has responsibility for

U.S. air defense, testified that the proposed Guard changes would pose "no unacceptable risk" to meeting his mission.

"That's not exactly a wholehearted endorsement -- to me anyway," said Harold W. Gehman Jr., a retired Navy admiral, citing Keating's use of a double negative.

Commissioner Phillip E. Coyle, who was the Pentagon's top weapons evaluator for much of the 1990s, noted that large parts of the country would be left without fighter jets, requiring planes to fly an hour or more to establish coverage in an emergency.

Army Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, who heads the National Guard Bureau, sought to mollify all parties by endorsing the Pentagon plan but adding that if it were approved, he would use his authority to ensure every state would retain at least one Guard flying unit. But that personal assurance seemed to assuage neither the commissioners nor state Guard leaders.

Force's flexibility questioned Need BRAC be involved in every detail?

Biloxi Sun Herald
Kate R. Houlihan
August 12, 2005

WASHINGTON - Members of the Department of Defense, Air Force and National Guard Bureau insist the 2005 BRAC decisions will not compromise national defense, but members of the Adjutants General Association of the U.S. are skeptical about the effect on the National Guard.

At a Base Realignment and Closure commission hearing Thursday afternoon, Adm. Timothy Keating, commander with the North American Aerospace Defense Command, said a joint NORAD and United States Northern Command team worked to assess the recommendations.

"We believe the decisions... do not create unacceptable risk to our mission," Keating testified, adding the bases on the lists are simply an element of overall security.

In Mississippi, the 186th Air National Guard Refueling Wing in Meridian is on the BRAC list.

Peter Verga, deputy assistant secretary of defense, said the department is focused on protecting the nation as a whole, versus state-by-state, and the proposed closures are in line with that philosophy.

Michael Dominguez, assistant secretary of the Air Force, said the recommendations are crucial to meeting future needs in the Air National Guard.

Throughout the hearing, contentious discussion of the recommendations affecting the Air Force and Air National Guard surfaced.

Various BRAC commissioners expressed concern over the detail involved in the recommendations, asking if it is imperative that the Guard specify exactly what kind of aircraft moves from one state to another and whether the Air Force wished to have more flexibility than it seemed the recommendations would allow.

"If the effect is the same, we'd be willing to talk," said Maj. Gen. Gary Heckman, assistant deputy chief of staff of the Air Force.

The biggest concerns came from a foursome of adjutant generals on hand to give the commission their own recommendations.

Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, president of the Adjutants General Association, said current decisions will take the National Guard "down an uncertain path" in addition to providing little savings and severely affecting personnel.

While none of their recommendations focused on individual bases, Lempke called for a flying unit of the Guard in each state and more cohesive relations between adjutant generals, the National Guard Bureau and the Air Force.

Maj. Gen. Francis Vavala said the concerns stem from homeland security, a lack of savings, the need for more discussion of emerging missions

and larger squadrons. "Nothing I've heard today changes that concern," he said.

Base Closing Panel Struggles With Plan

Washington Post

Liz Sidoti

August 12, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Less than two weeks before it must decide which parts of the Pentagon's base-closing plan to change, an independent commission is struggling over what to do with the Air Force's plan to restructure the Air National Guard.

When the nine-member panel meets later this month, Chairman Anthony Principi said it "will be compelled to exercise its best judgment" on whether to sign off on the plan to shake up dozens of Air Guard units.

During a hearing Thursday, Principi questioned whether the Air Guard plan would mean new risks for the United States' domestic security. "We're proposing taking aircraft out of a number of states, eliminating all of the assets out of certain states and dramatically reducing them in other states," he said before asking Pentagon officials to consider the consequences to security on the homefront.

Defense officials tried to reassure Principi and other skeptical commissioners.

"Our responsibilities to support the Department of Homeland Security in their homeland security mission are not impacted adversely by this beyond a level of acceptable risk," Peter Verga, a deputy assistant secretary of defense, told commissioners.

Adm. Timothy Keating, commander of the U.S. Northern Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command, said: "It poses no unacceptable risk."

Commissioners appeared unconvinced.

"That's not exactly a wholehearted endorsement," Harold Gehman, a retired Navy admiral, said.

The Air Guard proposal has emerged as the most contentious part of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal to close, shrink or expand hundreds of military bases and other installations nationwide. So Principi gave the Pentagon and states one last chance to argue their cases about it before the panel sends its final report to President Bush next month.

The plan calls for shifting people, equipment and aircraft among at least 54 sites where Air Guard units now are stationed. Roughly two dozen sites would expand, while about 30 would be closed or downsized. In many cases, units would continue to exist but no planes would be assigned to them.

The Air Force says units without planes would receive new non-flying missions and also would retain their roles in supporting the needs of governors during statewide emergencies.

For their part, state adjutants general, who oversee the Air Guard in the states, argued that the plan would prevent units from fulfilling their homeland security missions, including protecting the skies and supporting governors in state emergencies.

Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States, said the proposal would take the Air National Guard down an uncertain path, leading to a "ripple effect on personnel, readiness and an inability to support homeland security needs, which in our view would be irreversible."

He urged the commission to review an alternate proposal the group offered.

The Pentagon says the Air Guard changes are part of an overall effort to reshape the Air Force _ which is to have a smaller but smarter aircraft fleet in the future _ into a more effective and efficient force by putting active duty, Air Reserve and Air Guard units to work alongside one another.

Two states, Pennsylvania and Illinois, have sued over the Air Guard proposal arguing that the Pentagon doesn't have the authority to move units without each governor's consent. The Pentagon disagrees. A commission spokesman said the commission has received an opinion from the Justice Department, but neither the spokesman nor commissioners would disclose what it says.

Local News Articles

Saxton says BRAC commission skepticism of Air National Guard plan good for NJ

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
Donna De La Cruz
August 11, 2005

A federal panel on Thursday expressed skepticism over the Pentagon's plan to restructure dozens of Air National Guard units nationwide, which bodes well for New Jersey, Rep. James Saxton said.

"If I had to guess, I would guess that the commission would revise the recommendations, which would obviously be good for New Jersey," said Saxton, R-Mount Holly, a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

In the Pentagon base closing and restructuring recommendations, the New Jersey Air Guard's 108th Refueling Wing at McGuire Air Force Base would lose its 16 aging KC-135 tankers, which would not be replaced by newer planes.

Saxton said it's hard to say how many jobs would be lost if the Pentagon plan is approved by the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission, but said between 1,000 and 1,200 part- and full-time employees work at the 108th.

"If you don't have planes, you don't need pilots or maintenance and other workers," said Saxton, who attended the hearing held here.

The commission questioned the homeland security impact of the Pentagon's plan to reorganize the Air National Guard, which has emerged as the most contentious part of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal to close, reduce or expand hundreds of military bases and other installations nationwide.

Defense officials assured the commission the Air Guard proposal would not hinder the country's security, but state adjutants general, which oversee the Air Guard in states, said the plan will prevent units from fulfilling their homeland security missions, including protecting the skies and supporting governors during statewide emergencies.

The Air Guard is part of the U.S. military force responsible for national security and the president can activate units for federal missions, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. But governors, through their adjutants general, command Air Guard forces during civil disturbances and natural disasters.

