

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

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States say Justice opinion not the final word on Air Guard

Congress Daily

Megan Scully

August 15, 2005

A challenge from state officials to the Pentagon's proposed reorganization of the Air National Guard is not over, despite a Justice Department opinion that the units can be shuttered as part of the base-closure and realignment round.

The 14-page opinion, released Friday, said the Defense Department can close or realign a National Guard base without the consent of the governor, contradicting one of the main

arguments put forth by state lawmakers and Guard leaders.

"It would have been a surprise if they ruled any differently," said Maj. Gen. Frank Vavala, Delaware's adjutant general and a vocal opponent of the Pentagon's recommendations. "I figured [the Justice Department] would side with the Pentagon on this."

Vavala, who also serves as vice president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States, said the Guard will continue to meet with the independent commission reviewing the Pentagon's recommendations.

"We particularly are utilizing ... congressional delegations in every state to contact the individual commissioners and continue to reiterate our cases," Vavala said. If the commission upholds the Pentagon's Air Guard recommendations, Delaware will lose its fleet of C-130s, grounding the Air Guard in that state.

The Air Guard recommendations -- which would strip all aircraft from nearly two dozen units -- has become the most contested issue in this base-closure round. At least three states have filed lawsuits, arguing that altering the state-run units would be unconstitutional and infringe on a governor's ability to organize a militia. A lawyer for the commission came to a similar conclusion in a legal brief written last month. The Justice Department, however, noted that the Guard functions both as a state militia and as a reserve component of the active duty military.

"The modern National Guard descends from efforts that Congress began in the early twentieth century both to revive the long-dormant 'Militia' described in the Constitution and, spurred by World War I, to make it an effective complement to the regular Armed Forces," the document states.

In addition, the Justice Department concluded that the Pentagon can move aircraft during base-closure rounds. The scope of the Base Closure Act, Justice Department officials found, is broad, as is the definition of realignment, which includes any action that reduces or relocates

military functions. Guard leaders have argued that moving aircraft is a programmatic decision, and as such should not be made part of base closures.

"There are programmatic, force-structure recommendations in BRAC, which we feel are illegal and shouldn't be there," Vavala said.

BRAC Commissioner Harold Gehman last week said the programmatic argument was just one small piece of the overall debate and not the deciding factor. The commission will decide on their own base-closure recommendations next week and forward their list to the president by Sept. 8. Guard officials plan to work until the last minute to save the units.

"This is another legal opinion. It still has to go to court and a judge can decide," Vavala said.

Task force files BRAC rebuttal

The Lima News
Tim Rausch
August 16, 2005

WASHINGTON -- The Base Closure and Realignment Commission has Task Force LIMA's rebuttal to the Defense Department's rebuttal.

The outcome of the argument over whether to trim 27 percent of the manufacturing space at Joint Systems Manufacturing Center may not be known until the BRAC Commission begins voting next week, said James Gallagher, the Washington, D.C., consultant for the community task force, Linked in Mutual Alliance.

The Defense Department recommended to the commission that the space be trimmed in an effort to save money from unused space. Data from the Army, however, indicated the Lima plant is using 95 percent of its space.

Gallagher said he believes 2-year-old data was used in the creation of the recommendation, back to when the Pentagon first started collecting information for the 2005 BRAC

round. That information is no longer accurate, he said.

Gallagher said he is unsure whether members of the BRAC Commission staff would inform him before the commission's vote if the Pentagon's recommendation will be thrown out. Gallagher said the commission intends to begin its final deliberations Aug. 24.

Montana Democrat Says Rehberg Plays Politics on BRAC

The Roll Call
August 15, 2005

State Rep. Monica Lindeen (D), who is challenging Rep. Denny Rehberg (R) for the Treasure State's lone House seat, accused Rehberg of not doing enough to insulate Montana from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommendations before Congress adjourned for the August recess.

Lindeen said Rehberg put politics above the state's well-being because he did not promote a provision backed by Sen. Max Baucus (D) in conference that would have reopened a Malmstrom Air Force Base airstrip in the highway bill.

"Rep. Rehberg had an opportunity to stand up to his party leadership," Lindeen charged in a news release. "Instead, he stood by silently while his party leadership stripped the provision from the bill. His simple objection ... would have stopped this last minute agreement."

Rehberg spokesman Brad Keena was not available to comment Friday, but he did tell the Great Falls Tribune earlier this month that the Congressman could do little to preserve the provision to save the airstrip - which was inserted by Baucus into the sweeping highway bill that passed Congress on July 29 - on the House floor.

Keena told the paper "procedurally, you couldn't object to an objection."

Rep. Christopher Shays (R-Conn.) moved to strike the provision by objecting to it.

Keena said after the back and forth over the entire bill, if Rehberg had tried to push the issue further before adjournment his actions would have been "academic and only symbolic."

Lindeen said Rehberg put politics ahead of Montana.

"Montanans needed someone to fight for them in Congress," she charged. "Unfortunately ... our current Representative chose not to stand up for Malmstrom."

U.S. judge agrees to quick hearing on Pa.'s base-closing lawsuit

Centre Daily Times
August 15, 2005

PHILADELPHIA - A federal judge has agreed to expedite Pennsylvania's lawsuit against Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld over proposed cuts to the state's Air National Guard.

