

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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Time Magazine

Douglas Waller, Rita Healy/Denver; Hilary

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August 29, 2005

Faced with base closings, towns are desperate to get off the hit list. Here's how they can adjust:

To hear the politicians and local leaders tell it, closing a military base is about the worst thing you can do to a community. Ever since Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld listed the 180 or so installations he wants shut down next, local anger and fear have simmered. Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman denounced the proposed mothballing of the naval submarine base at Groton as "cruel and unusual punishment," and state officials have churned out stacks of reports disputing the \$ 1.6 billion the Pentagon claims it will save from the move. At Maine's Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, thousands of workers shouting "Take us off the list!" have demonstrated before visiting members of a commission reviewing Rumsfeld's recommendation to do away with the facility. Faced with the shuttering of his state's second largest employer, Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota Senator John Thune wants to attach an amendment to this year's defense bill to delay all base closings.

It's probably too late. The nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which has toured the country since May to hear pleas from closing opponents in affected communities, plans to vote this week to approve or amend Rumsfeld's choices. Then Bush and Congress must accept or reject the commission's final list by late fall.

Is closing a base necessarily the economic catastrophe communities fear? The evidence suggests that it isn't. The Defense Department estimates that the areas surrounding the 97 major bases closed during the past four rounds (in 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995) have so far replaced almost 85% of the civilian jobs lost. An independent study released in May by the Government Accountability Office concluded that most of those communities "are faring well compared with average U.S. rates for unemployment and income growth."

Recovery takes time--five to 10 years in most cases--and there are hurdles and frustrations along the way. "But there is life after a base closure," says Tim Ford, executive director of the Association of Defense Communities, a nonprofit organization that has been advising cities and towns facing closings over the past 30 years. Here is how four communities have coped:

THE "AHA!" MOMENT

Austin, Texas, was at first staggered when the news arrived in spring 1991 that nearby Bergstrom Air Force Base was on the base-closings list. The 12th Air Force headquarters and two air wings at the 52-year-old facility would take almost 5,000 military and civilian jobs with them once they moved out, and that was projected to drain \$ 339 million annually from the local economy.

But at the same time city leaders "had the 'uh-oh!' moment, they also had the 'aha!' moment," recalls Kirk Watson, a lawyer and then community leader who later became Austin's mayor. As luck would have it, Austin was in the market for a new airport to replace the 63-year-old one the city had long outgrown. Bergstrom, with its 12,250-ft. runway, on which giant B-52 bombers could land, was ideal for the jumbo jets that carry the international air-cargo traffic Austin wanted to attract. So the city seized the opportunity, wading through mounds of federal red tape to have the base transferred to it and persuading reluctant airlines to relocate to a facility that would need extensive renovation for commercial traffic. A \$ 400 million local bond

referendum was passed to convert the base into a commercial airport, and federal and state money came in to build highways feeding into the facility.

Eight years later, city officials proudly stood on the tarmac of the new Austin-Bergstrom International Airport as Air Force One taxied up with Bill Clinton inside as one of the first arrivals. The terminal has special touches: Amy's Ice Cream and the Salt Lick Barbecue Restaurant serve local delicacies, and a stage in the concourse offers live music. The airport brings in \$ 1.8 billion annually and has created 35,700 new jobs. Bruce Todd, who was mayor in 1991, regrets the time the city initially wasted trying to fight the base closing. His advice to mayors facing what he did: "Leave the past behind" and "visualize the future."

THE LOWRY SHOWCASE

The picture in Denver and its eastern suburb of Aurora on Sept. 30, 1994, the day the flag was lowered for the last time at Lowry Air Force Base, was typical of what many communities see when their military facilities close. "We had a thousand empty buildings," recalls Tom Markham, executive director of the Lowry Redevelopment Authority. "We had abandoned runways. We had utilities that were old and in the wrong place." The pain of losing 7,500 civilian jobs at Lowry, where the Air Force had a technical training center, was compounded five years later by the closing of nearby Fitzsimmons Army Medical Center, which had 12,000 employees. Those two shutdowns, combined with the closing of the city-owned Stapleton Airport, left heavily urban northeastern Denver and suburban Aurora with 11 sq. mi. of land in desperate need of recycling.

Rebuilding was not easy. The Air Force was slow to turn over its property, and the environmental cleanup proved time consuming. But today Denver and Aurora proudly call that land Redevelopment Triangle. The two cities are 80% of the way toward their goal of creating 10,000 jobs there and filling the area with 4,500 homes and apartments, plus 2 million square feet

of offices, retail stores and restaurants worth \$ 1.3 billion.

The community, like others, "fought very hard to keep the base open," says Aurora Mayor Ed Tauer. "But once it became clear that the base would close, very quickly we shifted from mourning the loss to looking at the opportunity." In short order, local leaders organized a development group and agreed on a refurbishing plan, helped along by \$ 12 million in local, state and federal grants. "I don't think there's any doubt that the community is better off [than when the base was there]," says Markham. The Air Force, for example, paid no property taxes, which are currently collected on the new homes and businesses, and the military jobs that left paid less than the ones that took their place. The Association of Defense Communities sponsored a conference in Denver in June for representatives from more than 200 communities whose bases have closed or are about to close, using the Lowry redevelopment as a showcase for prospering after the military decamps.

ELVIS WAS HERE

Recovery can be easier for big cities like Denver and Austin, where millions of dollars can be generated locally to rebuild. About all Fort Smith, Ark., had in abundance was patriotic pride when the Pentagon announced 14 years ago that its Fort Chaffee Army post would be closed. Homes in the small city of about 85,000 at the Oklahoma border fly the American flag year round, and folks always welcomed the hundreds of thousands of young G.I.s who had trained at the post since the 1940s. (Elvis Presley got his first Army haircut there after being inducted in 1958.) Arkansas National Guard and other military reserve units still use about 66,000 acres of largely vacant land from the post for exercises. The remaining 6,000 acres, which contained much of the installation's main facilities, were turned over to a municipal development authority to convert to a residential and business community.

But what the city got was a collection of eyesores: about a hundred World War II--vintage barracks and buildings with asbestos in

their ceilings and yellow lead paint flaking from their walls. Most of the acreage has no water or sewer lines to support new buildings. Federal and local money to rebuild, plus add roads, has been slow to arrive; so far, only \$ 4.2 million has been spent. "Down here the land has no value because it has no real infrastructure," explains Sandy Sanders, executive director of the Fort Chaffee Redevelopment Authority. The vacant post, Sanders says, wound up being a "liability because of all the old stuff that needs to be taken care of."

But "we're finally making lemonade," Sanders adds. The post's stockade has been leased to repossession companies, and the municipal development authority rents storage space in the old motor pool for boats and recreational vehicles. A massage therapist, a Greek Orthodox church and the offices of a food-processing center moved into barracks that have been renovated with indoor plumbing, high-speed Internet access and central heating and air conditioning. Earlier this year, the first major industry arrived: Graphic Packaging Corp., with a 326,000-sq.-ft. industrial complex and 400 new jobs that will make up for 350 civilian positions lost when the Army moved. And to attract tourists, Barracks No. 803 will be restored to its original look. That's where Elvis got his pompadour clipped. Fort Smith's recovery may take a hit in the coming round of base closings, though. This year's proposal would spin off the 188th Air National Guard, an F-16 fighter wing situated next door to Fort Chaffee, to bases in Georgia and California.

BICKERING IN THE O.C.