Doyle meets with BRAC chairman to press for 440th Airlift Wing

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)

Frederic J. Frommer
August 11, 2005

Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle urged the chairman of a federal commission Thursday to remove Milwaukee's 440th Airlift Wing from the Pentagon's list of military bases to close.

Doyle met with Anthony Principi, chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, during a break in the commission's hearings in Washington.

Doyle said while Principi was careful not to tip his hand, it was clear "we'll get a fair hearing."

The governor, a Democrat, said the Pentagon incorrectly evaluated the base by failing to take into account improvements made to the runway, hangar and ramp at Mitchell International Airport, where the 440th is located.

Officials with the nine-member commission and the Pentagon did not respond to messages left Thursday.

Doyle also met with another member of the base-closing commission, Samuel Skinner, in a separate meeting on Thursday. Doyle requested the meetings.

Overall, the Pentagon has called for closing or reducing forces at 62 major domestic bases and hundreds of smaller installations nationwide. In Wisconsin, the 440th was the only major base on the list, but the Pentagon also called for moving some jobs out of Fort McCoy and relocating reserve units in Madison and La Crosse.

The commission held the hearing Thursday to give the Pentagon and states one last chance to argue their cases before the panel sends a final report to President Bush next month.

Doyle said he hoped the commission's recent decision to add Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina to the list of installations facing possible closure could help save the 440th in Wisconsin. In May, the Pentagon proposed moving the 440th to the Pope Air Force Base.

"The state of Wisconsin is in no position to look at the big picture and say you should be closing Pope," Doyle said, "but obviously to the extent that they've added that to the list, that certainly is a factor in how they will look at Mitchell Field. Because those two decisions relate to each other."

Pentagon official points out Brunswick's importance

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Portland, ME)
August 11, 2005

A top Pentagon official told Gov. John Baldacci and the state's congressional delegation in a letter that Brunswick Naval Air Station is "an important part of our national defense capability."

The letter from Vice Chief of Naval Operations R.F. Willard laid out the Pentagon's argument for retaining a scaled-back air base in Brunswick because of its strategic location.

It was similar to another letter two weeks ago from Ann Rathmell Davis, an assistant to the Navy secretary on base realignment and closure issues, to Sen. Susan Collins.

Willard wrote that the airfield is needed for homeland security, for refueling of aircraft and as a logistics hub for the central and northern commands. "Brunswick continues to be the optimal site in New England for P-3 (aircraft) detachment operations," he wrote.

The letter arrived a day after the Base Realignment and Closure Commission held a public meeting on Brunswick Naval Air Station.

The Maine delegation plans to submit the letter to the commission as further evidence of the Brunswick Naval Air Station's importance to homeland security. "The Defense Department has made our case for us," the delegation said in a statement.

The Pentagon proposed eliminating all P-3 Orion squadrons and half of the military personnel and relocating them to Jacksonville Naval Air Station in Florida.

But the Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted to consider the option of closing the base altogether. The panel is expected to begin voting on the week of Aug. 22. Its final recommendations are due to President Bush on Sept. 8.

Battle over Oceana could be bad news for Cherry Point

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Raleigh, NC)
August 11, 2005

The political battle over a naval air station in Virginia could mean a lot to the Marine Corps' air station at Cherry Point.

The base in Carteret County is slated to receive two squadrons of F/A-18 jets - with about a dozen jets per squadron - in 2007. The presence of the planes, attached to carriers based in Norfolk, Va., would bring an estimated \$40 million in salaries to the area.

But last month, a federal base closing commission proposed closing Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach. Politicians across the Southeast are trying to persuade the commission reviewing the proposals to give their states the base's 250 aircraft and its \$1 billion payroll, while Virginia is trying to keep the facility intact.

The outcome of the struggle could mean even more jets for Cherry Point, or the loss of those due to arrive in two years.

"If they want to keep the aircraft close to the fleet, I think their No. 1 preference is North Carolina," said Jimmy Sanders, leader of a booster organization called Allies for Cherry Point's Tomorrow.

"But they're people, and they may get tired of beating their heads against a wall. If the (Oceana) jets go to Georgia or Florida or Texas ... then probably our two squadrons go away. So the stakes are big."

North Carolina leaders are trying to get at least some of Oceana's F/A-18s for Cherry Point, in addition to the planes promised for 2007.

Sen. Elizabeth Dole and Gov. Mike Easley recently wrote to the chairman of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Anthony J. Principi, asking that at least four squadrons - about 48 planes - be moved to Cherry Point if Oceana is closed.

But politicians in other states have been busy as well. President Bush's brother, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, is making a play for the jets, while the president's home state of Texas is offering \$365 million in incentive money.

Virginia is aggressively trying to keep the base, which is being crowded by development in

nearby cities, with state lawmakers proposing to buy development rights around it.

The state also has a powerful advocate in its U.S. Sen. John Warner, who heads the Armed Services Committee and has testified before the commission on behalf of Oceana - even meeting privately with some commissioners after one hearing.

"In the last two or three weeks, we've seen firsthand what happens whenever very powerful people get in the middle of the fray," Sanders said. "I have no idea at all what's going to happen."

Virginia has also proposed that the Navy build a practice landing field for aircraft carrier jets in its state. The project is planned for Washington and Beaufort counties in North Carolina, but has run into stiff opposition.

Construction is blocked while a federal appeals court considers a lower court's ruling that the Navy hasn't properly studied the project's environmental impact.

The outlying landing field would serve jets from Oceana and Cherry Point. But if the Oceana jets are sent to another state, it would make little sense for the Navy to build the field in North Carolina, Sanders said.

The commission will send a revised list of recommendations to President Bush in September. He must approve it in its entirety or send it back to the commission for more work. Once the president signs off, the list goes to Congress, which must accept it or reject it as a whole.

Whitehall Base Could Be Recipient Of More Jobs

Columbus Dispatch (Columbus, OH)
Jonathan Riskind
August 11, 2005

Technically speaking, the very existence of the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in

Whitehall and its 2,000 jobs was on the line yesterday.

Practically speaking, the emphasis was on gaining jobs, rather than rescuing them, as central Ohio officials addressed the group deciding the future of many of the nation's military bases.

"We made our case and made it very strong for expansion," Whitehall Mayor Lynn Ochsendorf said after local officeholders, members of Congress and civic leaders spent an hour before the Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

The Pentagon had proposed adding 1,300 jobs to the accounting service -- the bulk of a 1,750-job increase at the Defense Supply Center, Columbus, on E. Broad Street. That plan seemed in jeopardy last month when the base-closing panel decided to review a nationwide plan to winnow more than two dozen finance and accounting centers to three -- in Whitehall, Indianapolis and Denver.

But during a visit to the Whitehall center last week, commission member Samuel K. Skinner called it "highly unlikely" that it would be closed. That eased the minds of local officials and got them to thinking about pursuing even more jobs.

The Whitehall center is in the district of U.S. Rep. David L. Hobson, R-Springfield. During the hearing, he and other central Ohio officials emphasized that the buildings and parking lots have plenty of room to accommodate many more workers at minimal cost. The Columbus area offers affordable housing, they said, adding that the work force is young and well-educated and includes plenty of people trained as accountants.

The commission appears to be focusing on how many finance centers to keep open, Hobson said after the hearing.

He expects four to seven will survive, he said, possibly including one with 1,000 jobs in Cleveland that the Pentagon had planned to

close. About 300 of those jobs were ticketed for Whitehall.