U.S. District Judge John R. Padova will hear arguments Aug. 23 and plans to rule on the case before Sept. 8, the Pentagon's deadline for sending its base closure recommendations to President Bush.

Gov. Ed Rendell alleges that the U.S. Constitution prevents the Pentagon from making changes to a state's National Guard without a governor's consent. The suit is one of several strategies he and others are pursuing to save the Willow Grove Naval Air Station, which is home to the 111th Fighter Wing of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard.

Padova has agreed to consider whether Rumsfeld can legally recommend the unit's deactivation without Rendell's consent and, secondly, whether the recommendation involving the 111th should be deemed null and void.

A prompt decision in the case will best serve Congress' intent that action involving proposed base closings be "quick and final," Padova said.

The Pentagon had opposed an expedited court schedule.

In a response filed last week, the Pentagon argued, in part, that Congress expressly excluded governors from decision-making authority in the 1990 base closure act to avoid politicizing the process.

Local News Articles

Sub Base Estimates Conflict In New Analysis, Projected Savings From Closing Are \$400 Million Below Pentagon's Figures

Hartford Courant (Hartford, CT)

David Lightman

August 16, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Closing the Naval Submarine Base at Groton would save \$1.2 billion over 20 years - \$400 million less than Pentagon estimates, a Government Accountability Office analysis revealed Monday.

The discrepancy, which base-closing foes branded a "large error," gave fresh ammunition to their argument as the Base Realignment and Closure Commission prepares for final deliberations next week.

The panel, scheduled to convene Aug. 24 for debate and likely decisions on Groton's and 32 other major bases recommended for closure, had sought the GAO numbers. The GAO is an independent investigative government agency.

BRAC Chairman Anthony J. Principi had asked GAO to resolve questions about the cost of closing the 90-year-old base.

Any change in the potential savings is significant because the \$1.6 billion estimate was a sizable chunk of the \$50 billion the Defense Department hopes to save by closing or realigning military facilities over 20 years.

The Pentagon recommended moving the naval base's 18 attack submarines and repair facilities to Norfolk, Va., and Kings Bay, Ga., relocating the Submarine School to Kings Bay and sending other operations elsewhere.

Principi first asked if the Navy had conducted a "sufficiently rigorous analysis to justify the elimination" of so many billets.

Comptroller General David M. Walker, who wrote the GAO report, found that "more recent information from the Navy's BRAC office suggests that the number of positions likely to be eliminated due to the proposed BRAC actions was overstated."

Navy officials had said they included in their savings estimates the elimination of 214 medical positions that were not related to BRAC.

Principi also wanted to know about testimony at the July 6 BRAC hearing in Boston from Electric Boat officials, who said closing the base in Groton could increase procurement costs by as much as \$50 million a year.

"We found no evidence that the Navy included these additional potential costs in its BRAC analysis," Walker reported.

BRAC also heard testimony Monday from Connecticut delegation members that the cost of moving the submarine school had been understated.

Walker indicated he agreed. "The Navy analysis did not consider any additional cost factor based on unstable soil conditions," his report said.

Factoring in these concerns - higher-than-estimated costs for military construction and moving, as well as fewer savings from eliminating personnel - "our analysis showed that the 20-year net present value savings decreased from \$1.6 billion to \$1.2 billion," Walker said.

Connecticut leaders lined up to declare the findings meaningful. "This error, combined with

the Navy's other admitted errors, confirms what Team Connecticut has been saying for some time," said Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, "the closing of [the base in Groton] produces no savings."

Walker cautioned that the GAO's numbers are based on "standard factors and other data" that are models, not actual savings.

The GAO was unable to comment on Principi's question about whether closing the base in Groton would restrict the Navy's flexibility in future submarine plans.

Walker would only say "it may be prudent to seek additional information from the Department of Defense regarding these uncertainties, particularly as they relate to military value."

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld is scheduled to testify before the commission Saturday.

Closure Panel Wants Action On Oceana Encroachment

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)
Dale Eisman
August 16, 2005

WASHINGTON — Virginia and the city of Virginia Beach need to take "definitive steps" to block new development around Oceana Naval Air Station and roll back projects that already have reduced the base's usefulness in training naval aviators, the head of a federal base closing commission said Monday.

"There needs to be a recognition that this is a serious problem and needs to be resolved now," said Anthony J. Principi, chairman of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Some progress has been made, he added, but there are "complicated issues" surrounding the development rights of landowners with property already zoned to permit growth.

"I hope there's a way that some of these issues can be resolved without the need to move out of Oceana," Principi said.

In an interview, Principi repeatedly cited testimony from naval aviators who have described how adjustments in their training patterns – forced by development around Oceana – have eroded the quality of that training.

He also defended the nine-member commission against charges that it has exceeded its legal authority in exploring an offer by Florida officials to return a former Navy base, Cecil Field near Jacksonville, to the military to serve as a replacement for Oceana.

"The general counsel of the commission has stated unequivocally that it is not illegal" for the commission to investigate the Florida proposal, Principi said.

Sen. John W. Warner, R-Va., charged on Friday that the commission is conducting "what may be perceived as a public auction" by granting Florida officials a hearing on their Cecil Field offer. That session is scheduled for Saturday in Washington and will include time for Virginia to rebut the Florida proposal.

