

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

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BRAC chairman: Encroaching development poses serious problem for Oceana

Marine Corps Times
Gordon Trowbridge
August 17, 2005

The chairman of the independent base closings commission is defending — in sometimes pointed language — his panel's scrutiny of the Navy's major East Coast fighter base, in response to criticism from the powerful head of the Senate Armed Services Committee. In a letter dated Monday and released late Tuesday, Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission Chairman Anthony J. Principi rejected claims by Sen. John Warner, R-Va., that the panel is violating the federal base-closings law by scheduling a hearing Saturday

on the possibility of closing Naval Air Station Oceana, Va., and moving the base's fighters to Florida.

Last week, Warner accused the panel of exceeding its authority by planning to allow Florida officials to testify in support of reopening Cecil Field, near Jacksonville, Fla., which would reverse a decision in 1995 to close that base. But Principi said the hearing, scheduled for Saturday, is vital to address the effect of encroaching development that has curtailed training at Oceana.

"I believe you share my view that there is no higher military value than the safety of proficiency of America's uniformed young men and women, in this case the naval aviators our nation sends in harm's way," Principi wrote to Warner.

The letter catalogs a series of concessions the commission has made to Warner and other Virginia officials, including what Principi terms an "unprecedented" request from Warner to allow Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Mullen to testify at an earlier hearing on Oceana's future.

And it repeats Principi's concerns that despite Navy requests, the city of Virginia Beach has allowed development that limits important flight training and could put the lives of Navy crews at risk. Principi included in the letter a series of articles from a Norfolk newspaper outlining a history of community decisions to allow development near Oceana over Navy objections.

The letter adds to the contention between the commission and a lawmaker who will be key to ensuring Congress does not reject the closings list.

Warner, one of Capitol Hill's most influential lawmakers on defense issues and an avowed supporter of the base-closings process, has emerged as one of the commission's toughest critics. He has called the Pentagon's plan to move thousands of defense workers out of leased offices in Northern Virginia a violation of the base-closings law he helped create. And he

has been sharply critical of the panel's decision, in July, to add Oceana to the list of bases considered for closing.

Navy officials have said the service's preferred solution to the Oceana problems is eventual construction of a new fighter base elsewhere on the East Coast — something they could not complete in the six-year timeline required by the base-closing process.

Those statements, and the commission's apparent determination to examine every possibility to close Oceana, may have spurred local officials into action. On Tuesday, Virginia Beach officials announced plans to buy a beachfront site near Oceana planned for ocean-view condominiums — a project approved in 2003 despite opposition from the Navy.

City and state officials also said they planned to establish a fund to buy land near Oceana and the base's outlying landing field, starting with \$4.4 million and growing over 20 years to more than \$160 million.

Saturday's hearing, which will include testimony from Florida and Virginia officials, will come four days before the panel begins its final deliberations and votes on the closings recommendations. Tuesday, the commission announced it will begin those sessions Aug. 24 in Arlington, Va., just outside Washington.

National News Articles

Connecticut Lawmakers Say Base Closing List Could Be Rejected

CQ Today

Anne Plummer

August 17, 2005

Connecticut lawmakers, rallying against the Pentagon's recommendation to shutter the state's New London submarine base, said Wednesday they believe there might be enough dissatisfaction in Congress with the base-closing process that lawmakers could reject the final list.

In a conference call with reporters, the lawmakers said that rejection of President Bush's final Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) list — while unprecedented — should not be ruled out as a possibility because of the growing dissatisfaction among lawmakers with the BRAC process.

Bush is slated to deliver his list of proposed base closures on Nov. 7. The recommendations become final in 45 legislative days unless Congress passes a joint resolution of disapproval. Even then, Bush would have to sign the resolution — which he almost certainly would not — or the closings would proceed.

“Though I'm not counting on it, I think there's a real chance Congress will rise up against these recommendations,” said Democrat Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman.

“I think there's a bigger likelihood than there has been before that the list will be rejected,” added Democrat Sen. Christopher J. Dodd.

The independent BRAC commission is slated before the end of August to decide which military bases it will include on its list of facilities recommended for closure or realignment. It has until Sept. 8 to send its list to the president.

The Pentagon unveiled its own list in May, targeting 33 major bases for closure, 29 others for realignment and hundreds more for one or the other.

The New London submarine base was on the Pentagon's hit list, representing the biggest single job loss of proposed closures. The move would kill more than 7,000 military jobs and 950 civilian posts.

Also targeted was the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine, whose shutdown would affect more than 200 military jobs and 4,000 civilian jobs.

Rep. Rob Simmons, R-Conn., said he too was cautiously optimistic that Congress might reject the president's BRAC list, despite the failure in

May to amend the House version of the fiscal 2006 defense authorization bill (HR 1815 — H Rept 109-89) to delay the BRAC process. The amendment was rejected 10-47 by a show of hands during the Armed Services Committee mark up of the bill.

“But I think there's growing frustration,” Simmons said. “I'm certainly prepared to vote against the whole list if I have the opportunity,” even if New London is spared. “I don't like this process.”

The politically charged process has been far from smooth. Charging that the Pentagon was relying on flawed analysis and keeping pertinent information from Congress, Lieberman and Republican Sen. Susan Collins of Maine in June signed a subpoena requiring the Defense Department to turn over documents related to its BRAC recommendations. And in the latest wrinkle, Sen. Olympia J. Snowe, R-Maine, put a hold on Gordon England's nomination to the Pentagon's No. 2 position because of his role in signing off on the Pentagon's recommendation to shutter Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

Lieberman said Wednesday that the mood in Congress “ranges from increasingly skeptical to downright opposed.” There are so many flaws in the process and analysis that “Congress may be ready to rise up and defeat this whole package,” he said.