Sen. Mike DeWine, who also testified, said after the hearing that Cleveland "clearly is in the ballgame" to stay open in some form. "It's all coming down to the next couple weeks. . . . We have a lot at stake in Ohio."

The commissioners remained tight-lipped. They must send their recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8. Bush and Congress must accept or reject them in their entirety.

Columbus Mayor Michael B. Coleman -- who also testified -- said he remains cautiously optimistic.

"This process is not over," he said. "Anything can happen."

Hobson and other Ohio officials hope that the commission also will reconsider a Pentagon recommendation to close Air National Guard bases in Springfield and Mansfield.

Springfield has a "decent shot" at remaining open, Hobson said, though nothing is assured.

The commissioners have indicated concern about the plan to close a number of Guard bases around the country, an issue that will be addressed today in a hearing. No specific decisions affecting Ohio Guard bases are expected.

**AFIT fits best at base, say leaders;
Supporters emphasize to BRAC location,
logistics, key roles school plays**

Dayton Daily News (Dayton, OH)

Jessica Wehrman

August 11, 2005

WASHINGTON - Former Rep. James Hansen of Utah, a plain-spoken former Navy man, boiled down the Air Force Institute of Technology's bid to survive the base closure process with a characteristically blunt question Wednesday.

"Is there anything at AFIT that they couldn't teach at NPS (the Naval Postgraduate School)?" the commissioner quizzed panelists defending AFIT before the independent Base Realignment and Closure commission.

There was a brief silence. Then Rep. David Hobson, R-Springfield, repeated the pitch that he and other AFIT defenders hope will save the school's life.

He talked about one AFIT program that teaches stealth technology to Air Force officers who would go on to develop and operate stealth aircraft, an example of a course not found in civilian colleges. He mentions about the millions of dollars in research money saved by the Air Force because of its close access to the graduate work done at AFIT, and the benefit in education that AFIT receives by being so close to the Air Force Research Laboratory.

"There are no labs adjacent to the Naval Postgraduate School," he said. "You can't duplicate the equipment that's in those labs at the Naval Postgraduate School."

Hobson's answer echoed a theme often repeated during more than 20 minutes of testimony at the last public hearing on the future of the institute, which employs about 500 and has 1,000 students.

Part of what makes AFIT work, witnesses testified, was location, location and location: namely, its proximity to the lab and other resources at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. They portrayed an educational institute where Air Force researchers pluck graduate students to help them with research work and where students do term papers on issues important to the Air Force.

"It's not just that the students there are performing functions that are integral to parts of NASIC (the Naval Air and Space Intelligence Center) and the research labs," said Rep. Mike Turner, R-Centerville. "It's also an enhancement to their education."

That argument - as well as Turner's argument that Monterey has a far higher cost of living - is a cornerstone to what community leaders hope will be a successful effort to keep AFIT at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. The institute, which serves as the military's graduate school of engineering and management, traces its roots at Wright-Patterson since 1919, but it was endangered as recently as the mid-1990s. Though it escaped the Defense Department's original base closure recommendations, the commission, tasked with reviewing the DOD recommendations, added AFIT to the list of potential closures on July 19.

On Monday, the base closure commission held a regional hearing in Monterey, Calif., where community representatives argued for the survival of the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defense Language Institute.

Both Monterey and Dayton leaders have repeatedly said they are interested in keeping their own missions and not out to lure new schools to their campuses.

Among those supporting AFIT were DeWine, Hobson, Turner, members of the Greene County Commission and the Dayton City Commission, as well as retired Lt. Gen. John Nowak, CEO of LOGTEC; and Daniel Curran, president of the University of Dayton, who testified that the Air Force Research Lab was superior to labs at other major research institutions for the Air Force purposes.

The commission also received a letter from former Air Force Secretary F. Whitten Peters, who urged the commission to neither close nor move AFIT.

"Moving AFIT out of the Dayton community would destroy the unique opportunities AFIT students now have to learn from and work with leaders in the Air Force scientific and procurement communities, with no conceivable offsetting gain in educational value," he wrote.

The commission wants to study whether merging AFIT, the Defense Language Institute and Naval Postgraduate School is a more cost-

effective option and is also considering privatizing the schools.

But Commissioner Harold Gehman has repeatedly suggested keeping both schools at their current locations, but merging some administrative functions to eliminate redundancy.

Some of that has been done: Both schools have an informal alliance aimed at eliminating redundancies in their education programs. The move was initiated by former Air Force Secretary James Roche, who made AFIT the lead military school for aeronautical engineering and the Naval Postgraduate School the lead on meteorology and acquisition.

Commissioner James Bilbray, a former Republican congressman from Nevada, seemed to reiterate that proposal Wednesday, suggesting the idea of a larger graduate defense university with a single governing body.

"That's one thing we're looking at - potentially strengthening the governing body," he said.

Other commissioners still seem interested in the idea of consolidating both schools.

Commissioner Samuel Skinner, who along with Commissioner Lloyd Newton visited AFIT last week, lauded the Dayton area's universities as helping to make the Dayton region a "center of excellence in education." Skinner also pointed out the synergy of AFIT's location adjacent to the lab.

"It appears to be a logical no-brainer, putting aside the cost of consolidation," he said.

But, after the hearing, Skinner said his comments did not indicate how he'll vote.

"I just wanted to explore it," he said, adding that Monterey's mayor approached him after the hearing to remind him about California's strong colleges and universities.

Newton reiterated that all options remain on the table.

"What we really want to do is provide together to the best of our ability an opportunity for those two very important institutions to provide the best graduate-level education we can with the BRAC (base closure process)," he said. "That's the objective."

Hobson said he is hopeful the commission will keep AFIT at Wright-Patterson and the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey.

"It probably could be rolled over to Wright-Patterson, but I don't see that happening because it's so expensive," he said. "I would think they'll probably leave both institutes and find a better way or encourage a better way for them to communicate with each other on curriculum and more jointness, which is where we were moving anyway."

Sen. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, said he thought the commissioners were pleased to hear about coordination between AFIT and the Naval Postgraduate School. Further coordination, he said, could be done without changing AFIT's location or core mission.

"I think that is certainly a positive thing," he said.

Panelists hear one more plea to save BNAS; Closing or downsizing the air base would compromise security in the Northeast, Maine supporters argue.

Portland Press Herald (Portland, ME)
Mark Peters
August 11, 2005

Members of a federal commission deciding the future of Brunswick Naval Air Station wanted to know Wednesday whether top officials from Maine would rather see the base closed or downsized. Their answer: neither.

Gov. John Baldacci, the state's congressional delegation and retired BNAS officers refused to stray from their main argument that a shutdown

or shrinking of the base would compromise homeland security in the Northeast.

Several members of the Base Realignment and Closure commission tried to get a direct answer from the delegation on the preferred option if it came down to closing the base or scaling it back. They didn't get one.

"The best option . . . is a fully operational base protecting New England and the Northeast. It is the right answer for the country. It is the right answer for the state," Baldacci told the commission.

Whether the nine commissioners agreed with Baldacci wasn't clear. A few commissioners said they still weren't sure how they would vote on the future of the Brunswick base. Others didn't comment at all during the 80-minute hearing.