Principi said he thinks the Navy might be able to return Cecil Field to service in the six-year window for actions by the BRAC Commission but that the timing and cost of a transfer are among the issues the commission wants to explore on Saturday.

If a transfer is unworkable in the time provided or if Cecil Field proves a less-desirable alternative than Florida officials have claimed, the commission ultimately might decide simply to include "strong report language" in its final message to President Bush and Congress, Principi said.

That could include urging that a firm date be set for resolving development issues around Oceana before the Navy begins to search for a new alternative somewhere else along the East Coast, he said.

“Speaking as one commissioner,” his aim has been to ensure that pilots who will be expected to land high-performance fighter aircraft on carrier decks can practice those maneuvers realistically, Principi said.

At Oceana, he said, the commission has heard testimony that pilots who must be able to land in near-total darkness on a carrier must train over well-lit neighborhoods and shopping centers. And rather than descend from about 600 feet, as will be expected at sea, they must begin their final approach to Oceana from about 1,000 feet, Principi added.

“Where I’m coming from, having two sons in the military, is to ensure that we minimize the risk” to pilots and crew members, Principi said. “If we can do that at Oceana, that’s the best of all possible options.”

Principi dismissed as “absolutely false” suggestions that the BRAC Commission is responding to political pressures in examining the Florida facility, which has been championed as an Oceana alternative by Gov. Jeb Bush, the president’s brother.

He has met with every governor, and members of Congress, whose districts would be touched by proposed closures, without regard to their political party, Principi said. The commission has taken pains to do its work in the open, including scheduling Saturday’s hearing, so there would be no suggestion that it’s being swayed by political factors, but “when the stakes are this high, things are said,” he added.

While granting Florida’s request for a hearing, Principi said the panel will not pursue suggestions from Texas and North Carolina officials, who said bases in their states might provide an alternative to Oceana. The panel respects the Navy’s desire to keep the master jet base near the coast, a factor that rules out a move to Texas, he said, and the Carolina offer would require splitting Oceana’s jets between two bases, an undesirable step.

Principi said Saturday’s hearing will let commissioners examine the truth of claims by Florida officials that the kind of encroachment that has impeded operations at Oceana would not be a problem at Cecil Field.

The Florida base was ordered shut by the 1993 BRAC Commission as the Navy moved to consolidate its East Coast tactical aircraft operations at Oceana. Virginia officials have argued that skies crowded with commercial aircraft along the Florida coast limited Cecil Field’s usefulness, but Principi noted that before the closure the Defense Department actually judged the Florida base’s military value higher than Oceana’s.

A former secretary of veterans affairs, Principi is no stranger to high-pressure lobbying – veterans organizations are widely considered some of the most powerful on Capitol Hill – but he said he has been surprised by the tenor of some appeals to and attacks on the BRAC Commission.

“I understand the anxiety, the fear that these issues bring,” he said. “I knew this was going to be tough. ... This has turned out in some ways to be even tougher” than running the VA.

Delegation: Pentagon savings estimates may be high

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
August 15, 2005

Members of the South Dakota delegation put forth another argument for saving Ellsworth Air Force Base Monday, saying the Pentagon’s projected savings from closing the base could be too high.

The Base Closing and Realignment Commission will hold a final round of meetings next week, and commissioners will decide whether to keep Ellsworth and other targeted bases on the Pentagon’s list of closures. The list is then sent to Congress and the president for up-or-down approval.

According to The New York Times, most of the commissioners say the department may have overstated the projected savings - estimated at almost \$50 billion over 20 years - by nearly 50 percent.

Eight of the nine commission members expressed concerns about the accuracy of the Pentagon figures and have ordered their staff to conduct a savings analysis before next week's final votes, the newspaper said.

A majority of the commissioners told the Times that they agree with a July report from the Government Accountability Office, Congress' investigative arm, that concluded much of the projected savings over the next 20 years would come from cuts in military jobs that simply would be reassigned to other places.

Democratic Rep. Stephanie Herseth of South Dakota said Monday the Pentagon analysis "creates a misleading sense of savings."

Sen. Tim Johnson, D-S.D., said: "If we are closing bases to save money, we must be sure the savings aren't based on accounting gimmicks."

The state's other senator, Republican John Thune, said he, too, has deep concerns about the Pentagon's figures.

"You have to ask yourself, is it really worth all of the dislocation and havoc caused by closing some of these bases right now," Thune said.

Thune has pushed legislation that would delay the process.

Eighty percent of the Pentagon's proposed savings come from 10 percent of the recommendations, the Times said, including from Ellsworth.

But Thune argues that savings from closing the base, located in Rapid City, would have a low rate of return since Ellsworth will be more expensive to close than any other base.

The Pentagon estimates it will spend \$299 million to shut the base down and will save \$1.9 billion from Ellsworth over the next 20 years. That is less savings than is expected from other bases - realigning Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska, for example, is expected to cost \$141 million and save the Pentagon \$2.8 billion.

If the savings are overstated, Thune said, Ellsworth "becomes even less of a plum" for the Pentagon.

Pentagon spokesman Glenn Flood defended the Department of Defense's analysis.