For a community to bounce back quickly after a base closing, one thing is important: "Speak with one voice," says Patrick O'Brien, director of the Pentagon's Office of Economic Adjustment, which helps cities and towns rebuild when the soldiers leave. Irvine and the rest of Orange County, Calif., did not and instead spent 10 years and \$ 100 million on ballot initiatives, public campaigns and lawsuits fighting over what to do with El Toro Marine Corps Air Station.

The economic jolt to the Southern California county was negligible when the Marines decided in 1993 to move out their jets and pilots. Orange County has been a mecca for high-tech and biomedical companies. With a red-hot real estate market, the 4,700 acres the Marines left behind should have been scooped up quickly for development. But a feud broke out between regional leaders, who wanted the land to build a new international airport, and the city of Irvine, which preferred pricey homes and a massive metropolitan park. Irvine eventually won, and three years ago, the Department of the Navy, of which the Marines are part, auctioned off the land for \$ 650 million to a developer that will build what the county calls the Great Park.

Irvine is still about five years away from realizing its dream. The Navy has estimated that it will cost \$ 300 million to clean up the jet fuel and toxic cleaning solvents that seeped into the ground at the base. Larry Agran, Irvine's former mayor, isn't fazed. "We are talking about a plan for a metropolitan park three times the size of Central Park," he says. "In terms of the big picture, [the long fight will be] seen as very worthwhile." But the battle might not be over. The nearby city of Los Angeles, desperate for an overflow facility to relieve its overburdened LAX airport, has not ruled out a lawsuit that would force construction of an airport on the land.

Over the past four rounds of base closings, the Federal Government has spent \$ 1.9 billion to help communities recover. Congress this fall is expected to appropriate \$ 30 million as a first installment next year, with hundreds of millions of dollars more in subsequent years. But not every community ends up with a success story. Kittery, Maine, and nearby Portsmouth, N.H., might have a difficult time finding other jobs for the 2,300 skilled submarine-repair workers thrown out of work if the Portsmouth yard closes. That's why most local leaders have been focused on lobbying to get their town off Rumsfeld's list.

Yet, if history is any guide, they should be looking at life without the facility. Most commission members believe Rumsfeld is

overly optimistic about the savings he will get from the closings. But past commissions have endorsed 85% of the Pentagon's recommendations. "So even though [local leaders] are going to fight like hell to get off that list," says the Association of Defense Communities' Ford, "they should be thinking about a Plan B and putting together the pieces for it now."

BRAC Panel Approves 'Necessary' Closures

Marine Corps Times
Gordon Trowbridge
August 27, 2005

ARLINGTON, Va. — The chairman of the independent base-closings commission on Saturday asked Congress to authorize regular rounds of base closings, calling the process "necessary and healthy" despite political criticism of the process. Failing to authorize future rounds would "inevitably drag down our defense with the anchor" of unneeded or outdated facilities, Anthony Principi, chairman of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, said during the panel's final hearing.

Over four days, the commission approved hundreds of measures to close or shrink installations around the country. But it also rejected several large closings recommended by the Pentagon, including Submarine Base New London, Conn., Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Maine, and Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D.

The commission must formally submit its recommendations to President Bush by Sept. 8. The president can send the report back to the commission once to request revisions – though Bush has said he will not do so. Eventually, the president must approve or reject the list in total. It becomes law unless rejected by both houses of Congress.

Principi said the preliminary estimates showed the commission's plan would save the Pentagon about \$37 billion over the next 20 years,

compared to about \$49 billion under the Defense Department's original recommendations. The commission questioned much of the Pentagon's estimated savings, especially in the area of military personnel. Under the commission's tougher standards, its plan would save about \$14 billion, compared to about \$24 billion under the Defense Department recommendations.

Previous commissions had approved 80 to 85 percent of Pentagon recommendations. Calculating such a figure for this round will prove difficult, because many of the Defense Department's request were linked; Principi and another commissioner, retired Adm. Harold Gehman, said the commission hadn't calculated a figure.

But in several high-profile cases, the commission sided with community concerns over Defense Department reasoning.

"We did not flinch" from reversing Pentagon decisions the commission felt violated the legal selection criteria, Principi said. "Nor did we hesitate to identify and respond to problems ... we felt the secretary should have addressed but did not."

BRAC Panel Saves Flying Missions At Some Guard Bases

Air Force Times
Gordon Trowbridge
August 29, 2005

ARLINGTON, Va. — A plan approved late Friday by the independent base closings commission would leave aircraft at several Air National Guard bases scheduled to lose their flying missions under the Pentagon's proposals. The plan is an attempt to respond to four months of criticism over the Air Force's plan to remove aircraft from 22 Air Guard bases across the country. It maintains the presence of fighter jets in New England and in the Pacific Northwest, two areas about which members of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission had voiced concerns.

The plan also left in place several guard units without aircraft that the Defense Department would have disbanded.

The exact impact of some of the changes was unclear Saturday. To approve its plans, the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission approved a list of complex resolutions without public readings, and the commission staff had yet to place them on its Internet site.

As the commission was laying out its plan, a federal judge in Pennsylvania ruled in favor of that state's argument that federal law prohibits the federal government from changing National Guard organizations without state approval. Pennsylvania, Illinois and Tennessee all have challenged the Air Force plan on that basis.

The commission, aware of the ruling, continued with its deliberations, content to vote as it saw fit and let the courts sort out the legal arguments.

"We believe we're on very solid legal ground," said Commissioner Lloyd Newton, a retired Air Force general. "I'm sure if we're not that somebody will take us to court."

Saturday, the panel's chairman, Anthony Principi, said the commission had an obligation to move forward with its task and let the Justice Department defend the federal government's jurisdiction over the units.

In fact, units in several states that had been most vocal in criticizing the Air Force's recommendations – Pennsylvania, Texas, Massachusetts and Illinois – would still lose their flying missions under the commission's plan.

State adjutants general – the senior military officers in state National Guards — have accused the Air Force of making its changes without consulting them or their governors. The commission had asked the Air Force and Guard officials to work together to bridge what Principi termed "a chasm," but those talks accomplished little.

Newton, who helped craft the plan, acknowledged it likely would not satisfy everyone. He said that while the compromise plan was meant to answer many criticisms from states, the Air Force must be able to plan for a much smaller aircraft fleet.

"There are some who would say [the Air Force recommendations] did it about right," Newton said. "It is unfortunate that they did not share with everyone."

Among the bases from which the Pentagon wanted to strip aircraft: —Fort Smith, Ark., scheduled to lose its F-16 aircraft under the Pentagon plan, but with 18 A-10s under the commission's. Fort Smith was the ranked second among Guard fighter bases in the Air Force's military value rankings.

- Portland, Ore., scheduled to lose its 15 F-15 fighters and eight KC-135 tankers, would retain its F-15s, in what Newton described as a response to fears in the Northwest that the region would have no protection against air attack.

- Great Falls, Mont., scheduled to become a small base with no aircraft, would receive 15 F-15s. Retired Adm. Harold Gehman, also instrumental in guiding the commission's plan, called that move, too, a nod to homeland defense concerns in northern-tier states.

- Duluth, Minn., where 15 F-16s were scheduled to retire, would retain those aircraft, again a response to homeland defense concerns.

- Birmingham, Ala., which keeps eight KC-135s scheduled to move under the panel's plan.

- Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, N.Y., was scheduled to close, losing its National Guard C-130s and Air Force Reserve KC-135s. But the commission voted to assign eight C-130s to the base's reserve unit, and allow the National Guard wing there to remain and team up with reservists to operate those aircraft.

•New Castle Airport, Del., would retain eight C-130s under the commission's plan, reversing a plan to strip those aircraft.