Throughout a day of hearings, the commission listened to a parade of U.S. senators, representatives and local officials from five states and the District of Columbia. They came to make a case for why their bases should come off the Department of Defense closure and realignment list.

The commission is expected to decide this month the future of the Brunswick air station, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery and the Defense Finance Accounting Service offices in Limestone as well as dozens of other bases across the country. President Bush and Congress then can either accept or reject the entire list without changes.

"Today reminded me of the closing argument in a long court case," said Ralph Dean, a retired Navy captain and member of a local task force for the Brunswick base.

Maine officials got to make a second argument for Brunswick because the commission decided to look at closing the base instead of just considering the Defense Department's realignment recommendation.

Realignment means the base would remain open, but its roughly 2,300 active-duty military

personnel and P-3 Orion surveillance planes would relocate to Jacksonville Naval Air Station in Florida.

But Maine officials asked the commissioners to imagine they were in charge of defending the Northeast. Would members faced with a cruise missile attack from offshore or a powerful weapon hidden in a container ship want the P-3s in Maine or Florida? They said BNAS is the clear answer.

"We need to remind ourselves that we are at war," said retired Rear Adm. Harry Rich, an advocate for BNAS and a Maine resident. "The front lines are no longer just overseas. They are everywhere in the western world, including our extensive Atlantic coastline."

The questions that the BRAC members touched on ranged from the possibility of a cruise missile attack from offshore to how much the Brunswick base could help if a London-style attack happened in Maine.

But the majority of questions and comments revolved around the issue of whether a complete closure or realignment would be better for Maine. Commissioners wanted to know how the two scenarios would affect Brunswick, Topsham and other local communities.

Baldacci and U.S. Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine, laid out a series of problems, from growth in unemployment to local business failures, that would result from closure or downsizing. But state leaders shied away from getting into which option is better.

They said afterward that the Defense Department and Navy have put the commission in a difficult position. The Navy considered closing BNAS outright to save money, but the Pentagon rejected the idea and put it on the list for realignment.

The Navy won't save much if the commission goes along with realigning the base, Maine officials said.

"I think (commissioners) recognize realignment doesn't make any sense. What they are wrestling with is a decision that they know has already been half made to keep it open," Baldacci said after the hearing.

Some Maine officials said after the hearing that if the commission decision does come down to downsizing versus closure, downsizing would be better.

Under that scenario, Brunswick and neighboring communities would not be able to redevelop the site for new businesses, housing and other uses. But Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said the base would likely re-emerge as a key location for the military because of its strategic location and the inefficiency of having airplanes and their crews working part time in Brunswick.

"If realignment is the commission's decision, I think ultimately it would become a fully operational base again," Collins said.

Simmons: Pentagon missed 3rd dock

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)

Katherine Hutt Scott

August 11, 2005

WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons pointed out a flaw Wednesday in the Pentagon's argument for closing the Groton submarine base — the base has access to three maintenance dry docks, but the Navy counted only two.

Simmons, R-Stonington, made the point in a letter to Anthony Principi, chairman of a base-closing panel that will decide whether to accept the Pentagon's plan to close Groton and send its sailors and 18 submarines to bases in Virginia and Georgia.

'Flawed data'

"This flawed data underscores the flawed process that led to the Pentagon's flawed recommendation," Simmons said in a statement. Simmons cited a Navy letter addressed to him, in which the service acknowledged the third dry dock, but said it was under repair.

The dry dock error contributed to the Navy discarding an alternative scenario in which the submarines and sailors from Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia would be sent to Groton, Simmons' letter said. That scenario assumed the Navy would be required to buy another dry dock for Groton, at a cost of \$93 million.

The Navy made the error because when it was tallying Groton's facilities, the third dry dock was being repaired, Simmons' letter said. But the dry dock is scheduled to be fully operational by February — before any base closings would take effect, the letter said.

EB letter

Also Wednesday, the president of General Dynamics' Electric Boat Division wrote to Principi, repeating arguments he has made before in favor of preserving the Groton base, located just two miles from Electric Boat's Groton shipyard. The shipyard builds new submarines for the Navy. The close proximity has created many synergies that have helped develop new submarine designs, president John Casey wrote.

The proximity also has resulted in cost savings of \$50 million a year in building costs for new submarines, savings that would be lost if Groton is closed, Casey wrote.

The savings are possible because Electric Boat performs maintenance on the base's submarines and that work absorbs some of the company's fixed overhead costs, he wrote.

In May, the Pentagon recommended closing 33 major U.S. military bases — including Groton.

Off-base planning - Fort Meade job growth discussed

Laurel Leader (Laurel, MD)

Pete Pichaske

August 11, 2005

Col. Kenneth McCreedy, left, took over June 30 as base commander at Fort Meade, which is facing explosive growth in the next few years.

File Photo by Hans Ericsson.

An expected explosion of jobs at Fort Meade could set off a frenzy of changes in the Laurel area, including more schools, widened and improved roads, more upscale shopping and additional housing.

Fort Meade would add about 5,300 new jobs under recommendations the Pentagon made in May to the national Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

Separately, the National Security Agency, headquartered at Fort Meade, plans to add about 1,500 jobs a year for the next five years, plus contractors.

The anticipated growth has elated local and state officials, who see it as a boon for economic development.

But some officials - and some residents - have warned that, without proper planning, the additional residents and commuters could have an adverse effect on the area.

At a community meeting Monday at the Maryland City fire station, federal, state and local officials and Laurel-area residents discussed the impact the new jobs could have.

While the visions varied and were fuzzy, given the fact that the changes are years away, everyone agreed the impact will be substantial.

"This is a great opportunity," said Aris Melissaratos, secretary of Maryland's Department of Business and Economic Development. "This corridor is really the center of the world. ... We need to upgrade our shopping centers, upgrade our service shops. We need to upgrade our town centers. We need to upgrade our neighborhoods - solve the crime issue. We need more quality housing."

"The citizens have some concerns about the quality of life," added state Del. Brian Moe of Laurel, who helped organize the meeting. "We want to make sure we get the funding we need to accommodate these changes."

Adding so many jobs, Moe said, will have a big impact on transportation, housing, schools and other services, and community input is vital to ensure services can handle the added growth.

The added positions at Fort Meade are part of the U.S. military's efforts at consolidation and would be transferred from bases in Virginia, Florida and New Jersey.

The positions are in three main categories: adjudication and security clearance offices; journalism, including military magazines and public information services; and the Defense Information Systems Agency.

More than 3,500 of the positions would be high-tech and professional jobs.

The NSA jobs, while not specified, are part of an unrelated effort to beef up national security in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

NSA's job is to use sophisticated equipment to listen in on electronic communications throughout the world, and to protect the security of the federal government's computer systems.

The expected NSA jobs "are mostly analysis, computer services - those kinds of jobs," said Ellen Cioccio, a NSA spokeswoman.

The added 5,300 jobs at Fort Meade are not yet definite. The BRAC Commission must forward its recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8. Bush then has until Nov. 7 to submit his recommendations to Congress. After 45 legislative days, the changes become law unless Congress passes a joint resolution to reject the entire package.

U.S. Rep. Benjamin Cardin, a Baltimore Democrat, warned participants at Monday's meeting that some lawmakers are fighting to change the Pentagon recommendations. Maryland is considered a big winner in the process so far, he said, and states that stand to lose military jobs are "working to undermine the BRAC process. Maryland is a target. But I'm optimistic."