"We stand by what we said," he told the Times.

The delegation has also argued that consolidating all of the nation's B1-B bombers could be a threat to homeland security. Under the Pentagon's plan, Ellsworth's 29 planes would join the rest of the fleet at Dyess Air Force Base in Texas.

Atkins Opposes BRAC Listing for Navy Broadway Complex

City News Service (San Diego, CA)

James R. Riffel

August 15, 2005

Deputy Mayor Toni Atkins spoke out today against a proposal to place bayfront property owned by the Navy, and slated for redevelopment, on a list of base closures. At a news conference at City Hall, Atkins said the city and the Navy could redevelop the Navy Broadway Complex, along Harbor Drive south of Broadway, themselves. Plans for the series of buildings call for mixed-use office and retail development, along with office space that would be retained by the Navy. The chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, Anthony Principi, toured the facility 10 days ago and said it could be placed on the BRAC list in order to spur the redevelopment. However, such placement would include language that gives the Navy time to arrange a lease to a developer, Principi said. The land, which Principi called "magnificent," has been targeted for redevelopment since 1987, but nothing has

happened. Atkins, who became the city's top elected official when Mayor Dick Murphy and former councilman Michael Zucchet resigned, said she met Friday with Rear Adm. Leendert Hering, commander of Navy Region Southwest, which is headquartered at the complex. "The city and the Navy would benefit more by sticking with the (1987) development agreement," Atkins said. The city would lose control of the redevelopment if the property went through the BRAC process, she said. Principi has said the property would be sold outright if the Navy could not reach a lease agreement within a certain amount of time. The complex is the only one in San Diego County slated for possible closure. Commissioners will vote on a final list of proposed closures on Aug. 24 and submit a report to President Bush by Sept. 8, Principi said. The proposals need congressional approval before the president signs off on the closures. BRAC officials said the San Diego property has an estimated value of \$135- \$200 million.

Hope for Ingleside renewed as BRAC officials plan visit

San Antonio Express-News (San Antonio, TX)
Sig Christenson
August 15, 2005

Three base closure commissioners will visit the Coastal Bend this week as South Texas leaders prepare to make their case for taking over a Navy pilot training mission that could save Naval Station Ingleside.

Hope is rising because closing Master Jet Training Base Oceana in Virginia could bring 8,000 jobs to the Texas Gulf Coast. The 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission is considering a Pentagon recommendation to shut down the Ingleside facility, the home port of the Navy's minesweeper operations.

But while Ingleside boosters say they can make their case, there are no guarantees because of opposition from the Navy and a powerful senator.

"The stakes are very high," said Gary Bushell, a consultant to a group trying to save Ingleside. "This would ensure a major Navy operational presence, and not just a training presence but an operational presence in Texas for as far as the eye can see."

Confidence, too, is high among coastal leaders as retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Sue Ellen Turner arrives Wednesday for a fact-finding tour of the Corpus Christi-area base, a visit she said must be made before voting on the base's fate.

Those hoping to win her support say South Texas has an area seven times the size of Rhode Island, 18,000 nautical square miles of sky unfettered by commercial jets.

They see Naval Air Station Kingsville as a natural home for Oceana's flight training mission and Ingleside, a deep-water port with new facilities, as the perfect place to host a carrier.

The region's quality of life and cost of living are Navy-friendly, they say, and Gov. Rick Perry is offering \$ 365 million worth of inducements to win over the mission.

BRAC put Oceana, in the Norfolk-Virginia Beach, area, on the closure list July 19 after raising concerns about the base's viability as a site for aviator training.

At the time one commissioner, retired Army Gen. Tom Hill, raised the possibility of moving Oceana's assets to South Texas. Hill and the commission's chairman, Anthony Principi, have both toured Ingleside.

Backers of Ingleside, put on the BRAC list with Red River Army Depot in Texarkana and San Antonio's Brooks City-Base, have argued the facility is needed to defend the state's maritime traffic and heavily industrialized Gulf Coast. Ingleside and Red River are home to 7,700 jobs that are major drivers in their economies.

Former Corpus Christi Mayor Loyd Neal said Oceana's addition to the closure list last month was "an opportunity for these communities and the state of Texas to really step up."

San Patricio, Kleberg and Nueces counties, along with a number of cities, have raised more than \$ 400,000 to commission a research project -- due out shortly -- that promotes Kingsville NAS as Oceana's understudy.

Commissioners have since visited Oceana and Cecil Field, a Jacksonville, Fla., facility closed in a previous BRAC. It isn't clear if they will tour Kingsville NAS. The commission will meet next week listening to Pentagon leaders and presentations from Florida and Virginia.

A final vote on the fate of 41 installations now on the BRAC list is set for Aug. 24-27. An agenda outlining votes on specific bases has not been firmed up.

"There's a lot of people in the Oceana area who are unhappy not only with the noise but also the crowded conditions around the airfield," BRAC Commissioner Turner told the San Antonio Express-News. "The Navy has indicated that they would like to find a suitable replacement for it and they've looked, but they haven't found what they want yet."

Development around Oceana troubles the commission and has opened the door for Ingleside. Principi said Navy instructor pilots and students complained about flight restrictions, noise abatement procedures and lack of realistic training due to development.