Panel on Base Closings Wraps Up Work

New York Times

David S. Cloud

August 28, 2005

WASHINGTON, Aug. 27 -The military base-closing commission completed its work on Saturday, approving a huge retrenchment of the Defense Department's domestic installations after deciding in recent days to keep open more than a dozen sites that the Pentagon had said were no longer needed.

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Next Steps in Plan to Reduce the Military (August 28, 2005) The Base Closure and Realignment Commission approved the revised list in a half-hour final session, attended by five of the nine commissioners, after marathon deliberations over the previous three days in which members reviewed more than 800 bases the Pentagon wanted to close, shrink or assign new missions.

Much of the Defense Department's plan for closing or consolidating a record 62 major military bases and 775 smaller installations emerged from the review intact. But by opting not to close installations in Connecticut, Maine, South Dakota, Alaska and Michigan, and by saving Air National Guard units in other states, the panel cut into the savings that the Pentagon was hoping to achieve in this round of base closings.

The changes were a relief to communities whose bases had been on the original list and will help ensure a smoother reception for the plan in Congress, officials involved said. Although it was rarely acknowledged by the commission members during their final deliberations, their decisions had sweeping political and economic implications.

States where bases were spared could count on a continuing flow of federal money. States where bases were closing had to begin thinking about new ways to generate economic growth. Politicians unable to save a local base faced the possibility of a challenger in the next election charging that they lacked influence.

Anthony J. Principi, the commission chairman and a former secretary of veterans affairs, said the panel successfully balanced "proposals to restructure military infrastructure against the human and painful impact of those proposals."

The revised plan now goes to President Bush, who is expected to send it without changes to Congress. Despite the sweeping nature of the Pentagon plan, Congress is not expected to intervene to block it.

Among the controversial parts of the plan were proposals to shift Air National Guard units around the country, leaving some states without aircraft. Late Friday, the commission restored planes to some units, and in doing so, kept open some Air Guard and Reserve bases that would have closed under the Pentagon plan.

The Air Guard base in Schenectady, N.Y., saw the commission increase its complement of C-130 cargo planes to 10 from 6 in the Pentagon plan. In addition, the panel rejected a Pentagon proposal to close the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, leaving eight C-130's there rather than moving them to a base in Arkansas.

Explaining the decision, Mr. Principi said the base "is the second-largest employer in western New York."

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, a Democrat from New York who serves on the Armed Services Committee, claimed credit for helping to save the installation.

"I'm thrilled that the BRAC commission accepted the strong arguments that we made and reversed the decision to close the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station," she said in a statement, adding that the move "will preserve the

thousands of jobs that were jeopardized just a few short months ago."

Mr. Principi told reporters Friday night that changes in the Pentagon blueprint approved by the commission had reduced the estimated savings over 20 years to \$37 billion, from \$48 billion, though he called the revised number "very preliminary."

Base Closing Verdicts Yield Winners and Losers on Capitol Hill

The Washington Post
Shailagh Murray and Brian Falter
August 28, 2005

The first duty for members of Congress is to bring home the bacon. The second is to keep local military bases open.

Earlier this year, the Pentagon took stock of its real estate, and discovered 33 major facilities it no longer needs and 29 others that could be downscaled. But the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission, created to vet the process, gave a reprieve last week to some of the prominent sites that the Pentagon is targeting.

That's created some big winners in Congress. At the top of the list: Sen. John Thune of South Dakota (R), whose vow to protect Ellsworth Air Force Base was a major factor in his upset 2004 win over Senate Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle. The Pentagon had recommended closing Ellsworth, but on Friday, the commission took it off the list -- and possibly saved the freshman Thune's political career.

Another big winner is Rep. Rob Simmons, a Connecticut Republican whose district includes a major submarine base the Pentagon had targeted. Commissioners struck that one from the list on Wednesday. Democrats had considered Simmons a ripe target in the 2006 midterm elections, but Republicans rallied behind their colleague to help save the Groton base, including an appeal to the commission from House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.).

Sens. Olympia J. Snowe and Susan Collins of Maine get points for helping to spare Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. It also reduces the potential for mischief from the two moderate Republicans, swing voters on many major issues. But the commission voted 9 to 0 to close the naval station in Pascagoula, Miss., the home town of Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.). Lott and Rep. Gene Taylor (D-Miss.) could continue their attempts to save the base, or push for the speedy release of the highly attractive parcel of land it occupies, overlooking the Gulf of Mexico.

During three base-closing rounds in the 1990s, the commission approved about 84 percent of the Pentagon's recommendations. Early next month, it will send a revised list to President Bush, who will forward it to Congress -- which must approve or reject the list as a whole.

Grass-Roots Efforts Helped Save Bases

The Los Angeles Times
John Hendren and Mark Mazzetti
August 28, 2005

The independent panel charged with the closure list met with carefully coordinated -- and positive -- campaigns by locals and politicians.

WASHINGTON — Early each morning, the South Dakotans met in a Starbucks in the lobby of a suburban Washington hotel, then fanned out along two escalators and in the foyer of a meeting room two floors below.

From their strategic locations, Republican Sen. John Thune, GOP Gov. Michael Rounds and Democratic Rep. Stephanie Herseth buttonholed commissioners arriving, fresh from breakfast, to the final meetings of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission. For three days beginning last Wednesday, they sipped coffee and pleaded their case for removing South Dakota's Ellsworth Air Force Base from the Pentagon's list of doomed military posts.

By Thursday, Thune was a portrait of confidence.

"We have an idea about how some of these folks will come down," Thune said at the time. "We're hopeful."

His GOP colleague, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas, also had been working the floor Thursday, gauging whether Ellsworth's B-1 bombers would be sent to Dyess Air Force Base in her state. If not, she at least wanted to ensure that Dyess would not lose a fleet of C-130 cargo planes, as called for under the Pentagon's base closure plan.

When the decision came down Friday, sparing both Ellsworth and the C-130s at Dyess, Thune was ready for the cameras and Hutchison, apparently satisfied that the compromise outcome was assured, was absent.

The independent commission's process stood in marked contrast to the system the Pentagon used to craft its own list, as described by Defense officials. The Pentagon said its rigorous analysis was free of politics. Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said he had not discussed base closure with any governor or lobbyist, although Defense officials said several tried, including California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Once the Pentagon's process was over in May, its recommendations went to the base-closing commission, a high-powered group of former military and government officials, many with corporate experience. There, base advocates were again free to meet with decision makers — and they did it with enthusiasm. In many cases, their efforts ended with the bases being taken off of the Pentagon's hit list, proving to supporters what they had hoped for three months: that lobbying works.

By the time they choreographed their strategic efforts to bump into commissioners each morning, the South Dakotans had met privately with each of the nine commissioners, who were barred by law from gathering in groups of more than four outside of public hearings.

In June, Thune joined other local and state leaders in Rapid City, S.D., for a presentation to members of the base-closing commission, which

is known by the acronym BRAC. The commissioners were greeted by 6,000 to 8,000 South Dakotans rallying at Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, and were treated to a flag-festooned stop at Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

Locals had been lured by posters and banners around town reading: "Let's save Ellsworth. Attend the BRAC hearing."

"We've kicked over every rock," Thune said.

Having gone through the base closure process in the previous four rounds, lawmakers and lobbyists had closely studied ways to save their bases.

"While it is an independent process, it is not an isolated process. So it is certainly possible that someone like Sen. Thune had enough contacts around to know which way the commission was likely to go," said Jeremiah Gertler, a commission staffer during the last round of base closings in 1995 who is now a military analyst at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, a Washington think tank.