Definite or not, the BRAC recommendations already have state and local officials scrambling to figure out how to accommodate the influx of jobs and people. Among the changes participants recommended at Monday's meeting were the following:

- * Opening more science and technology magnet schools to attract science-oriented students - and parents.

- * Adding more schools and expanding existing ones to accommodate the expected new students, especially in Anne Arundel County.

- * Taking advantage of the University of Maryland's highly rated engineering and business schools, boosting the offerings at local community colleges, and finding a niche for nearby Bowie State University.

- * Closing the Washington-run Oak Hill Youth Center, a maximum-security juvenile detention facility, to provide a security buffer for Fort Meade. Congress is considering legislation that would do just that.

- * A variety of transportation improvements, including widening Route 175 and extending the Washington Metrorail through Laurel to Fort Meade.

- * Adding new housing, including affordable housing.

- * Adding new stores and upgrading some existing shopping centers.

"It's all a matter of planning," Melissaratos said. "The challenge for the community is integrated planning."

While Melissaratos and most state and local officials painted the added jobs as a huge benefit for the region, some local residents warned they could pose problems.

Tim Mical of Russett said his community already is ignored by local officials when it comes to providing services, and any increase in

population will make its lack of amenities all the worse.

"We're all for development ... but we need a senior center, we need a community center, we need a strong high school," Mical said.

Laurel businessman Bob Mignon said that unless officials make some improvements, they cannot expect to entice the highly educated workers expected at NSA to move to the area.

"We've got to bury power lines, we've got to replace our curbs and gutters and sidewalks," Mignon warned. "We're trying to get top-rate scientists, educated individuals to come in - they're not going to accept this."

Col. Kenneth McCreedy, the Fort Meade base commander, agreed that the area has to "make the case that life here is better" than where the current workers are living.

He also said planning for such a big expansion is a headache - but not the worst headache he could imagine.

"No matter what challenges I face, it beats the heck out of the challenges faced by other base commanders, whose bases might be closed," said McCreedy, who took over as base commander June 30.

To better plan for the impending changes and make sure the community is involved, Moe suggested that a committee be established and hold regular meetings. He said he might even propose legislation formalizing such a group, which would give it more clout.

"This could be five years away, and it could be more than that, but we have to make sure we continue to look out for the impact this is going to have here," he said.

Shipyard supporters claim they won't relocate if yard closes

Foster's Online (Dover, NH)

Douglas P. Guarino

August 11, 2005

KITTERY, Maine — Military estimates that 40 percent of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard's workers would relocate if the facility closed are inaccurate, shipyard advocates say.

Members of President Bush's Base Realignment and Closure Commission have considered the estimate, a factor in the Department of Defense's plans to shift Portsmouth's work to other public shipyards, according to public documents available on the commission's website.

During a June 1 yard visit, commissioner Philip Coyle asked Nancy Peschel, manager for long range corporate planning at the shipyard, whether she felt the DOD estimate was accurate. Peschel, who was delivering a presentation to commissioners, said shipyard employees are mostly New Englanders and are unlikely to move, the commission documents state.

Coyle then asked if a survey had been conducted to learn the number of employees willing to move. Peschel said a organization-wide survey hadn't been done, but that a key unit that handles planning for work at all four public shipyards in the U.S. had surveyed its 213 civilian employees. It revealed only about six percent would be interested in relocating, the documents state.

During an interview with Foster's, union leaders at the shipyard said the number of workers who would be likely to move would be less than that figure.

Paul O'Connor, president of the Metal Trades Council, the shipyard's largest union, said past layoff records indicate less than 5 percent of Portsmouth's nearly 5,000 employees would be likely to relocate to another shipyard.

John Joyal, second vice president for the American Federation of Government Employees at the yard, agreed. He said he believed the Navy would transfer a significant portion of the yard's submarine work to less-efficient private shipyards once the 40-percent estimate fell through.

As part of its recommendation to close Portsmouth, DOD says it would intend to relocate the yard's repair work to the three remaining public shipyards in Norfolk, Va., Puget Sound, Wash., and Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Norfolk would take over Portsmouth's submarine maintenance, engineering, planning and procurement responsibilities.

During the July 1 visit, Earl Donnell, of the Shipyard Superintendent's Association, told Coyl he didn't think the shipyard receive credit for being more efficient than the other yards, a point that was noted by the commissioners, according to the documents.

"Overall, the briefs and tour were well received by the commissioners," the documents state.

Members Of Panel See Dangers In Closing Otis

Gaps feared in US safety

Boston Globe (Boston, MA)

Bryan Bender, Globe Staff

August 12, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Just weeks before a final report is due, members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission said yesterday that they believe closing Otis Air Guard Base on Cape Cod could jeopardize homeland security in the event of another suicide aircraft hijacking in the Northeast similar to the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

In their last public hearing, commission members grilled Pentagon officials and top military officers for hours yesterday on how they would protect the airspace over the most populated areas of the country without combat aircraft on round-the-clock standby. What they heard, however, didn't erase their concerns.

"We're not yet assured," said a commissioner for the panel, Samuel K. Skinner. He said he doubted that the military could quickly intercept hijacked airliners and shoot them down, especially on a moment's notice, as in the 9/11 attacks.

"There is a big, big gap," added another commissioner, James Bilbray, referring to the vast distances that some aircraft would have to fly to take down a hijacked airliner. "The interception time has been so extended because those bases are so far."

Without the 102d Fighter Wing at Otis, the closest Air Guard fighters on alert near major cities such as New York and Boston would be two Air National Guard combat jets at Bradley International Airport in Hartford, 100 miles to the west of Cape Cod. The commission chairman, Anthony Principi, calling Otis the "doorstep to the Atlantic," suggested that might not be close enough to protect an area with some of the most congested airspace in the country, which has lost several other air bases in recent decades.

In other regions, said another commissioner, Phillip Coyle, distances between units are much greater. In the Northwest, he said, the Pentagon's plan would leave two aircraft on alert to cover an area the size of Europe. He suggested that even if they could scramble to an emergency intercept on time, "they could be out of gas when they get there."

The shake-up of two dozen Air Guard units has emerged as the most contentious part of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal to close, shrink, or expand hundreds of bases and other military installations nationwide.

Governors Edward G. Rendell of Pennsylvania and Rod R. Blagojevich of Illinois are suing Rumsfeld, saying they had not been consulted, and numerous analysts have said the airspace over major US cities will be more vulnerable if the military gets its way.

As a result, the nine-member commission reviewing the proposal gave the Pentagon and the states a last chance yesterday to argue their cases before its final report -- with suggested changes if necessary -- goes to President Bush and to Congress next month.

The questioning was notable not only for its critical tone, but also because it was coming so

late in the process. If the commission overturns the recommendations, the Pentagon would have to find other ways to achieve the savings. Overturning the Guard proposals would upend the entire Air Force plan, a number of Pentagon officials have said.

The Navy officer responsible for protecting US air space, Admiral Timothy J. Keating, insisted that while large areas of the country might not have aircraft on alert, he can call on other forces in the event of an emergency.

Those forces, he said, could include combat aircraft from other units, fighters from aircraft carriers, or ships armed with missiles. In the Pentagon's view, lack of aircraft in one location does not mean lack of preparedness.