Principi, a former Veterans Affairs secretary, recently learned nearly 200 residential buildings are approved for development in "accident-potential zones" around the base. One of the region's biggest malls sits at the end of an Oceana runway.

"In addressing these questions we must all, every one of us, remember that every day we send young men and women to sea wearing wings of gold," Principi said. "They accept an obligation to place their lives on the line for us, and we have a reciprocal obligation to them to ensure that they get the best training possible, not unnecessarily limited by artificial or unrealistic complaints."

If Ingleside backers are heartened by those words and a second visit to the region since the Pentagon released its BRAC list May 13, they also know closing or even realigning Oceana isn't a slam-dunk for practical and political reasons.

The Navy's chief, Adm. Michael G. Mullen, conceded concerns about development around the base, but he also told the commission Oceana is ranked fifth of 23 Navy air stations in military value.

He said there are no alternatives to the base, warned the Navy couldn't move the mission by BRAC's 2011 deadline, and that closing Oceana would drain funds needed for fleet upgrades.

Perhaps an even bigger obstacle is Sen. John Warner, R-Va., chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

At the Aug. 4 BRAC hearing, both Warner and Mullen defended Oceana, according to former White House Chief of Staff Leon Panetta. Warner said the Pentagon views Oceana as "the most suitable option," a view also held by Mullen, who has just taken over the Navy's top job.

Principi and other commissioners have insisted they won't rubber-stamp the Pentagon plan and early on rebuffed Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's admonition to leave the original BRAC list unchanged.

They made their point by adding Oceana and seven other facilities to the BRAC list last month and also challenged Rumsfeld's call for sweeping changes in the structure of Air National Guard bases -- which has drawn widespread outcry in some states.

Panetta, co-chairman of California's effort to blunt this year's BRAC, suggested the politically savvy commissioners are aware of Mullen's relationship with Warner.

The panel is a mix of military and political figures, among them retired Air Force Gen.

Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton, former Reps. James V. Hansen, R-Utah, Rep. James H. Bilbray, D-Nev., and former White House chief of staff Samuel K. Skinner, who served under the first President Bush.

Turner said encroachment at Oceana is a serious issue the Navy must resolve but added it's too early to know what the commission will do.

But she also said a new facility should have good airspace, a deep-water port to handle carriers, and a complex of bases with relatively new office, housing, and medical and recreation outlets.

She compared her Ingleside sojourn to one this summer to Red River, which she praised as a key cog in the war effort.

"I was fascinated with Red River and how they could tear everything down and basically crank out essentially a new vehicle," explained Turner, 63, of San Antonio. "I would never have understood what Red River was all about if I hadn't gone there."

Texas, however, apparently wasn't at the top of the list as Oceana options.

Commissioners initially looked at Moody AFB in Georgia. It fit the Navy's need for good airspace and is close to the Atlantic, but the Air Force doesn't want to give it up.

Former Air Force Secretary F. Whitten Peters said the Air Force has made a substantial investment in Moody, home to A-10 Warthogs and Security Forces troops critical to the war.

A member of Virginia's BRAC task force, Peters said while encroachment is a serious problem, particularly at Fentress field, Warner and the Navy are looking at an alternative site in Virginia.

Building a new master jet base would cost \$ 2 billion, he said, adding that the Navy isn't interested in South Texas because it's too far from the East Coast fleet.

But the Coastal Bend has gambled on the hunch that commissioners can be persuaded to trump the Navy.

Texas Military Preparedness Commission Chairman William Ehrie points to one of its big strengths -- some of the nation's best airspace.

Dick Messbarger, executive director of the Kingsville Economic Development Corp., said there are virtually no commercial air routes over South Texas and that pilots would fly over 3 million acres of ranch land.

Corpus Christi, Kingsville and Ingleside can house many missions, community advocates say, and have better weather and a lower cost of living than the Virginia Beach area or Jacksonville.

But there are hurdles.

Kingsville, population 25,500, is too small to absorb thousands of new residents. The base's runways are virtually identical to Oceana, but there are questions about ramp space for parking planes. At least one new hangar would have to be built.

Still, South Texas advocates have gathered data showing community assets within 45 minutes of the base, which opened in 1942.

Perry's incentive package "has singularly improved the odds" for the region, Messbarger said, while encroachment likely will force Oceana's closure in the future.

"The uniqueness of South Texas can't be replicated along either coast, East or West, or the Gulf of Mexico," he said. "So if you don't begin using the excess capacity in South Texas now, it may not be there in the future."

Estimate to close sub base \$400M off
 Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)
 Ray Hackett
 August 16, 2005

The Government Accountability Office has determined the Navy overestimated the long-term cost savings of closing the Groton submarine base by \$400 million.

The "error" was discovered after a further review of the Defense Department cost factors related to Groton. It was reported Aug. 10 to independent Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission Chairman Anthony Principi.

David Walker, comptroller general of the United States, noted in the letter the Navy did not use accurate figures in determining its cost analysis of the base closure and miscalculated the number of billets -- civilian and military positions -- to be eliminated in its initial calculations.

"Our analysis showed that the 20-year net present value savings decreased from \$1.6 billion to \$1.2 billion, and the pay-back period increased from three to four years," Walker wrote.