But given the power the president holds to force implementation of a final BRAC closure package, opponents are unlikely to prevail in the end.

Many members of Congress say the process is painful, but necessary to save money on unnecessary infrastructure. According to the Pentagon, the closings and realignments would result in a net savings of about \$49 billion over 20 years.

If allowed to move forward, the process is anticipated to take place over six years, starting next year.

BRAC deliberations scheduled to begin later this month

The Associated Press State & Local
August 17, 2005

Final deliberations by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission will begin Aug. 24, officials with the commission said.

The nine-member commission will decide whether to approve a Pentagon proposal to realign the Rock Island Arsenal and many other bases during its deliberations, which are scheduled to span four days in Crystal City, Va., a suburb of Washington, D.C.

"The commission has had a myriad of data to review and analyze, and during this period, will be making its decisions in the best interest of our country and in accordance with BRAC law," Chairman Anthony Principi said in a statement.

The panel has held hearings, visited bases and heard from communities fighting for their bases for the past three months. That includes meetings with representatives of the Arsenal, which would lose about 1,600 jobs under the Pentagon plan.

Recommendations that evolve from the deliberations, which are likely to be shown on C-SPAN, will be presented to President Bush by Sept. 8.

The president and Congress make the final decision.

Dodd, Lieberman: Congress Unhappy With BRAC Process **Panel's recommendations could be rejected, they say**

New London Day
Anthony Cronin
August 18, 2005

The state's two senators said Wednesday that there is growing discontent in Congress with the federal base-closing process, which has marked the Naval Submarine Base in Groton for

shutdown, and hinted that lawmakers might reject the Pentagon's list of closings and consolidations.

"We're on the verge of a congressional uprising here," said U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., during a media conference call with members of the state's congressional delegation and Gov. M. Jodi Rell. Both Rell and the delegation also expressed cautious optimism that the independent base-closure commission will overturn the Pentagon's proposal to close the 90-year-old submarine base when it meets next week.

"The mood in Congress toward this BRAC ... ranges from increasingly skeptical to downright angry," Lieberman said. "We're at war right now, and though I'm not counting on it, I think there's a real chance that Congress will rise up against these recommendations."

Lieberman's comments were echoed by U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., and U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, who unsuccessfully offered an amendment opposing the BRAC process this year. Both Lieberman and Dodd also have supported Senate efforts to postpone the base realignment and closure, or BRAC, process, citing national security concerns and the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Pentagon in May first proposed shutting the submarine base and moving its 18-submarine fleet and related commands to bases in Kings Bay, Ga., and Norfolk, Va. The Groton submarine school, the nation's first, is slated to move to Kings Bay, the home to the Navy's large Trident nuclear submarines. The federal Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, which is the independent agency charged with reviewing the Pentagon's proposals, will meet next Wednesday through Saturday to hold final hearings where it will announce its decisions concerning base shutdowns or consolidations.

The Groton shutdown is the largest proposed by the Pentagon. Once the BRAC panel reaches its final decisions, it must forward them to

President Bush by Thursday, Sept. 8. The president has the right to send the list back to the BRAC commission for further refinements. According to BRAC officials, the president has until early November to certify the closure and realignment list and then send it to Congress.

Congress would then have 45 days, excluding its recesses, to come up with a resolution of disapproval if it disagrees with the list. But BRAC officials have said that the president still has veto power over any such resolution.

Dodd said he was surprised by the growing discontent within Congress with the base-closure process, saying there was a short period of time to react to the Pentagon's proposals to close or consolidate bases. The Pentagon first announced its list on Friday, May 13. The 2005 BRAC process is the fifth since it began in 1988. The last round of base closings and consolidations occurred in 1995.

"I would never have said this 10 years ago," Dodd said, "but I think there is a greater likelihood than ever before that Congress might decide to reject the BRAC recommendations entirely."

Dodd, Lieberman and Simmons said the roughly four-month period that communities had to respond to the Pentagon's detailed proposals gave them a too-tight schedule to prepare defenses against shutdowns or consolidations.

"What the Pentagon has done is comparable to a death sentence to Subbase New London and all the other facilities," Lieberman said.

Simmons said he supported efforts this past year in the House of Representatives to postpone the BRAC process because of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. "I think there's a growing frustration and aggravation over this process, and I certainly am prepared to vote against the whole list should I have the opportunity — even if we're successful in taking the (Groton base) off the list," Simmons said.

During a wide-ranging interview with local and national reporters, Rell and the delegation said

they were buoyed by efforts to overturn the decision to close the Groton base, citing flaws and errors in defense officials' analysis to close the submarine facility.

"Closure of this center of military excellence makes no military sense. It's a risk to national security, there's no savings to closing the base and the costs are much greater than estimated," she said. Rell said the relationship between the Electric Boat submarine shipyard and the nearby submarine base could not be replicated if the Navy were to shut down the base. She also said the Navy has spent about \$200 million over the past decade on base improvements, with a majority of those funds — \$120 million — invested over the past five years.

"A decision of this magnitude with an impact so far-reaching makes no sense in this current global security environment," Rell said.