The proposed changes "do not create unacceptable risk to our mission," Keating, the top officer of the North American Aerospace Defense Command, told the commission. "We have a large number of arrows in our quiver," he added, noting that "hundreds and hundreds" of aircraft can be relocated to deal with any particular emergency event.

Commissioner Harold Gehman said Keating's comments were "not a ringing endorsement."

Indeed, military officials acknowledged yesterday that they did not consult the Department of Homeland Security when advising the displacement of the Massachusetts Air National Guard's 12 F-15s at Otis, or of dozens of other planes that patrol airspace, put out forest fires, and fulfill other state missions. "We did not formally consult with the Department of Homeland Security," said Peter F. Verga, deputy assistant secretary of homeland defense.

To some commissioners, the exclusion of homeland security officials from the deliberations was inexcusable, given that the Air National Guard plays a critical role in homeland security missions. As that department gathers intelligence about threats inside the United States, the Air National Guard could be called upon to help eliminate them.

Skinner said he was shocked that Department of Homeland Security officials didn't attend yesterday's hearing. "BRAC recommendations on the national Guard will impact the [homeland security] mission," Principi said.

Representative William D. Delahunt, a Quincy Democrat whose district includes Otis, was in the gallery during the Capitol Hill hearing yesterday. He said he took the absence of Homeland Security department officials as an indication they were told to skip the hearing because they might question the Pentagon's rationale.

Representatives of the National Guard raised their own questions about the plan's effect on homeland security, reiterating their concerns that the realignment would undermine their ability to support their host states in times of crisis.

Major General Francis D. Vavala, the adjutant general of the Delaware National Guard, told the panel that the plans "ignore critical homeland security needs." He also argued that closing many of the Air Guard bases will cost more than expected. This week, Massachusetts congressional delegation officials released an analysis suggesting the Pentagon underestimated the price for closing Otis by nearly a half-billion dollars.

Vavala also warned that leaving some states without Air National Guard aviation units could force experienced people to leave and make it harder to recruit younger people. Taking away the aircraft marks "the beginning of the end for these Guard units," he said.

"The commissioners obviously understand our concerns about the BRAC recommendations on Otis," said Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts. "Chairman Principi in particular highlighted the consequences of closing Otis, and the risks to our national security.

"Nothing in today's testimony undercuts the very strong case for keeping Otis open," he said.

Base Math Raises Doubt BRAC Challenges Pentagon's Cleanup Cost Estimates

Hartford Courant (Hartford, CT)

Jesse Hamilton
August 12, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Connecticut's submarine base provided members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission with potent ammunition Thursday, as commissioners took issue with the Pentagon's estimates for the environmental cleanup of U.S. military bases targeted for closure.

The estimate for the Naval Submarine Base in Groton - \$23 million to clean up a 90-year-old base that houses nuclear submarines - became a symbol of the commissioners' skepticism and concern that the Pentagon's numbers are far too low. The Pentagon has estimated the cost of cleaning up all bases at \$1 billion.

"It doesn't seem realistic to me," commission Chairman Anthony Principi said during a hearing Thursday, referring to the Groton estimate.

BRAC commissioners met in the Hart Senate Office Building to ask 11th-hour questions about two of the most contentious topics of the current round of base-closing recommendations: environmental cleanup costs and the homeland security ramifications of moving Air National Guard units.

Both issues are critical for Connecticut, which stands to lose both the Groton base and its A-10 fighter planes from the 103rd Fighter Wing at Bradley airport. Later this month, the commission will begin deliberations to finalize a list of bases to forward to President Bush. One of the chief rationales given for the Pentagon list are long-term cost savings that will accrue from closing dozens of bases and downsizing others.

Commissioner Harold W. Gehman Jr., a former admiral, said that although the Pentagon did not factor in total cleanup costs for the heavy metals, solvents, petroleum products, pesticides and

unexploded ordnance found on these bases - believing those costs would be figured elsewhere in the federal budget - the commission has to. Ultimately, he said, the commission must recommend closures that would generate funds for a transformation of the military. To that end, he asked, "How can we reconcile your [Pentagon's] recommendations?"

Commissioner Phillip Coyle wanted to know if there was an equation for estimating how far off the estimates are. "We're looking for some way to get a ballpark figure," he said. "Otherwise, I don't see how we can have any confidence in [Department of Defense] estimates."

Phillips Grone, a deputy undersecretary of defense, answered that the best example is the previous BRAC closures in 1995, the environmental recoveries for which were initially estimated to cost \$2.6 billion but which ended up costing about \$3.2 billion. He offered that as proof the military's estimates can come close.

As for Groton specifically, Coyle asked, "How could it possibly be \$23 million?"

In a study by Connecticut's Department of Environmental Protection on behalf of the base-advocates' cause, an alternate estimate was more than \$100 million over the Navy's figure.

Later, at the close of the daylong hearings, Principi told reporters that accurately assessing cleanup costs is critical in allowing the commission to establish what cost savings will accrue from the closings.

"We have to weigh that, to try to determine what the total cost might be and how that impacts our determination." In the end, he said, the commissioners have to decide whether there are cost savings or not. If not, Principi said, it puts the closure into question.

In his testimony, Grone also explained why the Pentagon didn't factor in the total cleanup costs for each site, assuming ongoing federal cleanup efforts would be budgeted elsewhere. Basically, he said, the bases would have to be cleaned

anyway, so that cost is not part of the closure. Also, he said, total cleanup costs were not included in previous BRAC rounds.

Anticipating the commissioners' arguments, Grone said that calculating cleanup costs when deciding which bases to close would be an unfair protection and punish cleaner bases that might be shut down instead.

James Woolford, director of the EPA's Federal Facilities Restoration and Reuse Office, said he was "not prepared to talk about" Groton, though he assumed the base "has been closely scrutinized" by the Navy analysts. He said that estimate seemed "reasonable," adding, "We may see more; we may see less."

Grone said he could organize a detailed briefing from Navy officials for the commission to explain how they arrived at their numbers. "The Navy is very confident about the estimates that they have made," he said.

But Coyle reminded him, "We only have another week." After that, the commission will start deliberating on the dozens of recommended closures and realignments.

Grone, Woolford and Patrick J. O'Brien, director of the Defense Department's Office of Economic Adjustment, said the estimates are complicated by not knowing what cleanup standard each site will require. O'Brien said it's usually "like use," as in a Navy port facility being cleaned to industrial standards for continuing use as a commercial port operation.

That's where Connecticut holds an unusual advantage. A 1994 "federal facility agreement," approved by the state, Defense Department and the EPA, calls for a complete environmental remediation if the military abandons Groton. The EPA confirmed as much in a Wednesday letter, which the state's base defenders forwarded to the commission.

Commissioner Lloyd "Fig" Newton, a retired general from Connecticut, also asked Thursday whether the agreement would be honored. Grone said he assumed it would be.

"Judging by the questions asked during today's BRAC hearing, the commissioners share our concerns that the Pentagon failed to account for both federal and state environmental standards," U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd said in a Thursday statement. "This is just one more piece of evidence showing how the Pentagon miscalculated the costs of shutting down the Navy's premier submarine facility."

Proposed reductions in the Air National Guard bases have encountered rising opposition from many states, including Connecticut.