The GAO called into question some of the Pentagon assumptions in its initial July 1 report to the BRAC commission. The closer look at the Navy's projections regarding Groton came as a result of BRAC commission questions during a July 18 hearing in Washington.

The latest discovery of flawed projections comes as the commission nears the beginning of its final deliberations next week, and amid strong criticism from commissioners over Pentagon savings projections that appear inflated. In a New York Times interview during the weekend, eight of the nine commission members said they don't trust the Defense Department projections and would rely on the commission staff's independent review of the Pentagon data.

"These findings by the GAO are yet another independent confirmation that the Pentagon's numbers simply don't add up," U.S. Sen. Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn., said Monday.

Connecticut officials contend closing Groton will result in a 20-year net loss to taxpayers of \$640 million.

Maine lawmakers welcome new report from commission

Blethen Maine Newspapers (Blethen, ME)
Bart Jansen
August 16, 2005

WASHINGTON -- Maine lawmakers said Monday they welcome a published report that said members of the base-closing commission are skeptical of the Pentagon's savings estimates for closing Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and reducing Brunswick Naval Air Station.

Mainers have criticized the Defense Department's estimates as "erroneous" and "faulty."

"I am pleased that the (base-closure) commission is wary of the Defense Department's cost-savings estimates in this base-closing round," said Sen. Olympia Snowe, R-Maine.

Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine, called the concerns helpful, although he warned that it isn't clear what savings estimates the commission might develop instead.

"If the commissioners understand that the savings numbers have been inflated, it undermines the Pentagon's case for closing some of the bases they have put on the list," Allen said.

On Sunday, The New York Times quoted eight of the nine members of the Base Realignment and Closure commission as questioning the Defense Department's projected savings of nearly \$50 billion over the next 20 years. The article suggested those savings estimates could be 50 percent too high and noted that the commission itself will analyze savings.

The Pentagon defended the military analysis and said the commission would receive a detailed explanation. The commission invited Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to testify before

final deliberations begin Aug. 24 on which bases to close.

The commission must decide by Sept. 8 whether to close 33 bases and reduce 29 others nationwide. Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Brunswick Naval Air Station and the Defense Finance Accounting Service office in Limestone are among those the commission is considering closing.

But even if Maine loses its 7,000 jobs, the work performed at all three bases would be shifted to other locations. Commissioners have questioned the savings because jobs account for the bulk of military costs, and, in many base-closure cases, the jobs would simply move elsewhere.

"These are arguments that the Maine and New Hampshire delegations have been making all along," said Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine and a member of the Armed Services Committee. "And the fact that questions related to cost savings of closing Maine's bases are being asked by nearly every BRAC commissioner is evidence that our arguments are resonating."

Portsmouth, which specializes in submarine maintenance, is rated the most efficient among the Navy's four shipyards. Few Mainers are expected to relocate to other shipyards in Virginia, Washington state or Hawaii if Portsmouth closes.

But the military and the commission both refused to consider closing Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard in Hawaii instead because of that base's strategic location and its versatility in handling aircraft carriers. Shifting Portsmouth's workload would fill gaps at the other yards, making them more efficient, according to top Navy officials.

Moving Brunswick's surveillance aircraft to Florida, as the Pentagon recommends, would add three hours of flying time to cover the same missions, whether over the North Atlantic or to the Middle East.

In addition, Mainers complained that part of the Pentagon's savings estimate came from cutting

maintenance staff that will be reduced even if the planes don't move. The cost of maintaining the next generation of aircraft will be paid by the manufacturer rather than the Navy.

While the Pentagon recommended removing the planes from Brunswick while holding on to the property, the commission is studying whether to close the base entirely to save more money.

For accounting offices, the Pentagon seeks to consolidate 26 offices, including Limestone, into three. But Mainers contend that Limestone should add jobs rather than lose its office because of the dedicated work force and rent-free space.

Evidence grows that Otis closure may violate law

New Bedford Standard Times (New Bedford MA)

August 16, 2005

As it gets closer to September when the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission is expected to issue its report on base closings to President George W. Bush, the number of holes in the Pentagon recommendations are increasing.

The most significant hole involves the closure recommendation for Otis Air National Guard Base and two dozen other Air National Guard units around the country.

The deputy general counsel for BRAC has written an internal memo stating that it may be illegal for the commission to shift Air Guard units without the consent of Congress. And governors from two states slated to lose Air Guard units, Pennsylvania and Illinois, have filed suit in federal court contending that states' rights would be violated by the closure or realignment of units without state consent. Air Guard units come under joint state and national control.

Although he is on record against the closure of Otis and realignment of its 102nd Fighter Wing, Gov. Romney should consider joining with the

governors of Illinois and Pennsylvania in this important lawsuit aimed at stopping the Air Guard closures.

The closure of Otis would also hurt the Coast Guard's ability to operate from the shared base on Cape Cod. This in turn would endanger New Bedford's and New England's entire fishing fleet, which depends on the Coast Guard for life-sustaining search-and-rescue missions on the high seas.

Another major hole was revealed recently when several analysts reported that the Pentagon had underestimated the costs of closing several bases and overestimated savings.

But the most significant flaw in the recommendation about Otis is that it ignores the importance of the Air Guard for homeland security in one of the most populated, coastally exposed areas of the country.