"Communities and politicians have gone to school on what works and what doesn't, on what kinds of information the commission wants and what it doesn't."

The saving of Ellsworth was one of several instances — each controversial and heavily lobbied — in which the commission rejected the Pentagon's recommendations to close a base. The panel also spared Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico; a Navy submarine base in Groton, Conn.; the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine; and others.

After several bases were removed from the Pentagon's base-closing wish list and a small number were added, the Pentagon's savings of \$48 billion over 20 years looked more like \$37 billion, commission Chairman Anthony J. Principi said.

Commissioners insisted that politics played no role, but some acknowledged that lobbying

ensured that many base advocates got their messages heard.

"Did it help us see all sides of the story?" Commissioner Philip Coyle said of the lobbying campaigns launched by base advocates. "It did. But I don't think itself that it led to any particular outcome the way some people would think. It's much more subtle than that."

When they reversed the Pentagon, members of the base-closing panel voiced disagreement with the Pentagon's assessments. In some cases, they disagreed with the Pentagon over cost savings estimates; in others, they were not ready to part with installations that had served U.S. interests so well for so long.

Portsmouth advocates said it was no accident that their base was spared from closure.

On May 13, when the Pentagon announced its base closure recommendations, Paul O'Connor gathered the stunned civilian employees at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and pledged a fight.

"I told them this is just the beginning of the process," said O'Connor, who heads the largest union at the southeast Maine shipyard.

In the weeks that followed, O'Connor and his team launched an offensive designed to win the hearts and minds of the base-closing commissioners.

O'Connor recalled proudly, "Every commissioner who came up to our shipyard voted to take it off the list."

When four members of the base-closing panel visited Portsmouth on June 1, about 8,500 residents — most wearing yellow "Save Our Shipyard" T-shirts — lined the nearby streets to greet the commissioners.

Instead of greeting the panel angrily, the throngs of shipyard workers cheered.

"[The commissioners] were totally taken aback by the size of the crowd and the demeanor of the crowd," O'Connor said.

That day, the base-closing commissioners listened to a presentation intended to prove that the Navy manipulated data to make its case to close Portsmouth.

Later in June, Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) — who was fighting to save the submarine base in Connecticut — subpoenaed thousands of Pentagon documents. Portsmouth's supporters sifted through the documents for any holes in the case for closing the shipyard to buttress their presentation, planned for a critical July 6 base-closing hearing in Boston.

On that day, residents of Kittery, Maine, and surrounding communities loaded into 60 school buses and drove to Boston to pack the Boston Convention Center, where the base-closing panel was holding its regional meeting.

When the BRAC commissioners walked into the cavernous convention center, more than 4,000 people in yellow T-shirts gave the panelists a standing ovation.

As O'Connor sees it, the decision to keep Portsmouth open proved that a massive grass-roots effort can be just as effective as inside-the-Beltway lobbying.

"On May 13, we felt betrayed," he said. "On Aug. 24, we felt vindicated."

The tactic was repeated in state after state, with mixed success.

In New Mexico, advocates for Cannon Air Force Base paid the high-profile Washington lobbying firm of Hyjek & Fix \$100,000 to help save the base. In the end, the base lost its aircraft but will be left open until at least 2009. The commission told the Air Force to study new missions that would keep the base open thereafter. New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, a Democrat, said afterward that he had met with every commissioner, often in their homes.

In West Virginia, the Pentagon had proposed moving eight C-130 cargo planes from a base in

Charleston. During a meeting last week, 87-year-old Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.) walked into the hearing room to show his concern over the Pentagon's plan. As he did, the commission's staff put up a slide showing that the planes would be restored under the commission's plan.

Not every state got what it wanted. The commission agreed to move leased offices near the Pentagon and issued a recommendation that would shutter Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach, Va., unless local and state officials cleared away encroaching development.

Virginia Gov. Mark R. Warner, a Democrat, testified at a hearing Aug. 20 but did not attend the final deliberations last week, leaving an overwhelmed Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf alone to face a commission demanding that the state, in the words of one commission member, "get its act together."

Making the decisions

The nine commissioners who make up the Base Closure and Realignment Commission:

Anthony J. Principi, chairman

Served as secretary of Veterans Affairs from 2001 to 2005; has been Republican chief counsel to the Senate Armed Services Committee and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee; 1967 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy

James H. Bilbray

Former congressman who served on the House committees on foreign affairs, armed services and intelligence; member of the Army Reserve from 1955 to 1963; law degree from Washington College of Law

Philip Coyle

Senior advisor for the Center for Defense Information and an expert on military research, development and testing; former assistant secretary of Defense for operational test and evaluation

Adm. Harold W. Gehman Jr.

Retired from the Navy after 35 years of active duty; last assignment was as NATO supreme commander for the Atlantic and commander in chief of the U.S. Joint Forces Command; graduate of Pennsylvania State University

James V. Hansen

A 20-year member of the House of Representatives from Utah who declined to seek reelection in 2002; served as a member of the Armed Services Committee; in the U.S. Navy from 1951 to 1955

Gen. James T. Hill

A 36-year Army career soldier who finished his service as commander of the U.S. Southern Command; graduated from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, and from the Command and General Staff College and National War College

Gen. Lloyd W. Newton

Served 34 years in the Air Force, finishing as commander of the Air Education and Training Command; is a command pilot with more than 4,000 flying hours; graduate of Tennessee State University and George Washington University

Samuel K. Skinner

Former White House chief of staff and secretary of Transportation for President George H.W. Bush; retired chief executive of USF Corp., a transportation and logistics company; member of the Illinois National Guard and Army Reserve from 1957 to 1968

Gen. Sue E. Turner

Retired from the Air Force after 30 years of active duty; was director of nursing services for the Air Force surgeon general; nursing degrees from Incarnate World College and University of Alabama

Source: Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

Analysis: Global Conflict Held Sway In Base Closings

USA Today

John Yaukey, Gannett News Service

August 28, 2005

ARLINGTON, Va. — The periodic military base closures that began as the Cold War was thawing have traditionally been done to cut costs, saving or skewering the occasional politician in the process.

But the latest round — the first in wartime and by far the largest — was notable for the themes that rose above the usual parochial and political concerns of saving jobs.

War in Iraq, China's rise as a naval power and terrorism weighed on the commissioners, who finished deciding late Friday which of the Pentagon's recommended base closures to approve, change or overturn.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission affirmed the vast majority of the 67 major recommendations it considered, including sweeping changes to the Army aimed at bolstering the war-weary force.

But the nine-member, president-appointed panel also showed no reluctance to depart with the Pentagon when it thought national security was being shortchanged. The commission rejected proposals to shut down two major naval installations and two Air Force bases and reconfigured contentious plans for the Air National Guard that the commissioners believed compromised homeland security. (Related stories: Cannon, Ellsworth spared | Shipyard, sub base saved)

"What you've seen here is a process driven by very serious security motivations," said Chris Hellman, a defense analyst with the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation and writer of a base closure newsletter. "These commissioners showed everyone they are not afraid of the Pentagon."

Pentagon officials staunchly defended the closure recommendations they released in May, but they have declined to comment in any detail on the commission's work.

That's not to say there wasn't the occasional whiff of political intervention. When Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, home of freshman GOP Sen. John Thune, was saved from closure, whispers arose that Republican powerbrokers had intervened. But a quick gaze at the BRAC map showed heavily Democratic New England was spared even more dramatically. (Related story: Panel denies political influence)

The commission kept 13,000 jobs in New England that otherwise would have evaporated.