Peter F. Verga, the secretary of defense's principal deputy assistant for homeland defense, said the BRAC recommendations "do not create an unacceptable risk" to homeland security. Minutes later, Adm. Timothy J. Keating, commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command and the military's Northern Command, repeated the "do not create unacceptable risk" line.

But Commissioner James H. Bilbray said, "I've heard your answers, but there's a very big concern. ... Our national defense is being hampered."

Michael L. Dominguez, an assistant secretary of the Air Force, told the commission that the Air Force must become smaller and more modern. He also said there is no military necessity for an Air Force presence in every state.

But the chief of the National Guard Bureau, Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum - reminded by one of the commissioners that he had once committed to having an Air National Guard unit in every state - made the same pledge again. He said he would try to "redistribute" aircraft until every state had some, though he added, "It may not be where it is today."

If his claim, which Principi called a "strong, decisive statement," turns out to be true, Connecticut would have some aircraft restored.

The association of state adjutant generals, a group of the leaders of each state's National

Guard forces, urged the commission to reject most of the Air Guard recommendations. If they are approved, it will be an "irreversible" devastation of the Guard that "will put the safety of our citizens at risk," said Maj. Gen. Roger P. Lempke, president of the association.

Whether it's fuzzy environmental math or debates over the best format for tomorrow's Air Force, the commission is running out of time: Its revised list is due on the president's desk Sept. 8.

Navy Memo Is Seen As 'Smoking Gun' Sub Base Supporters Say Document Outlines Shortfalls In Kings Bay Plan

New London Day (New London, CT)

Robert A. Hamilton

August 11, 2005

Groton -- An internal Navy memorandum obtained by The Day reveals that the Pentagon's plan to move the Naval Submarine School to Kings Bay, Ga., seriously underestimated the costs.

Opponents of the move Wednesday called the memo a "white-hot smoking gun" that will "blow a hole" in the Pentagon's case to close Sub Base New London.

"Clearly the timing and content of this memo is startling," said U.S. Sen. Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn. "If this information is indeed deemed to be accurate and true, it would call into question all data used by the Navy to support its BRAC (base realignment and closure) proposals.

"In particular," Dodd said, "it would blow a hole in the Navy's analysis recommending the transfer of the Submarine School from Sub Base New London to Kings Bay."

The plan to move the school, part of the larger plan to close the Naval Submarine Base, calls for construction of 70 classrooms. But Capt. Arnold O. Lotring, the director of the Submarine Learning Center, which would oversee the move, said in the memo he needs 100.

The plan also calls for standard construction, but the memo said the classrooms require highly specialized air conditioning, heating, electrical and information technology improvements that will be much more expensive.

The memo said that to operate effectively at Kings Bay, the sub school must have specialized dormitories, including a wing for students who are being disciplined; a larger cafeteria, or galley; and a brig for at least six people. With as many as 2,200 students at peak periods, there are always a few in serious trouble.

In addition, the memo said, the students will probably require an expanded or new indoor gymnasium because about seven days out of 10, weather conditions in southeast Georgia are too oppressive to meet Navy standards for outdoor workouts.

"It's inappropriate to comment on any specifics within correspondence for internal use," said William Kenny, Lotring's spokesman. But to put the memo into context, he said Lotring was seeking to carry out the requirements of the BRAC recommendation, and "to this end, he charged his planners to develop and execute a vision of Submarine Force training robust enough to serve the fleet and our sailors into the 22nd century."

Members of the team fighting to save the Groton base were fuming to learn that the Navy began assessing the cost of the move in June, almost three weeks after the Pentagon proposed the closure — and more than six months after all the data to support the move was supposed to have been certified by auditors.

"This memo is a disturbing revelation of how the Navy has miscalculated the costs of moving the Submarine School, and it seriously undermines their case to close Sub Base New London," said Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, D-Conn. "It shows that they neglected to conduct the necessary research and data certification before arriving at their conclusion on the base's fate.

“We will pursue this with the Navy and will provide all information to the BRAC commission for their deliberations. These flaws clearly provide even stronger evidence that Sub Base New London should remain open.”

Base supporters were furious to learn the memo was never released, even though it was written weeks before they traveled to Boston to argue against the Pentagon recommendation in a hearing before the base closure commission.

In addition, U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, noted the memo was written two weeks before his visit to Kings Bay in June. When he asked at that time whether the galley, the gymnasium and other facilities would be able to absorb up to 2,200 students at a time, he was assured they would.

“That's a matter of great concern to me,” Simmons said. “They must have known about this memo by then. But when all these issues came up, nobody said anything about a memo. How many other important pieces of information are out there that we don't know about?”

“This memo clearly points out that a whole series of assumptions about Kings Bay were simply incorrect. The Submarine Learning Center is the command responsible for coordinating the efforts of the Navy's submarine training sites. Its commanding officer identified issues with moving the submarine school to Kings Bay that were not adequately reviewed before the Navy decided to recommend the realignment. The visible gap between the Navy's analysis and reality grows wider by the day.”

John C. Markowicz, chairman of the Subbase Realignment Coalition, the grass-roots group fighting to save the base, called the memo a “white-hot smoking gun.”

“I liken this to the Buchanan memo of 1993,” Markowicz said. In that year, Rear Adm. Richard Buchanan, then head of Submarine Group Two in Groton, wrote an internal memorandum that said the Navy plan to move Groton's submarines to Norfolk, Va., was flawed

because it would cost much more to maintain them there.

That memorandum, leaked to the coalition, proved critical in overturning the recommendation 12 years ago to close the waterfront.

Staff members of the state delegation said they are drafting a letter to Commission Chairman Anthony J. Principi, which they hope to deliver today, and they will ask Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael G. Mullen to release any other documents that might undermine the Navy case for closing the Groton base.

“The idea that the Pentagon issued its BRAC recommendations regarding the sub school before even considering the analysis by the Navy's senior official charged with overseeing U.S. submarine training is stunning and wholly unacceptable,” Dodd said.

“Our state — needless to say — intends to follow this trail to wherever it may lead,” Dodd continued. “Clearly it will be important for the BRAC commission to take this into account.”

Critics of the Pentagon recommendation have long said the data-collection process to support the BRAC process was slipshod. On at least one occasion, for instance, Navy bases had just 48 hours to collect and return a large volume of information for a “data call.”

Markowicz said a review of the full Navy report on the Groton base showed no information entered for 11 of the 12 items involving military construction projects that would be required to support the sub school move to Kings Bay.

That means the Cost of Base Realignment Activity, or COBRA, computer model would have used default values in those categories, or average construction costs based on Navy experience. Markowicz said he knew those default values would seriously understate the real costs because of the complexity of construction required to support electronic classrooms.

Kenny, the public affairs officer for the Learning Center, said after the BRAC proposals were released by the Pentagon, Lotring established an Integrated Process Team to look at how the recommendation would be carried out.

The big question for base supporters now is how much impact can the memo have on the BRAC process, which is drawing to a close.

The commission has been working since May 13 to review the Defense Department recommendations, and has nearly finished its data-gathering process before heading into its decision hearings Aug. 23-27.

But Markowicz noted the commission continues to seek information about the Pentagon recommendations — for instance, several commission members are slated to meet with a panel of retired Navy admirals on Friday to talk about the Groton recommendation — so he's hopeful that the memo will be reviewed, and considered.