Otis is what one Base Realignment and Closure commissioner called the fighter unit on "the doorstep to the Atlantic." It makes no sense to eliminate our easternmost sentry.

Opinions/ Editorials

BRAC process hits bump: Are the savings there?

Macon Telegraph (Macon, GA)
Cal Thomas
August 16, 2005

It was Friday the 13th - a day back in May when some areas collectively exhaled while others couldn't catch their breath. It was the day the Base Realignment and Closure Commission released its list of bases to be shut down. While Robins Air Force Base didn't make the list, 800 other bases, including Fort McPherson in Atlanta, Fort Gillem in Forest Park, Naval Air Station Atlanta and the Naval Supply Corps School in Athens did.

Now the nine-member commission charged with delivering a final list to the president by Sept. 8 are having some misgivings about Pentagon

estimates of savings once the bases are closed, consolidated or realigned. The Pentagon notched the savings at almost \$50 billion over 20 years, but the Government Accounting Office released a report, according to The New York Times, questioning the Pentagon numbers. The report said 47 percent of the savings were from military personnel cuts who would just be reassigned to other bases. "This could create a false sense of savings available for other purposes," the report stated.

David Walker, the comptroller general, said in testimony before the commission, "Unless you end up reducing overall head count or the average compensation levels for the applicable positions, there are no net dollar savings for military personnel."

The Pentagon is standing by its figures, but the BRAC is not depending on either the Pentagon's or the GAO analysis. It's conducting its own cost-saving study.

This disagreement in savings lies at the core of what base closing is about. The last four, in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995, produced savings of \$29 billion through 2003, according to the Times. The chairman of base closing commission Anthony Principi, said, "We're going through this effort to save money from excess capacity to modernize forces. If the savings aren't there, and it costs money to do this on top of all the economic upheaval, why are we doing this?"

That question may give some communities hope they will be able to hold onto their bases. Several states, during commission visits to the effected areas, are saying the projected savings aren't there. Massachusetts officials said it would cost \$163 million over the next 20 years to close the Otis Air National Guard base, not save the \$336 million projected by the Pentagon.

The clock is ticking. By Nov. 7, the president and Congress have to accept or reject the base closure list. Any hitches in the process can create either bring hope or despair, and while RAFB is not on this list, anything can happen if BRAC 2005 is derailed.

For a while last week, some Crawford County residents might have wondered if somehow they had inadvertently been caught up in a "The Dukes of Hazzard" script, complete with stand-ins for Jefferson Davis "Boss" Hogg and Sheriff Roscoe P. Coltrane. Only in this case, Crawford residents were having to contend with the antics of three of their leading citizens: Sheriff Kerry Dunaway, County Commission Chairman Harold "Doug" Spillers and County Administrator Sandra Smith. And in the end, the sheriff emerged as the winner, with the county commission agreeing to extra funding for his office and a commitment from the county to address its substantial debt.

Looking back, here are some of the events that transpired. At week's start, Sheriff Dunaway arrested County Administrator Sandra Smith and charged her with letting her horses run loose. This arrest, she says, was politically inspired. The sheriff, however, says he's had 26 complaints over the past three years about her horses roaming other people's ranges. Then, a little later into the week, County Commission Chairman Spillers accused Dunaway of harassment. He allowed that the man with the badge announced to county employees that the commissioners' office had released their names, Social Security numbers and birth dates in what could lead to their becoming victims of identity theft. There apparently was no evidence this actually occurred.

Spillers said the information released involved an open records request about county employees' health insurance and did not reveal sensitive information. The sheriff, he said, was trying to hurt him politically, to which the sheriff countered, "That's an absurd statement."

As for Ms. Smith, she had the added problem of being charged with eight misdemeanor counts of having malnourished horses, a condition she said was mostly caused by randy stallions trying desperately to keep other horses away from the mares.

Disagreements were being resolved, however, and the consent decree signed by county

commission members Friday will help some county finances and sheriff's office expenses, but it won't increase the tax rate by more than three mills, officials allowed. Now, if they can just solve the horse problem.

No one knew who Cindy Sheehan was before she decided to camp out in front of President George W. Bush's Crawford, Texas ranch demanding the president talk to her. Sheehan is an angry, upset woman, and I don't mean that in a negative way. Sheehan lost her 24-year-old son, Casey, in Iraq in April 2004.

By instinct, mothers guard their children. They defend them even when they've done terrible wrong, so you can see why the motherly protective engine went into overdrive in Sheehan's case. Casey was only trying to do his duty when he lost his life.

What would Sheehan have to say to the president if they talked, though I doubt they will. There are too many political minefields for Bush to entertain the pleas of one grieving mother. More than 1,800 Americans have died in Iraq, so what makes Sheehan special? What can Bush say that he hasn't said?

According to news reports, Sheehan wants to ask Bush, "What is the noble cause my son died for? And if the cause is so noble has he encouraged his daughters to enlist?" And, she said, "I would be asking him to quit using Casey's sacrifice to justify continued killing, and to use Casey's sacrifice to promote peace."

Yes, Sheehan's a Democrat and a so-called "Peacenik." While some have tried to imply there are political motives to her siege of Bush's ranch and charged that she's undermining the mission and troop morale, Bush and his people understand the fragility of the situation. Bush said Thursday, "she has every right in the world to say what she believes. This is America. She has a right to her position."