Other communities weren't as fortunate. The closure of Fort Monmouth in New Jersey will eliminate more than 5,000 jobs.

Saving money was also part of the reason for this round of base closures. The Pentagon estimated its proposals would save nearly \$50 billion over 20 years, although commissioners and the Government Accountability Office thought that number was inflated.

Decisions to keep some major bases open will result in much lower savings.

The commission's best guess is that savings could be as little as \$14 billion or as high as \$37 billion. It will be up to federal auditors to recalculate it.

Worries of war

If the commission's decisions are approved by President Bush and Congress in the coming weeks, the consequences for Americans will start at the nearest Army Guard hall or Reserve center.

In one of its most far-reaching actions, the commission approved the Pentagon's plan to consolidate Army Guard and Reserve installations in more than 35 states so they'll be at or near active-duty bases.

For anyone thinking of becoming a citizen soldier, the message was clear: Prepare to train with active-duty forces because fighting alongside them overseas is now a very real possibility.

The Guard and reserves now make up about 40% of the roughly 138,000 U.S. troops currently in Iraq.

"There's no substitute for these (Reserve and active-duty troops) training alongside each other," said Commissioner Sam Skinner, former chief of staff to the elder President Bush.

The war was also clearly on the minds of commissioners when they blocked the closure of the Army's Red River Depot in Texas, which repairs Humvees and Bradley Fighting Vehicles, both mainstays in Iraq.

"With the nation being at war, this is not the time to be closing depots," Commissioner James Hill, a retired Army general, barked at a recent meeting.

The commissioners' decision to break with the Pentagon and keep open a major submarine base in New London, Conn., and a state-of-the-art shipyard in Kittery, Maine, was driven in large part by their desire to keep the Navy strong as a check against China's rapidly growing naval prowess.

"Strategically, the rise of Asia was very much part of our thinking," said Commissioner Lloyd Newton, a retired Air Force general. "You can't consider our naval capacity and not think about the developments out in the western Pacific."

All that said, one of the issues that dominated this round of base closures — the Pentagon's plan to redistribute and consolidate Air National Guard planes — brought the commissioners back to the regional fights over resources that have erupted in all of the four previous base closure rounds, starting in 1988.

The commission tried to put the Guard planes where they could best enhance the new mission

of homeland security, but the courts may do some editing of their work. Even before the vote, several states had already sued to stop the movement of their planes.

What's next

The commission's votes were the most dramatic part of the base closure process, prompting high-fives and wincing grimaces.

But it wasn't the end.

President Bush can either accept the commissioners' list of closures or send it back to them with recommended changes for one more review.

After that, Bush and Congress must accept or reject the list in its entirety, with no changes.

Congress can block the whole base closure process, but it would probably take a two-thirds majority in both houses — enough to override a presidential veto.

Congressional attempts to derail previous BRAC rounds have all failed.

Will Base Closings Sap Support For Military?

USA Today

Mark Sappenfield and Sara Miller, The Christian Science Monitor

August 28, 2005

WASHINGTON and BRUNSWICK, Maine — Almost as far back as Don Russell can recall, planes from the nearby naval air station have roared overhead, an audible assurance of security, especially since the Sept. 11 attacks.

Now that this Maine base has been designated for closure, however, "this is going to leave a tremendous hole," Mr. Russell says wistfully.

New England's experience is in many ways a barometer for the nation, as the military contracts into fewer and larger installations. Despite Wednesday's dramatic decision by the

Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) to keep open a shipyard in southern Maine and a submarine base in Connecticut, the region will have less military presence going forward than at any time in recent history. The concern is not so much one of security, but of society. (Related stories: Panel bucks Pentagon in shipyard, sub base save | Conn. town rejoices)

Some wonder whether the military, by leaving so many places where it has long been a part of the community, is setting itself up to become too remote from the very people it is charged with protecting. This changes the calculus on everything from defense budgets to recruiting and retention.

A looming disconnect

"As the military goes for fewer bases, there is an increasing disconnect between the military and the community," says Jeremiah Gertler of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

Those trends have begun to take shape in the Northeast, where a once-strong military presence has slowly ebbed — and recruiting lags behind every other region of the country.

The further erosion of the military industrial complex in the Northeast could accelerate the trend, leaving the region with little stake in the military, either culturally or politically.

"Down the road, in a period when we're not in great danger, it might be hard to muster congressional majorities for defense budgets," Dr. Thompson says. "The irony is that the military's effort to make [BRAC] decisions based on merit might be undercutting its long-term political base."

In Brunswick, for example, quite aside from the reassuring roar of planes overhead, far deeper connections include the local pride in a base that trained pilots for World War II and has since become the state's second-largest employer.

The station was a "thread in the fabric [of the community] for years and years," Russell says.

Yet there are valid reasons why the Pentagon would wish to flee the Northeast and consolidate its bases elsewhere, despite a tendency to read political motives into the Pentagon's actions, analysts say. (Related stories: Panel took on Rumsfeld | Plans anger GOP)

After all, with fewer bases, there are fewer installations to protect, and in moving south, the Pentagon is following the model laid out by private business — moving to where costs are lower and land is more plentiful.

In voting to overrule the Pentagon and keep open the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and Submarine Base New London, the BRAC Commission simply decided quality was more important than cost savings; the commission chairman suggested that both the shipyard and sub base were the premier facilities of their kind in the country.

The commission will send its final list to the president Sept. 8, and the president will then decide whether to forward it to Congress for an up-or-down vote.

Getting left bare

But these decisions resonate beyond skill sets and dollars and cents. To residents in places like Brunswick, there is a sense of being left bare. (Related story: Panel estimates \$35 billion less in savings)

"Every time the planes fly over our house, I feel safe," says Betty Sanford, sitting on the patio of a Friendly's restaurant near the base. "This will leave me without that good feeling."

The BRAC Commission rejected such safety concerns, saying that the Pentagon could use other airfields in the area if necessary. Likewise, experts suggest that Brunswick — and even the Portsmouth shipyard and Submarine Base New London — have limited strategic value, since the military is still shrinking after decades of cold-war growth, leaving the Pentagon with many more facilities than it needs.

"This is not just an industrial phenomenon, it's a recruiting and retention phenomenon," says Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute in Arlington, Va.

A democratic connection

And BRAC Commission chairman Anthony Principi told reporters as much after a hearing last month.

"It's important for our nation that our military and our society be close together," Mr. Principi said. "That's important for democracy. And it's important for recruiting. It's important for retention. It's important for building support for our engagements overseas."

Already, America is becoming less connected to its armed forces. Today, just 11% of American adults have had military experience — down from 20% in 1970. Today, 1 in 114 Americans is in the military. But at the end of World War II, the ratio was 1 in 12.

Fewer volunteers

In 2002, Rep. John McHugh (R) of New York told Congress: "Since far fewer people are recruited to serve in a voluntary military, the connection between America and its military is increasingly tenuous and less personal."

With the Pentagon now set to close scores of National Guard armories and other relatively small installations across the country, the Northeast in particular will offer a glimpse into how the departure of the military might reshape a community.

Says Thompson: "As time unfolds, we will see what it means to have very little stake in the military."

Local News Articles

Lawmakers Say They'll Work To Bring New Missions To Meridian Base

Picayune Item (Pearle River County, MS)
August 25, 2005

JACKSON (AP) - U.S. Sen. Trent Lott and Rep. Chip Pickering say they will work to bring new missions to Key Field Air Guard Station in Meridian following a decision by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to strip the base of all its refueling airplanes.