BRAC: End steps Panel begins final deliberations on GFAFB Aug. 24

Grand Forks Herald
Elisa L. Rineheart
August 18, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission begins its final deliberations Aug. 24.

The panel of military analysts that will decide whether to approve a Pentagon proposal to realign Grand Forks Air Force Base will open a four-day session at 8 a.m. Aug. 24 in Washington, D.C. The session, which ends Aug. 27, is open to the public, BRAC officials said Tuesday.

The deliberations mark the end of a nearly three-month review process of military installations around the country.

"The commission has had a myriad of data to review and analyze, and during this period, will be making its decisions in the best interest of our country and in accordance with BRAC law," Chairman Anthony Principi said in a statement Tuesday.

Each installation that has been proposed for closure or realignment, including Grand Forks, will be voted on, said Robert McCreary, BRAC deputy director of communications.

The commission will consider the installations it added to the list first, McCreary said.

In mothballs?

Pentagon recommendations released May 13 called for 36 of Grand Forks Air Force Base's 40 KC135R Stratotankers and 80 percent of its personnel to be reassigned to other bases around the country. The Defense Department recommended mothballing most of the facilities on base and keeping 10 percent operating, said Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D.

"My expectation is that that would change because it does not square off with what the Air Force wants for Grand Forks," Dorgan said.

Dorgan said there's no way of knowing what the final resolution will be. But he said he's optimistic.

"I hope the results are positive and they give Grand Forks an opportunity to keep a significant military presence," he said.

Base retention leaders have been trying to convince commissioners to retain at least one of the base's four tanker squadrons.

If realigned in its entirety, Grand Forks and surrounding areas would lose nearly 5,000 direct and indirect jobs by 2011. That's 7.4 percent of North Dakota and Minnesota's economic area employment, Pentagon officials said.

Three outcomes

As it enters the final leg of the BRAC race, Grand Forks faces three possible outcomes, McCreary said.

The commission could uphold the Pentagon's recommendations to realign the base.

It could vote against it and maintain the current mission.

Or it could propose a partial realignment, he said.

Rep. Earl Pomeroy, D-N.D., said the possibility of Grand Forks being removed from the realignment list - and keeping all its tankers - is slim.

"It's unlikely we'll continue to have four tanker squadrons," Pomeroy said. "I think it will be realigned somewhat because of the UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) mission coming to Grand Forks."

If the commission voted to retain the entire tanker mission, the base wouldn't have enough facilities to sustain both operations, Pomeroy said.

He said the base could be turned into a "warm spot," open but mostly inactive, for some time.

"You could conceivably be left without much of a mission," Pomeroy said. "We've been concerned about that, but the Air Force has assured us that they have robust plans for Grand Forks."

Dorgan disagrees.

"The Air Force has made it very clear that it doesn't intend to put the base in warm status," he said.

Happy Hooligans

Talking about the future of Fargo's 119th Fighter Wing, Pomeroy said that he hasn't received any indication that the commission plans to remove language in the Pentagon report that could prevent the "Happy Hooligans" from receiving a new flying mission when its aging F-16 fleet retires in 2007.

But he said he believes the commission will vote in favor of bringing a follow-on mission to Fargo.

"Things look promising," Pomeroy said. "But as you know, North Dakotans don't bank on their crop until it's in the bin."

The final BRAC report is due on the president's desk by Sept. 8.

The president has said he would accept the BRAC recommendations. He must forward the approved list to Congress for approval by Nov. 7.

Local News Articles

Ellington Air Field to get squadron of unmanned aircraft

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Houston, TX)
Wendy Benjaminson
August 17, 2005

A squadron of the unmanned aircraft used to ferret out Saddam Hussein will soon be based at Ellington Field, supplying officials with a bargaining chip to keep in place a fighter wing that has been recommended for transfer.

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission has recommended that the 147th Fighter Wing, which includes about 15 F-16s, be eliminated. Local, state and congressional officials have been fighting the recommendation.

"We hope we're sending a message to BRAC that this is a facility that has a more important role," Gov. Rick Perry said Wednesday.

The squadron's arrival will mean 450 new jobs at Ellington, an increase of about 50 percent, Perry said.

Perry and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Sugar Land, said the squadron of Predator Unmanned Aerial Vehicles will need some F-16s to go after targets that the Predators find.

The Predators can stay in the air for 24 hours at a time and be piloted from the ground or by satellite with a crew consisting of one pilot and two sensor operators, said Lt. Col. Chip Webb.

A Predator controlled by satellite from Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada helped U.S. soldiers find and capture Saddam Hussein in December 2003.

The Predators would be used to patrol the Port of Houston, the petrochemical industry and patrol the border for illegal immigrants, the officials said. Once they find a target, the Predators can either call for the fighter jets or fire missiles, Webb said.

The squadron "will ensure Ellington Field remains a vibrant, irreplaceable part of this country," DeLay said. The aircraft "have become synonymous with the technological ingenuity that has made American the strongest nation on Earth."

Training has already begun and the planes will arrive next summer, officials said, estimating the squadron would be fully operational by 2009. In the beginning, the Texas Air Guard will share support duties with the Arizona Guard.

While the Pentagon decides the state that squadrons such as the Predators will be based, Perry said it was up to him which Texas base would get the squadron.

DeLay noted that even if "the worst happened," and the 147th Fighter Wing was eliminated, a few F-16s and their crews and support personnel would remain at Ellington to work with the Predators.