Fla., Texas Gain Ground In BRAC

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

Louis Hansen

August 12, 2005

In an unusual step, the federal base closure panel has scheduled hearings to allow Florida and Texas officials to make their case for moving operations at Oceana Naval Air Station to their states.

The Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission will hold a special public hearing Aug. 20 to consider proposals to close the Virginia Beach base and move its operations to Texas or Florida, according to officials briefed Thursday evening on the process.

The hearings come after the nine-member independent panel concluded its visits to affected bases, and just a few days before the members are expected to vote on base closings. The commission must send a full list of base closings and realignments to President Bush by Sept. 8.

Virginia officials reached late Thursday called the move surprising and unprecedented. Some hinted that politics were taking a greater role — President Bush's brother, Jeb Bush, is governor of Florida, and the president once served as Texas governor .

John Reid, a spokesman for Sen. George Allen, said the process should remain transparent. He said he didn't see a political connection, but the new hearing "certainly raises eyebrows how this process is unfolding."

George Foresman, assistant to Gov. Mark R. Warner, said Virginia has never seen this from a BRAC Commission. "This should be a clear indication that the commission has not reached a conclusion," Foresman said.

In the past two weeks, the governors of Texas and Florida presented plans to replace Oceana, the Navy's only master jet base on the East Coast.

On Thursday, Gov. Bush met privately with BRAC officials. The governor supports a proposal to re-establish Cecil Field near Jacksonville. On Monday, Texas Gov. Rick Perry announced a \$365 million incentive package to improve three bases.

A spokesman for the commission did not return a phone call late Thursday.

Bob Matthias, an assistant to the Virginia Beach city manager, said this is the first time the city has gotten into a bidding war for Oceana. The commissioners, he said "seem to be making up rules as they go along."

Kevin Hall, a spokesman for Warner, said the state would fight to ensure they can make their case before the commission. "This is unusual and late in the process, and could open Pandora's box," Hall said .

If other states are allowed to introduce new proposals days before the deadline, he said, "we would expect equal treatment."

Reprieve for McGuire unit? BRAC wary of Air Guard cuts

Asbury Park Press (Asbury Park, NJ)
August 12, 2005

WASHINGTON — A federal panel on Thursday expressed skepticism over the Pentagon's plan to restructure dozens of Air National Guard units nationwide, which bodes well for New Jersey, Rep. H. James Saxton said.

"If I had to guess, I would guess that the commission would revise the recommendations, which would obviously be good for New Jersey," said Saxton, R-N.J., a member of the House Armed Services Committee.

In the Pentagon base closing and restructuring recommendations, the New Jersey Air Guard's 108th Refueling Wing at McGuire Air Force Base would lose its 16 aging KC-135 tankers, which would not be replaced by newer planes.

Saxton said it's hard to say how many jobs would be lost if the Pentagon plan is approved by the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission, but said between 1,000 and 1,200 part- and full-time employees work at the 108th.

"If you don't have planes, you don't need pilots or maintenance and other workers," said Saxton, who attended the hearing held here.

The commission questioned the homeland security impact of the Pentagon's plan to reorganize the Air National Guard, which has emerged as the most contentious part of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's proposal to close, reduce or expand hundreds of military bases and other installations nationwide.

Defense officials assured the commission the Air Guard proposal would not hinder the country's security, but state adjutants general, who oversee the Air Guard in states, said the plan will prevent units from fulfilling their homeland security missions, including protecting the skies.

Military officials spar over base list Willow Grove not mentioned in what may be last hearing.

Allentown Morning Call (Allentown, PA)
Jeff Miller
August 12, 2005

WASHINGTON | State adjutant generals and U.S. Air Force officials squared off before a base-closing commission on Thursday over the Pentagon's plan to mothball dozens of Air Guard units across the country.

Willow Grove wasn't mentioned during the four-hour hearing. But the testimony could help determine the fate of the Horsham Township base, one of 180 installations the Pentagon wants to shutter to save money and make the military more effective.

Pennsylvania officials, who have filed a lawsuit challenging the closure, monitored the hearing but did not testify.

Under the Pentagon's plan, the 111th Air Fighting Wing of the Pennsylvania National Guard based at Willow Grove would be disbanded. Its A-10 tank-killing aircraft would be shipped to Guard units in Idaho, Maryland and Michigan.

The Air Force and the National Guard have been at odds over the plan for several months. Guard officials complained that they weren't consulted on the closure recommendations before they were announced. Air Force officials insisted that the adjutants general received more briefings than some top Pentagon brass.

Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, president of the Adjutants General Association, said the closure plan would take the National Guard "down an untested path" that would weaken homeland defense.

Lempke, the Nebraska adjutant general, said it would be "irresponsible to put the United States at risk by diminishing the Air Guard."

Air Force officials defended the plan, saying that U.S. homeland defense would not suffer even if some states lost their only Air Guard units.

Adm. Timothy Keating, commander of the U.S. Northern Command, said he's able to move planes, ships and other military assets to cover vast geographic areas regardless of state boundaries.

Keating said the closure plan "poses no unacceptable risk" to homeland defense. But his words were less than inspiring for some commissioners.

"A sentence with a double negative in it is not very compelling," said Hal Gehman, a retired admiral.

Anthony Principi, chairman of the independent Base Closure and Realignment Commission, questioned whether the Pentagon's quest for efficiency had gone "too far in upsetting the balance between communities, the Guard and active forces."

Air Force officials said larger Air Guard units in fewer places would be more efficient to operate. They said the plan would also help the "total force" — including the Air Guard — make the transition from older-generation technology to new fighters and unmanned vehicles.

But Lempke and other adjutants general said the Air Force had not considered several factors.

For instance, they said most Air Guard members wouldn't transfer to new units because they have other jobs and strong ties to their communities. Their loss will cost the military vital experience and money to train new Guard members.

Willow Grove's defenders have made the same argument and say that the trend of eliminating bases in the Northeast also hurts military recruiting in the region. They also contend that Willow Grove is a vital homeland security asset.

On Thursday, several members of the state's congressional delegation wrote the base commission to emphasize Willow Grove's

proximity to major East Coast cities, its 8,000-foot runway and its status as a joint reserve base where all the branches of the military can work and train.

The letter was spurred by reports that Northern Command is developing war plans to guard against and respond to terrorist attacks in the United States.

The commission had hoped to hear the views of the Department of Homeland Security on Thursday. But the department declined to send a representative to the hearing.

Commissioner Sam Skinner, a former transportation secretary, said he was "shocked" that Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff was a no-show.

"I know he's a busy man," Skinner said. "But I was a Cabinet secretary and I would have rearranged my schedule. I just don't understand."

Pennsylvania also took the rare step of suing in federal court to block Willow Grove's closing. The suit contends the Defense Department can't move Air Guard units without consent from state governors, which Gov. Ed Rendell said he never granted. Illinois has filed a similar lawsuit.

Principi said Thursday that the commission has received a legal opinion on the issue from the Department of Justice. But he declined to say what the opinion said because commission staff attorneys were still reviewing it.

Thursday's hearing may have been the commission's final one before it begins deliberation over whether to accept or modify the Pentagon's proposal. The commission has until Sept. 8 to submit its revised list to President Bush.

Bush then has until Sept. 23 to accept or reject the recommendations. If he approves, Congress will have 45 days to act on them. Neither the president nor Congress can change the list.

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