The decision Friday to remove nine mid-air refueling KC-135R Stratotankers from the 186th Air Refueling Wing in Meridian will result in the loss of 33 military jobs and 142 civilian jobs at the 1,100-employee facility.

It is the first time the commission has voted to close or realign Guard units. The move has already started a legal showdown in some states and Gov. Haley Barbour and other officials have not ruled out the possibility of taking legal action to protect Mississippi's Guard bases.

Meanwhile, Lott and Pickering will work to find other flying missions for Key Field, Lee Youngblood, a spokesman for Lott, said Saturday.

"This is unit has had a changing mission throughout its history," Youngblood said.

Lott said in a prepared statement that he was disappointed in BRAC's decision, but "I'm very pleased that they do recognize the important of keeping this facility open and I will continue to work with Congressman Pickering, local, state and federal officials to find another mission for this outstanding unit."

Pickering said in a prepared statement that he was "confident that, working together, we can move forward in a way that ensures a valuable role for our Meridian guardsmen."

The Air National Guard plan would shift people, equipment and aircraft around at 54 or more sites where Guard units are stationed. Major Air Guard and Reserve facilities in Alaska, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin would close.

In some states, aircraft would be taken away from 25 Air Guard units. Those units would get other assignments such as expeditionary combat support roles. They also would retain their missions of aiding governors during statewide emergencies.

The panel has until Sept. 8 to send its final report to President Bush. The president can accept it, reject it or send it back for revisions. Congress also will have a chance to veto the entire plan, but it has not taken that step in four previous rounds of base closings.

Sub Base Saved As Employment Sinks

Hartford Currant (Hartford, CT)

Michele Jacklin
August 28, 2005

The news that the Groton sub base had been spared the Pentagon's budget ax reached members of The Courant's editorial board as we toured the downtown Marriott Hotel in Hartford Wednesday, 24 hours before its grand opening. The Marriott is the first full-service luxury hotel to debut in Hartford in more than 20 years, cause for celebration.

Likewise, the rescuing of the sub base was reason to exult. Together, the base, with its 8,000 workers, and the hotel, with its 220 new hires (nearly a third of them city residents) represented encouraging developments on Connecticut's job front.

But hold off on the applause. That same day in the northwestern part of the state, the Timken Co. unveiled its plan to transfer 190 jobs in its automotive division out of state. That disclosure came in the wake of International Paper's announcement that it will move its global headquarters from Stamford to Memphis, Tenn., taking 150 high-salaried positions with it.

That's the way Connecticut's job news has been going lately - some days fabulous; some days awful.

On balance, though, the awful days have outnumbered the fabulous. To put it bluntly, the

state's employment picture couldn't be worse. Connecticut is at the bottom of the job-creation barrel, No.50 out of 50. According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., since the early 1990s, Connecticut has had the most stagnant job market in the nation, spanning all sectors.

The state has hemorrhaged more than 100,000 manufacturing jobs in the past 15 years and had the lowest growth in its professional and business services sector of any state in New England. Of late, the situation has improved only marginally, with job creation rising by just 1.4 percent in the first quarter of this year, placing Connecticut 32nd in the January-to-March period. To be sure, nothing to brag about.

Losing the naval base would have been a nail in the coffin of the Connecticut economy, with the death toll extending well beyond the southeastern corner.

In advance of Wednesday's vote by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, few politicians had wanted to confront the unimaginable: the potential for economic havoc. But leave it to Lt. Gov. Kevin B. Sullivan to say what others had undoubtedly been thinking: "Our state just dodged a huge bullet that would have been [an] economic disaster statewide."

In addition to the 8,000 on-site jobs that would have vanished, an additional 31,000 were in jeopardy. More than 500 Connecticut manufacturers are direct subcontractors of the sub base, chief among them the shipbuilding giant, Electric Boat. The sub base and the boat-maker contribute a staggering \$3.3 billion to the state economy.

Ten days ago, EB President John Casey conceded that his company's sizable maintenance crew in Groton would have to be pared back if the sub base were to close. "We would have to go where the ships are," he said unapologetically. Fortunately, that exodus won't be necessary.

That the BRAC Commission chose to keep the sub base open because of its military importance to the nation - and not because of its intrinsic

economic value to Connecticut - provided political cover for state officials. But it's hardly of consequence to the shopkeepers, restaurant owners, teachers and real estate agents whose livelihoods depend on the military installation. They only care that the sub base has survived, whatever the reason.

So, in the aftermath of the base's reprieve, its second in 12 years, it's fair to ask: What now?

U.S. Sen. Christopher J. Dodd speculated that the BRAC panel's decision to overrule the Pentagon could pump some adrenaline into the region's economy, calling the 7-1 vote "a confidence builder." In recent years, the two tribal casinos, among the world's largest, have accounted for most of the area's economic vitality.

Reducing the region's double-barreled reliance on defense spending and gambling would seem an obvious priority for state leaders. The Navy must also be persuaded to boost production from one to two subs a year so that the Submarine Capital of the World can continue to live up to its moniker.

Not wasting a minute, Gov. M. Jodi Rell immediately called on President Bush and Congress to step up production. Said Rell: "At no time in the future do we want to see New London on that [closure] list."

To which 8,000 workers are today saying, "Amen."

Base Closure Plans Had Lawmakers Scrambling

The Dallas Morning News

Todd J. Gillman

August 27, 2005

WASHINGTON – The military base closure process has been a high-wire act for cities across Texas – and for the politicians who represent them.

Sure it's about national security and efficient use of Pentagon funds in wartime. But unemployed

voters have been known to vent frustration at the ballot box. So even though Congress created the process to remove the politics, politicians have spent months in a frenzy of lobbying on behalf of targeted facilities.

Last week came the winners and losers.

"You can't leave politics out of anything that emanates from Washington, D.C.," said Rep. Ralph Hall, R-Rockwall.

He confessed to a huge sense of relief after the Base Closure and Realignment Commission overruled the Pentagon last week and saved Texarkana's Red River Army Depot, along with 5,000 jobs.

Local and state officials spent countless hours buttonholing Pentagon officials and countless more drafting letters, organizing rallies and spiffing up the place once the selection process shifted to the commission.

The scene was repeated in San Antonio, Corpus Christi and scores of other cities nationwide – despite the fact that the process is supposed to be apolitical, hinging on each base's merits and contribution to training and security.

"Who you know never hurts," Mr. Hall said. "If you've worked with 'em and they have faith in you, if they're friends with you and they know what you tell 'em is true and they can trust you – that helps an awful lot."

Texas' big winners: El Paso, Fort Bliss and Rep. Silvestre Reyes, D-El Paso. Bliss stands to gain 16,000 troops. Texarkana avoided calamity but still loses 700 jobs at the Lone Star Ammunition Plant.

The big losers: Corpus Christi (6,000 jobs at Naval Station Ingleside) and Wichita Falls (2,900 jobs at Sheppard Air Force Base). Suffice to say the lawmakers representing those workers, Reps. Solomon Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi, and Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Clarendon, aren't happy.

Military bases are rich sources of local pride and economic activity. So politicians fight fiercely to protect them. In the old days, it was easy enough for Congress to stymie Pentagon efforts to ax installations.

In 1987, a Dallas-area House member, Republican Dick Armey, found a way to sidestep that problem, maneuvering to passage a law that created an outside commission to review Pentagon recommendations, then subject them to up-or-down approval by the president and Congress. The idea catapulted his House career. He rose to majority leader before turning lobbyist and fittingly enough, Florida hired him this year to protect its 21 bases.