While Perry said it was unclear what the Predators' role would be in securing the inland borders, DeLay suggested they would be used to find and capture illegal immigrants.

Perry said the Predators would largely be used to bolster homeland security, protecting ports, refineries and major cities.

But he added, "If they can be used to track those coming in to the U.S. illegally, I'm all for that."

Wednesday's announcement was the latest action by Perry to fight the recommended base closings in Texas.

Last week, Perry offered the Pentagon a \$365 million incentive package to create a Navy Master Jet Base in the South Texas Coastal Bend region.

Officials in Texas' Coastal Bend are fighting BRAC's recommended closure of Naval Station Ingleside. Perry said the jet base could bring 250 aircraft and thousands of military and civilian personnel to the region.

EB president: Repair jobs on the line in BRAC decision

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (New Haven, CT)

Matt Apuzzo

August 17, 2005

The president of submarine builder Electric Boat said Wednesday that he will consider moving more than 1,500 repair jobs out of Connecticut if the submarine base in Groton is closed.

If the Base Closure and Realignment Commission approves the closure next week, John P. Casey said it's unlikely the Navy would send submarines to Connecticut for lengthy repairs and upgrades.

"I'd have to make a decision to either discontinue that line of work or attempt to uproot and relocate the business to where the work is," Casey said during a conference call with Connecticut politicians Wednesday.

U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., said closing the base could jeopardize the long-term future of Electric Boat, which employs about 8,600 workers in Connecticut and 2,100 in Quonset Point, R.I.

Casey said the company likely would keep its shipbuilding operations in Connecticut and Rhode Island even if the base closes because the Navy doesn't buy enough submarines each year to make it sensible to invest in a costly move.

Casey estimated that 1,500 to 2,200 Connecticut employees work on submarine repairs.

"If the Navy decides to move the location of the sub force, we as a business have one primary customer and that's the U.S. Navy. We'll do what we have to do to support the Navy," he said.

Since the Pentagon announced its intention to close the submarine base this spring, EB officials have been guarded about the company's future plans.

Wednesday's comments seemed to support Gov. M. Jodi Rell's prediction that the base closure would double southeastern Connecticut's unemployment rate. Economists have said the closure would cost the state billions of dollars.

Rhode Island officials also are concerned about EB's uncertain future. On Wednesday, company officials contacted the Rhode Island Economic Development Corp. to discuss the possible base closure, said Jeff Neal, a spokesman for Rhode Island Gov. Don Carcieri.

"The governor would be gravely concerned if Electric Boat intended to move its operations from Connecticut," Neal said. "That type of move would obviously have a significant impact on Rhode Island."

Rell, who was on the conference call with Casey, said she was not surprised by the news.

"We knew and know if this base would close, there would simply be some ramifications," she said.

That argument, however, won't be enough to save the submarine base. By law, the nine-member BRAC commission must make the military value of each base the key factor in the decision.

Supporters of the base, including several retired submarine admirals, have repeatedly argued that closing the base will make the U.S. more

vulnerable, as countries such as China increase their submarine fleets.

"We'll survive the loss of the base in Connecticut. We're talented people," Dodd said. "But we'll not be able to recover as a country."

Veteran submarines have said that the country should maintain a fleet of 50 or more subs. Some Navy projections predict the force will dwindle into the 30s.

Dodd and U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-Conn., have said that by closing the base, the Pentagon is trying to avoid a congressional debate on the future size of the submarine fleet. With fewer piers available, they say, their fleet must shrink.

U.S. Sen. Joseph Lieberman said Wednesday that Congress is on the verge of an uprising against the BRAC process but he and his colleagues stopped short of predicting that Congress would overturn the final closure list.

National Guard chief reveals realignment plan

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Oklahoma City, OK)
Tim Talley
August 17, 2005

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A proposed realignment plan for the Oklahoma National Guard calls for closure of 53 local armories and six maintenance facilities and construction of seven new Armed Forces Reserve Centers across the state, Oklahoma's adjutant general said Wednesday.

Maj. Gen. Harry M. Wyatt III said the plan would relocate more than 3,711 Oklahoma guard members and their units to new regional reserve centers for training "and remove them from the outdated facilities they are currently using."

The plan was developed along recommendations by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission concerning active-duty military bases as well as demographics, the Army's emphasis on a modular unit concept and the cost of upgrading and maintaining the state's older

armories, some of which were built in the 1930s and '40s, Wyatt said.

"This program will change the course of the Oklahoma Army National Guard and get our soldiers into some really nice facilities that are strategically located to better serve our state and our soldiers," Wyatt said.

If implemented, Wyatt said the recommendations would leave the state with a total of 39 armories and reserve centers.

Wyatt said Gov. Brad Henry and state lawmakers have been briefed on the realignment plan. Henry said he plans to view it in greater detail in the coming weeks.

"It is important to update and retool the state's military so that Oklahoma and its soldiers will be prepared to handle the changing missions of the years ahead," Henry said.

The plan calls for the new reserve centers in Norman, Muskogee, McAlester, western Oklahoma City, Broken Arrow and on Vance Air Force Base and Fort Sill Army Post. The new reserve centers would cost more than \$243 million and would be funded with money from the BRAC process, Wyatt said.

The new reserve centers will resemble the multiple-use facility in Sand Springs that opened in 2003 and houses both Oklahoma Army National Guard units and Army Reserve units, Wyatt said.