Sheehan's position is simple, and Bush hasn't budged. He said, "I thought long and hard about her position. I've heard her position from others, which is: Get out of Iraq now. And it would be a

mistake for the security of this country and the ability to lay the foundations for peace in the long run if we were to do so."

So who's right? Is it Sheehan for wanting U.S. involvement in Iraq to end now, or Bush for staying the course he's set for the nation?

Both are right.

I'm sure if Bush could, he'd withdraw all 145,000 plus troops tomorrow, giving Sheehan exactly what she wants. But we all know he can't do that. It's not even an option. That alternative disappeared as soon as our troops crossed the border from Kuwait into Iraq in March 2003.

When former Secretary of State Colin Powell compared Iraq to a pottery barn, "you break it, you bought it," he could not have been more right. We've broken it, and now we have to put it back together. Unfortunately, Iraq may be more like Humpty Dumpty than we would like.

Some pundits have encouraged Americans to stop looking at the changing reasons for going to war: WMDs, spreading democracy, ousting a dictator, and focus in on what America has to do now.

In some respects they're right. America has screwed up, we know that, and now America is stuck trying to build a nation that, by some accounts, doesn't want to be rebuilt with a "Made in the U.S.A." tag attached.

Sheehan has come to represent the feelings of many Americans, particularly those who are grieving as she is. Some have joined her protest while others are watching quietly from the sidelines. And there are those in Crawford who have come to protest Sheehan's protest.

I can't decide for anyone else, particularly a mother, if this fight in Iraq is worth it. Is it a noble cause? We do know the soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice are noble. The other troops who have left their families and crossed an ocean to fight are certainly noble and brave. However, that does not make the reasons given for getting in this fight noble.

Can you have noble soldiers fighting for the wrong reasons? Of course we can, and history is full of examples. This latest illustration remains on the fence. No one can yet predict how Middle East history will change because of our Iraq adventure. We do know the lives of the dead and wounded, civilian and military, are forever changed. We know it's a legacy Cindy Sheehan, and the president, wish they could alter. Charles E. Richardson's columns appear Tuesday and Sunday. He can be reached at crichardson@macontel.com or 744-4342.

There are many valid reasons why President Bush should not meet again with Cindy Sheehan, the mother of Casey Sheehan, who was killed in Iraq. There is one reason he should, and that reason trumps the others.

Yes, such a meeting would set a bad precedent, because it would say that all one has to do to get time with the president is to stage a protest in August during the slow news cycle and one can enjoy a privilege available to few Americans.

Yes, Cindy Sheehan has become a tool - and a willing one - of the far left which is unrelenting in its criticism of the president and his policies. She dominates the Michael Moore Web page, which urges more people to show up at the president's ranch in Crawford, Texas, so they can be on TV and have their pictures in newspapers. The Moore Web site carries her daily rants, most of which are about her own "feelings" and the "insane war." She calls herself a "progressive liberal."

Yes, the president can wait her out. She has said she is staying until he either sees her or he returns to Washington.

Yes, the media would love to have her meet with the president in private. It would duly record her predictable statement that he was insensitive and uncaring and that he did not respond to her concerns or complaints. It would be a well-choreographed attack on the president.

Here's the reason he should meet with her, but not alone. Other relatives of dead and wounded

soldiers and some of the soldiers, themselves, should be included. He might also invite a few Iraqis who support the effort to free a people long held in bondage by Saddam Hussein and who face new bondage under the totalitarian dictatorship of Islamofacism if this effort fails.

The president should hold the meeting in a public place. Let the criticism flow, but let Iraqi women tell their stories about rape and torture at the hands of Saddam's now-dead sons. Allow Iraqi men to tell about life under Saddam and how grateful they are that he is gone. Wounded soldiers and families of the dead would speak in support of the war effort. Members of Sheehan's own family could come. They posted a letter on the Drudge website in support of the president.

President Bush is hearing Cindy Sheehan from behind a protective wall of security at his Crawford ranch. He addressed reporters last week, saying he sympathizes with her loss and knows she feels strongly about her position and "she has every right in the world to say what she believes. This is America."

The president passed her in a motorcade on the way to a political fundraiser, prompting Sheehan to hold up a sign that read, "Why do you make time for donors and not for me?"

A meeting with her among many would help dilute her political objective and allow other voices to be heard. It would also reinforce the president's position that withdrawal before Iraq is stabilized would do irreparable harm to American interests, Middle East stability and ultimately cost many more American lives as terrorists and fighters claim victory over the United States and feel emboldened to continue their terror campaign to establish one theocratic state after another.

Let Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld preside at the gathering. He is the most articulate member of the administration when it comes to defending the reasons we are in Iraq. Let the president answer respectful, even challenging questions. Americans would appreciate a president who would risk putting himself in

rhetorical harm's way when our soldiers are in far greater danger.

The case for creating peace and stability in Iraq is a good one, but it needs to be made repeatedly because of short attention spans, bad memory and the boldness of the left, which thinks it has found the president vulnerable.

Go and meet again with Cindy Sheehan, Mr. President, but this time not in private and not alone.

Additional Notes

N/A