The process has worked.

The Pentagon has saved billions and closed scores of unneeded facilities in several rounds.

And few lawmakers, if any, have been punished for letting thousands of jobs slip away.

"Congress has really set this thing up in a way that they absolve themselves of blame," said Juan Carlos Huerta, a political scientist at Texas A&M Corpus Christi, not far from Ingleside. "They have their scapegoats. They can blame the Pentagon. They can blame BRAC. It's hard for voters to say this is Ortiz's fault."

But it's impossible to tell if all the lobbying made a difference.

Mr. Hall thinks so. He credits Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, in particular, for saving Red River. "Kay could be elected mayor of Texarkana right now," he said.

But Dr. Huerta said the only thing certain is that voters are more inclined to forgive defeat than inaction.

"They might be in trouble if they did nothing," he said.

Westfield Residents Pleased With Decision To Shift Jets To Barnes

Boston Globe (Boston, MA)
Jay Lindsay, AP Writer
August 27, 2005

WESTFIELD, Mass. --In a place where stunt planes twisted overhead and conversations were drowned out by the screech of fighter jets, the arcane work of a federal commission didn't figure to cause much excitement.

But Westfield residents at Barnes Air National Guard base Saturday were talking about a surprise vote by the Base Closure and Realignment Commission that would put their city front and center in homeland security.

The commission's vote Friday to transfer the F-15 fighter jets from Otis Air National Guard base on Cape Cod to Barnes promises new jobs and new prominence. If the commission vote stands, all 18 of Otis' F-15 jets would move to Barnes, and the A-10 attack jets at Barnes would be stationed elsewhere.

The sleek F-15s are air-to-air fighter planes that have guarded the Northeast's skies since Sept. 11, when they were the first to respond to the terror attacks. The bulkier A-10s, called Warthogs, are ground combat support planes that have played a key role in Iraq.

Albert Masciadrelli, who attended the Westfield International Air Show at Barnes on Saturday, said the commission "picked a jewel of a city to put the system."

"I think it's going to be an economic boon," he added.

The arrival of F-15s would completely transform the work at Barnes, but the base is ready for it, said Col. Marcel Kerdauid, commander of the 104th Fighter Wing at Barnes.

"The bottom line is it's a win for Barnes, for western Massachusetts and the city of Westfield," he said.

The loss of Otis would be a major blow to the Cape, where Otis employs more than 500, mostly civilians.

U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy said he was baffled by the planned move to Westfield, a city of 40,000 about 130 miles from Otis. Attorney General Thomas Reilly and Gov. Mitt Romney promised to pursue legal action to overturn the vote. On Saturday, Reilly said he would sue the federal government if President Bush didn't reject the recommendation.

"It's an uphill fight but these are important principles that are worth fighting for," he said.

To some local residents, the eagerness to overturn a move that could help the western part of the state is the latest example of state politicians' western Massachusetts myopia.

"I'd love to see this area benefit, even though it's to the detriment of the eastern end. "You might call it a little revenge," said Robert Greenleaf, 83, a Navy veteran and Pearl Harbor survivor.

U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, whose district includes the Cape, said people may not understand that the civilians and military personnel who work at Barnes may be forced to transfer. He rejected the notion that politicians are rallying around Otis at the expense of Barnes.

"It's about the people, not the geography," he said. "Am I glad the 102nd Fighter Wing is going to remain in Massachusetts? Of course. But what they (the commissioners) have done is create a personnel nightmare for the Air Guard."

The independent commission began voting Wednesday on the fate of dozens of military bases around the country that are slated to close or realign under a Pentagon proposal.

President Bush can reject or alter its recommendations and Congress also can veto the plan in its entirety, though it has never taken that step in four previous rounds of base closings.

The air guard base at Barnes covers 185 acres and employs about 300 people full time. Fifteen

A-10s are currently active there, along with two reserve jets.

Kerdavid said the arrival of additional planes inevitably requires more workers. The facilities would have to be adjusted for the F-15s, which would create more construction work.

Westfield Mayor Rick Sullivan said Barnes is one of area's biggest employers and generates hundreds of millions of dollars for the local economy. Expanding it can only help, he said.

Kerdavid said Barnes can quickly adjust to handle F-15s. Most of the infrastructure is in place, he said. Mechanics have general training that allows them to switch from one aircraft to another fairly easily, while A-10 pilots will need about two to four months to move to F-15s, he added.

"It's going to take a while for pilots to gain experience in that mission," Kerdavid said. "It doesn't mean they can't do the job."

The F-15s are louder than the A-10s, so Sullivan anticipates residents will be concerned about increased noise levels.

"There's no question there are issues we are going to have to deal with," the mayor said.

Steve Andras, 52, said he would miss the A-10s, which have become a source of local pride. But he said residents will embrace the change.

"Good, bad or indifferent, noise or no noise, they do support the base," he said.

Cobb Base's Future After Closing Uncertain National Guard Shows Interest

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution (Atlanta, GA)

Brenden Sager

August 28, 2005

U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, at a news conference on Iraq, once said: "As we know there are known knowns. . . . We also know there are known unknowns."

He could say the same thing about the future of Naval Air Station Atlanta.

The Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure Commission — with certainty — voted Wednesday to close NAS Atlanta. The final decision rests with President Bush and Congress, but they are not expected to raise serious opposition to the independent commission's decisions.

What happens to the base after it closes, however, is a subject of much speculation. Don Beaver, chief operating officer of the Cobb Chamber of Commerce, is head of a task force charged with preparing for the base closing. A transitional plan could take up to 18 months to create.

And after that, actual redevelopment can take much longer. The former Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado is now filled with shops, restaurants and small, service-oriented businesses. It has 3,200 new houses, generates \$39 million in additional local taxes and contains 800 acres of parks and green space.

But it took 11 years to reach that level.

Beaver said once the final decision is made to close NAS Atlanta, the 166-acre installation will be assessed for future military or government use, then for state and local use. Beaver said his committee will work with the government "to move forward to help the transfer from military installation to its best use."

The installation is located on the same site as Dobbins Air Reserve Base — which is not on the BRAC list — with an entrance near downtown Smyrna. A Lockheed aircraft manufacturing plant is also located on the site, along with Georgia Tech research facilities.

Cobb Chairman Sam Olens said the state and local proponents for the base were disappointed that NAS Atlanta will likely close, but there is a silver lining. He said the U.S. National Guard along with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Georgia Emergency Management Agency use the 10,000-foot runway.

These agencies now house disaster relief supplies at Fort Gillem in Atlanta, which also is slated to close. Those materials could be consolidated at NAS Atlanta, Olens said.

"We're very disappointed that the [BRAC] commissioners didn't agree with the staff to keep NAS Atlanta open," Olens said. "But the National Guard is very interested in moving significant resources to that area. A lot of GEMA and FEMA equipment is flown into Dobbins."

Losing thousands

Shirley Payne is one of Naval Air Station Atlanta's most hardened fighters but this week she lost the battle to keep the base in Cobb. She was surprised, she said, because NAS Atlanta has a lower cost structure compared to other similar facilities and it's in an idea location for training pilots.

"We were shocked," said Payne. "We were very positive because we had everything going for us."

Cobb County stands to lose 707 active duty and 2,168 reserve sailors, along with 526 active duty and 1,027 reserve Marines, officials estimate. The base could also lose 92 civilian jobs. NAS Atlanta is used by more than 20 Naval and Marine Reserve units, several of which were battle-hardened in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Possible gains

Every month 3,000 Naval reservists from all over the country come to NAS Atlanta for drill weekends. Reservists who come from more than 50 miles away stay in local hotels or on base and spend the weekend in metro Atlanta. Many are pilots for local airlines based at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport.