Construction of the Vance, Norman and McAlester centers is projected to begin in 2007 and take about 18 to 24 months. The remaining sites would begin construction in 2008 and 2009.

Wyatt said the realignment proposals are preliminary and must withstand federal scrutiny before they are implemented.

"Bottom line, this is a very fluid process and nothing is certain until the BRAC Commission's recommendations are approved by the President and Congress," Wyatt said.

Officials: Job-Shift Plan Made on Flawed ; BRAC Gets Letter Defending Operation at Wright-Pat

Dayton Daily News (Dayton, OH)
August 17, 2005

BOSTON -- Members of Ohio's congressional delegation argue in a letter to the Base Closure and Realignment Commission that a recommendation to move Wright-Patterson jobs to Massachusetts costs too much and was made during a flawed deliberative process.

The letter, signed by Sens. Mike DeWine and George Voinovich, and Reps. Mike Turner, David Hobson and John Boehner, all Republicans, opposes the proposed movement of the Development and Fielding Systems Group to Hanscom Air Force Base in Bedford, Mass.

The letter was sent Tuesday, barely a week before the base closure commission is to begin voting on specific Defense Department proposals.

It will be one of the last arguments the congressional delegation can make before the commission votes on the Wright-Patterson to Hanscom move.

According to the letter, the Wright-Patterson program procures, fields and provides technical assistance for automated business, logistics and management systems. The Defense Department proposes to merge it with Hanscom's C4ISR program -- command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

That work, among other things, helps airmen determine whether they've effectively taken out targets and provides communication with the battlefield. The Defense Department estimates the move will cost the Dayton region 2,250 jobs, including 988 contractor jobs.

Ohio lawmakers argue that with only 8.4 available acres for industrial use, Hanscom does

not have enough available space to accommodate the jobs.

They also say the costs will be higher than initially estimated because of the high cost of living in the Boston area, where Hanscom is located. Among the costs the Defense Department did not consider, they say, was the price of moving 1,412 contractor jobs from the Dayton area, Montgomery, Ala., and San Antonio, Texas, to Boston, which would increase the Defense Department's annual labor costs by \$33.7 million.

The group argues that a Defense Department task force that considered the base closure recommendations made the recommendation before fully figuring out the military value of it.

Finally, they say that a \$410 million Massachusetts proposal to beef up infrastructure at the base may have influenced the Defense Department recommendation. According to base closure guidelines, the Defense Department cannot make recommendations based on community proposals.

Turner, R-Centerville, has been most critical of the Massachusetts proposal and has said it attempts to turn the base closure process into a "bidding war" where communities that offer to spend money win military infrastructure.

But Alan Macdonald, executive director of the Massachusetts Defense Technology Initiative, the group that helped put together the \$410 million proposal, said the plan was never intended to create a bidding war. Instead, Massachusetts consulted planners who urged them to use available parking lots and add levels to buildings to maximize space. The result was a plan aimed at saving Hanscom from closure and showing the Air Force that Hanscom had room to grow.

"We have the deepest, most dense, most experienced technical workforce in the country," he said. "All we did as part of the (base closure) process was clear up perceived weaknesses."

Mass. contends 'no savings' in reassignment of 102nd wing

Upper Cape Codder (Cape Cod, MA)

Paul Gately

August 18, 2005

The Massachusetts Capitol Hill delegation claims the Pentagon used flawed analysis in determining a \$336 million cost savings over two decades by transferring the 102nd Fighter Interceptor Wing from Otis Air National Guard Base to installations in New Jersey and Florida.

U.S. Democratic Sens. Edward Kennedy and John Kerry, along with U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, D-Quincy, and Gov. Mitt Romney, took direct issue with the Pentagon's figures, saying there would be instead a \$163 million cost to taxpayers.

Mass Development presented its report about Pentagon recommendations to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission Friday after BRAC conducted a Capitol Hill hearing into Air Force rationale for realigning the Air National Guard across the country. A key part of the Massachusetts report centers on keeping the 102nd here.

"We have a good case, a great case," said William Burke of Mass Development. "There are no cost savings for what they propose. We have irrefutable numbers contesting the military recommendations. We used their models."

Delahunt said the new calculations about what it will cost to transfer the 102nd's F-15 aircraft indicated a "flawed process" followed by the Pentagon with national, if not international, implications.

"They can't say there are savings by moving a unit from one place to another," Delahunt said. "This is insanity. It's misleading to the American people. The DOD [Department of Defense] is creating a shell game. I think a very strong case has been put together on Otis."

Kennedy expressed optimism that BRAC and the Pentagon will agree with the Massachusetts

review of the military's estimated cost savings as they relate to Otis.

"The cost savings were the heart of the administration's rationale for closing Otis, in spite of the obvious disadvantage for national security," Kennedy said. "The new calculations make a strong case for retaining Otis."

Romney agreed. "The new calculations on cost savings are additional pieces of direct hard evidence that underscore the fact Otis should never have been on the list of recommendations for closure," he said.

Delahunt stressed homeland security, especially as it relates to the Coast Guard mission here, and national defense would be jeopardized by the change.

"Today we now have the hard evidence to also show that closing Otis provides the taxpayers with no real savings and will in the long run be far more costly to our nation," Delahunt said.

The "Save Otis" effort is at a crossroads. All eyes on and off the military reservation are trained on BRAC, whose final deliberations will begin the week of Aug. 22. Burke said BRAC has no "wobble room." The commission's recommendations to President Bush must be submitted by Sept. 8.

BRAC, however, does have some flexibility in its decision-making. It could, for instance, vote to close the New Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine with its submarine hunting P-3 aircraft and transfer the so-called "surge capacity" to Otis. Surge capacity is military jargon for the temporary authority to use a facility for staging aircraft in a mobilization exercise or assignment to combat.

Burke said there has been informal discussion at BRAC about the future of New Brunswick. Delahunt said there is no Massachusetts advocacy on the one hand about what will happen to the Maine installation. On the other, he said, the option cannot be ignored either given the possible change of mission at Otis.

BRAC analysts, meanwhile, are studying the Massachusetts contention that there will be no savings with the transfer of the 102nd flight mission.

Yard closure deadline looms

Portsmouth Herald News (Portsmouth, NH)

Jennifer L. Saunders

August 17, 2005

PORTSMOUTH NAVAL SHIPYARD -

Decision day is looming in the fight to preserve the nation's oldest shipyard from closure.

It has been three months since the Department of Defense announced the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard is among the military facilities slated to be downsized or disbanded as part of the Base Realignment and Closure Round.

Beginning Monday, Aug. 22, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission is expected to begin its final deliberations after weeks of information gathering and multiple visits by its members to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

Although the fate of the shipyard still hangs in the balance, a recent Associated Press report indicates the message local advocates have been sending is getting through.

The majority of the BRAC commissioners have indicated they believe the Department of Defense has overstated the projected \$50 billion in BRAC savings by up to almost 50 percent, according to an Aug. 15 report by The Associated Press.

Shipyard advocates used the Navy's own data to show how closing the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard would not save the Department of Defense money in a July hearing before the commission.

On Saturday, Aug. 13, shipyard supporters from across the Seacoast region gathered at Pease International Tradeport for a family picnic and celebration in support of the shipyard.

Among those present was Maine Gov. John Baldacci, who has joined New Hampshire Gov. John Lynch and members of both states' congressional delegations to advocate for the yard's survival as the BRAC review process has continued.

The Greater York Region Chamber of Commerce, too, has played an active role in the "Save Our Shipyard" campaign, attending hearings in Boston and Washington, D.C., as well as local events.

According to economic studies, the closure of the shipyard would mean a loss of more than \$13 million to York's economy alone.

Among the issues raised in the effort to support the shipyard is its efficiency as the lead yard in the Navy in the refueling and overhaul of Los Angeles class nuclear submarines.

As advocates have pointed out, the Navy itself honored the shipyard one day before the May 13 release of the BRAC list.

On May 12, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard received the Navy's Meritorious Unit Commendation for unsurpassed submarine maintenance - coming in under budget and ahead of schedule

Testifying before the BRAC Commission last month, shipyard advocates, two governors and two congressional delegations voiced one message: The Department of Defense deviated from the required BRAC criteria in recommending the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard for closure.

Among those deviations, according to shipyard advocates, is the fact that the Navy's own data indicates closing the shipyard would negatively affect the nation's other three public naval shipyards and its closure would require its three drydocks be replaced elsewhere at a cost of about \$500 million each.

With the deadline for the BRAC Commission to complete its own closure and realignment recommendations to President George W. Bush

set for Sept. 8, the local grassroots group known as the Seacoast Shipyard Association is urging residents to stay involved.

Information is available at the organization's Web site, www.saveourshipyard.org.

The BRAC commission is expected to send its recommendations to the president next week.

He must then decide by Sept. 23 whether to accept or reject the list in its entirety.

If the list is accepted, Congress will have 45 days to reject the recommendations or they will become binding.

Old Rivalry Reignites Between Cecil And Oceana

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)

Louis Hansen

August 18, 2005

The closing of Cecil Field Naval Air Station in 1999 left the taxpayers of Jacksonville, Fla., the owners of a mostly empty 60-year-old air base.

The city and its various public agencies have chipped away at bringing in new civilian development, spending \$133 million to reinvigorate the World War II-era installation. But now, after several years, the brightest prospect may be a returning tenant – the U.S. Navy.

Florida and Virginia leaders have reopened a battle over Cecil Field and Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach that dates back to the early 1990s. As Saturday's key hearing over the future of both bases approaches, each side is again touting the military value of their facilities.

It has become something of a grudge match.

The struggle has come with shifting arguments and even some shifting advocates. A one-time Oceana supporter, retired Adm. Robert J. Natter,

is now leading Florida's charge to reopen Cecil Field.

And in another irony, 12 years after a federally appointed Base Realignment and Closure Commission approved closing Cecil Field, a new BRAC panel is considering whether to reopen the base and move Oceana's fighter jet squadrons there.

In 1993, the Defense Department placed Cecil Field on its list for recommended closure, citing excess capacity at its East Coast air stations. Florida leaders argued strongly enough to BRAC members, whose job was to review the list, to persuade the federal commission to consider closing Oceana instead. Oceana won, eventually getting 10 squadrons from Cecil Field.

The intense arguments set the stage for the current rivalry.

Both bases hosted the most advanced Navy jets, sat near the coast, and were called vital pieces of Navy real estate and air space.

The commission believed that the Navy overstated the amount of interference by civilian air traffic into Cecil Field air space, and rated Cecil as having more military value than Oceana.

But after weighing all the issues, the commissioners were briefed on a secret mission supported by Oceana. They left the session convinced that the mission – and thus Oceana's aircraft – could not be moved from Virginia.

The Florida congressional delegation cried foul. U.S. Rep. Cliff Stearns, R-Fl a., said the delegation proved the Navy was wrong to back Oceana.

"When the Navy's back was to the wall, they threw that 'national security' trump card," Stearns said the day BRAC's decision came down. "It's like we're playing football and three minutes to the end of the game they moved the goal posts."

Charles Nemfakos, a retired Navy Department executive who oversaw the service's preparation for base closings in 1993 and 1995, recalled this week that leaders wanted to eliminate as much excess space as possible. Among the four air bases considered, closing Cecil Field cut the most extra capacity.

Although Cecil Field sits

15 miles from downtown Jacksonville, the Navy was concerned about commercial air traffic flying north and south over the field, he said.

Oceana scored high for its nearness to the fleet and was able to support future aircraft inventories, he said. Nemfakos works as a defense industry consultant, and is no longer involved in base closure issues.

After Cecil Field left federal ownership, part of it became Cecil Commerce Center. The city and redevelopment authority strived to recapture the loss of about 9,500 military and civilian jobs. So far, private firms and government contractors have created about 1,600 jobs, Jacksonville officials said.

Navy jets still fly into and out of the airstrip for maintenance by the defense contractors that lease hangar space. Tenants include The Boeing Co., the Department of Homeland Security and a collection of defense contractors.

Public funding added new runway lights for civilian and limited military use, fixed airplane hangars and aging road and drainage systems.

Its Navy retirement has also featured parts in two John Travolta movies, and as a parking lot for hundreds of private jets when the city hosted the Super Bowl.

Florida leaders recently disclosed that informal discussions about reclaiming Cecil Field for the Navy have gone on for several years.

The opportunity finally came in July when BRAC chairman Anthony J. Principi solicited an offer from Florida Gov. Jeb Bush to re-establish the base.

"To us, this is the Super Bowl without four years of planning," Michael Stewart, a spokesman for the Jacksonville Airport Authority, said this week.

Florida hired retired Adm. Natter, former commander of the Atlantic Fleet, to lobby for the state's interests – including Cecil Field – during this round of base closings. A group led by Natter received \$510,000 from the state last year, and gets \$50,000 per month, according to published accounts.

Before, Natter was a strong backer of Oceana and Navy efforts to establish a new outlying field in North Carolina to replace the Fentress Naval Auxiliary Landing Field in Chesapeake. The outlying field, the Navy has argued, is critical for pilots to practice aircraft carrier landings without urban interference.

In an October 2000 letter, Natter said the Navy needed a solution for the next 50 to 100 years when additional high-performance aircraft join the fleet. A new practice field in North Carolina could do that, he said, and emphasized Oceana's importance.

"Oceana and Fentress remain critically important to fleet safety and training and, along with an additional outlying field, would be used to ensure the combat readiness of our aircrews," he wrote.

Two years ago, Natter also urged the Navy to base eight of 10 new East Coast Super Hornet squadrons at Oceana.

But last week, Natter urged BRAC commissioners to replace Oceana.

"The population encroachment surrounding Oceana/Fentress has seriously impacted flight training for our young pilots and has seriously complicated the scheduling of flight operations, especially in support of carrier deployments," he said in written testimony.

The advantages of Cecil Field, he wrote, include its closeness to other military bases and bombing

ranges, rural location, and low cost to re-open. The state has offered to return the entire base to the Department of Defense.

Natter did not return a phone call to his office seeking comment Wednesday.

Virginia proponents of saving Oceana said Natter's argument flew in the face of the evidence.

"He is an officer and a gentleman and a patriot," said Robert Matthias, assistant to the Virginia Beach city manager. "I think he's put some of that aside for his current position."

Beach proponents say they expect to argue during Saturday's the hearing before BRAC that the Florida data are unreliable because they weren't produced by the Defense Department, as required by law.

Jacksonville officials say their redevelopment plan is working, but still want the Navy back.

Susan Wiles, a spokeswoman for the Jacksonville mayor, said the city has not figured out all the logistics of reopening the base.

"We're answering questions. We're hosting lots of people," she said. "Ultimately, someone will have to make a decision."

Opinions/ Editorials

BRAC series bogs down in middle; Could we get some new writers, please?

Dayton Daily News (Dayton, OH)
Martin Gottlieb
August 17, 2005

If you've seen one BRAC hearing, you've pretty much seen them all. If you want to see them all, they're on C-SPAN 2, the network that had to be created for the same reason that Charlie's Angels had to have a sequel: there was just way too much sex appeal to be contained.

In recent weeks, C-SPAN 2 has presented BRAC hearings about Ohio, Massachusetts, Arkansas, Texas, Colorado, Maine, Wyoming

(or Montana), Delaware, Saturn, Mercury and Jupiter.

The plot is formulaic: Good, knowledgeable, patriotic, polite Americans from each of these states in turn are pitted against a mysterious, absent villain. The villain is out to destroy the nation from within by undermining its defenses against foreign enemies, and by spending the most possible money to do that.

This villain is referred to - ironically - as the "Defense Department."

For those who are just tuning in: BRAC is the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, a group of blue-ribbon citizens. They have received from the Pentagon a long list of recommendations for moving various military operations. The alleged goals include reducing the total number of bases. These reductions will, the theory holds, save money and increase military efficiency.

The BRAC's job is to review these proposals and come up with its own list for Congress, whose job is to either approve the list in its entirety or reject it.

The grabber of viewers to C-SPAN 2 is this: every single recommendation that the "Defense Department" has made is profoundly harmful. Each one will do many forms of harm.

But the goal of grabbing viewers is undermined by the fact that even the subplots of these shows are all the same. In every one, it turns out that:

* 1) The "Defense Department" is violating its own supposedly official standards for deciding what should be closed and what should be left open. For example, every proposed change, it turns out, will not save money, but will cost money; and every proposed change will not improve national security, but weaken it.

* 2) The figures the "Defense Department" has come up with to rank the value of various operations are the results of formulas that have been absurdly designed or inaccurately calculated or both.

* 3) The "Defense Department" plan will punish the good people who care about the American military by moving operations away from their communities to other states where the people are much, much worse.

To the viewer, it seems perfectly obvious that all the presentations made to the BRAC are written by the same people and are dropped into the various episodes as complete modules.

(Every once in a while, an oddity is thrown in. Dayton-area Rep. Mike Turner argued that Massachusetts' effort to buy some Dayton-based work is out of bounds. That was novel. A writer must have been on vacation, replaced by somebody who hadn't been given the scriptbook.)

Some questions are left open in each episode. Just what, exactly, does the "Defense Department" have against truth, justice and the American way? Uncertainty about that is apparently designed to keep viewers coming back.

Another open question is this: Is it possible that the sameness of the presentations by the various states is misleading? Is it possible, in other words, that some of these presentations are actually right and some are wrong, and that some are partly right?

Clues are hard to come by.

If you're thinking, for example, that you might discern something by noticing who's present for the various presentations, forget it. The same people are always present: governors, senators, members of Congress, military experts.

The bipartisanship is apparently supposed to be heartwarming. People join together who, in other circumstances, portray each other as embarrassments to humanity.

But that warmth doesn't make up for the series' other dramatic problems. All things considered, this package is not a likely candidate for syndication.

True, much depends on the ending. There are various possibilities. One has the BRAC sorting through the monotonous presentations and treating the various cases one-by-one.

But that would seem out of keeping with the otherworldly ambience of the series to this point.

Another that is more popular with experts has the BRAC hiring Clint Eastwood to infiltrate the "Defense Department" to figure out what's up with those people. That would indicate that a second season is coming.

In season three, the BRAC concludes that the states and the "Defense Department" are in league to sow confusion, to create a situation in which nobody knows anything for sure and nobody trusts anybody. The goal would be to soften the country up for a foreign invasion.

So the BRAC decides to take over. When the writers named one of the commissioners Fig Newton, they must have been telling us to keep an eye on him.

Don't disable Air Guard

USA Today

Roger Lempke

August 17, 2005

The National Guard of the states supports the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. What we cannot support is using it for other aims. Take a look at the Army — the state commanders, known as adjutants general, have taken no action to overturn any of its recommendations. The Air Force, on the other hand, took a liberally broad swat that could permanently disable the Air National Guard and reduce governors' homeland-security capabilities.

Air Force recommendations that affect 73 Air Guard units account for only 5% of its \$14.6 billion total savings. Five states would lose all flying missions. But are facilities actually being closed as expected? Well, no.

Five Air National Guard locations are recommended for closure. Twenty-three locations would become enclaves where flying units are disbanded and aircraft moved, leaving small pockets of support personnel behind. Nearly 17,000 highly experienced aircrews and maintenance people in the Air Guard would face relocation decisions. The Air Force plan wouldn't reduce infrastructure so much as it would shift equipment around.

Beltway analysts contend the Air Guard needs to give up old aircraft. We agree. Air Force recommendations reduce the Air Guard force by 160 aircraft — 15%. But the programmed movement of aircraft among locations only serves to disrupt Air Guard personnel assigned to fly and maintain these aircraft. Over 70% will likely resign from the Air Guard rather than leave their communities. During a war with an uncertain outcome, when reserve component military personnel are needed most, the Air Force will lose its very best from military service.

Why not re-assign our militia airmen to new missions? We would love to. However, the BRAC timeline causes large gaps between when aircraft leave sites and new missions can be fielded, leaving uncertain futures for Air Guardsmen at these locations.

The majority of Air Force recommendations for the Air Guard simply move aircraft around for unsubstantiated efficiencies unrelated to BRAC. The adjutants general recently submitted recommendations to the BRAC commission that delete the program-related movement of aircraft while leaving closure decisions to the commission. We support BRAC. We simply want it done right.

Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, adjutant general for the Nebraska National Guard, is president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States.

How Political Is BRAC Decision Becoming?

New London Day (New London, CT)

August 18, 2005

Letters To The Editor:

I was at a meeting attended by Rep. Rob Simmons when the sub base closure was announced. I raised the question of politics in this decision. I was told that we shouldn't pursue that angle. Norfolk, Va., is fighting the closure of Oceana Naval Jet Base.

In the past few weeks, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush offered to give the Navy a base that was closed in the '90s outside of Jacksonville, Fla.; Texas has bid to take the jet base and Sen. Elizabeth Dole is pushing to re-align some bases in North Carolina to take these planes.

Not only did these offers happen in August, but the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission will hear the sales pitch, a move that Virginia Sen. John Warner condemns as illegal.

This, coupled with the delay of removing the aircraft carrier USS Kennedy from Jacksonville, Fla., makes one wonder about it being political. Does Mr. Simmons feel that the sub base going to Georgia is still not political?

Additional Notes