Those training missions will likely move to other installations in Texas, Louisiana and Virginia, officials said.

Among the three facilities — the Lockheed plant, Dobbins and NAS Atlanta — the annual payroll comes to more than \$712 million. In addition to purely economic contributions, Dobbins ARB and NAS Atlanta provide instruction and training for more than 10,000 military personnel each year, officials said.

Still, Georgia should be a net winner in the base-closing initiative. The state could gain more than 4,000 jobs in this round of base closings because of about 9,800 additional military and civilian positions being relocated to Fort Benning from other states and about 4,000 jobs that other facilities in Georgia will gain.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission must pass the list to President Bush by Sept. 8. Bush is not allowed to change the list, but he could send it back to the commission with suggestions.

In four previous rounds of closings, no president has failed to accept the commission's recommendations. After the president approves the list, it goes to Congress, which has 45 working days to accept or reject it in full. The report becomes law if Congress does not act on it, which is usually the case.

BRAC Panel: Oceana's Future Hinges On Development Restrictions

Navy Times
Gordon Trowbridge
August 27, 2005

ARLINGTON, Va. — The independent base closings commission voted late Friday to give some teeth to its warning that the state of Virginia and local communities clean up development that affects operations around Naval Air Station Oceana.

The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted to give the head of the Government Accountability Office, Congress' investigative arm, the job of determining whether the cities of Virginia Beach and Chesapeake and the state have complied with a list of requirements the commission approved on Wednesday.

Under a measure the nine-member panel will send to President Bush, the cities and state must pass laws and ordinances that restrict future development, and establish a plan to spend at least \$15 million a year to condemn and buy real estate developments that limit operations at Oceana.

If they do not meet those requirements by next March, the Navy must move its East Coast fighter base to Cecil Field, Fla., which was shuttered in the 1993 round of closings. That move is contingent on Florida and the city of Jacksonville following through on promises to clear commercial clients from Cecil Field, which is now a business park, and to hand the base over to the Navy at no cost.

Friday's measure ensures that an independent organization will certify what could be a contentious issue: Whether the governments around Virginia Beach made the changes the commission has required.

BRAC Decision Keeps Ellsworth, S.D. Thankful

Aberdeen American News (South Dakota)
August 28, 2005

South Dakota, and the nation, can breathe a sigh of relief.

Friday morning the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) voted to strike Ellsworth Air Force Base from its base closure list. Now, with President Bush's expected approval, the base will remain open and functioning.

This decision is one that will reap many benefits, starting with the thousands of people who would have been impacted had the closure taken effect and ending with the stronger national security that two B-1 bomber bases will provide.

The BRAC commission's decision to remove Ellsworth from the list was by no means a foregone conclusion.

It came as a result of the hard work, determination, creative thinking, smart investigative work and collaboration of a lot of good South Dakotans. That, and the fact that the people sitting on the BRAC commission kept open minds during the information sharing process.

Sens. John Thune and Tim Johnson, Representative Stephanie Herseth and Gov. Mike Rounds are to be commended for a wonderful non-partisan team effort in doing their part to provide the necessary information to BRAC to persuade them that keeping the base open was sound both fiscally and operationally.

In listening to the comments of some of the BRAC commissioners, they clearly had not initially considered two valuable pieces of information, and they were quite open and honest about it.

One key piece of information was the fact that there really would be no money savings regarding salaries because personnel, in most cases, were simply being shifted from Ellsworth to Dyess Air Force Base.

The second was the fact that there are currently some legal issues pending in Texas regarding the availability of air space surrounding Dyess.

After the decision was made, South Dakota's congressional delegation and Gov. Rounds held a press conference in which they kept their united, non-partisan front as they commended the commission on its decision.

Rep. Herseth said she thought it was very positive that the commission recognized that the economic impact of closing Ellsworth would be exacerbated by the rural aspect of its placement.

The entire delegation acknowledged the team effort of the accomplishment and said it was a great day for South Dakota and for America's national security interests.

Clearly that is true. Keeping Ellsworth Air Force Base open and functioning will benefit the both

the nation and South Dakota, and this is definitely something to be thankful for.

Seeing South Dakota's elected leaders working together as a finely tuned, bipartisan machine?

Priceless.

Closures May Save Less Than Expected

Bradenton Herald (Bradenton, FL)

Drew rown; Knight Ridder Newspapers

August 28, 2005

WASHINGTON

Savings from closing or shifting the functions of many domestic military bases are likely to be far below Pentagon estimates, the head of the panel that hammered out the shifts said Saturday.

While the Pentagon had predicted a \$50 billion windfall over 20 years, Anthony J. Principi, chairman of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, said the Pentagon would be lucky to save \$37 billion.

The savings could drop as low as \$14 billion if questionable personnel savings aren't counted, Principi said. The commission, which wound up its work on Saturday, had challenged the Pentagon's savings estimates repeatedly.

Commission vs. Pentagon

The commission's final session followed three days of often intense deliberations in which the panel accepted Pentagon proposals to close five major Army bases, two large Navy installations on the Gulf Coast and the Army's historic Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. The commission also consolidated or shut down hundreds of smaller National Guard and Reserve Centers across the country.

The commission reversed the Pentagon on several tough issues, however, by refusing to close a Navy shipyard in Maine and a submarine base in Connecticut. It also kept open the Red River Army Depot in Texas, and Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota.

The commission also voted to keep open Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico but went along with the Pentagon's recommendation to remove F-16 fighter jets from it. The panel stipulated that the base will close by 2010 unless the secretary of defense gives it a new mission.

The panel also voted to keep KC-135 air refueling tankers at Grand Forks Air Force Base in North Dakota until at least 2011, reversing an earlier plan to move the tankers out and use the base for future unmanned aerial vehicles that have yet to be built.

Panel was unafraid

Principi said the commission "did not flinch from tough decisions" to close bases when it agreed with the Pentagon's recommendations, but "neither did we flinch" from keeping open other installations the Pentagon sought to close.

The panel's recommendations must be on President Bush's desk by Sept 8. He's got 15 days to accept or reject the list, although he can send it back once for revisions. Once Bush accepts the list, Congress has 45 days to accept it or reject it, but it can't make any changes.

Lawmakers endorsed four prior military realignment plans and are expected to approve this one.

"We worked really hard to find the right answers," said Commissioner Harold Gehman, a retired Navy admiral, as the last session ended.

Some defense analysts lauded the panel's work.

"From the tenor of the questions, and even some of the direct statements made by members of the commission, they're not feeling shy about taking on the Pentagon if they feel it's appropriate to do so," said Chis Hellman, a policy analyst at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. The center is a Washington nonprofit that seeks to reduce military spending, especially on nuclear weapons.

The panel's last challenge, on which members worked until nearly 10 p.m. Friday, was a

redistribution of hundreds of Air Force fighter jets, refueling tankers and cargo planes among several dozen Air Reserve and Air National Guard bases around the country.

The Pentagon's original plan faced widespread opposition in the Reserve and Guard and among the nation's governors because it would have left many states without aircraft or flying missions.

Gehman said the panel tried to leave at least one Air National Guard flying mission in every state, though some states were left without aircraft or flying units as the final list was drawn up.

Gehman and other commissioners said their version would better address homeland security concerns than the Pentagon's original recommendations.

Panel overstepped

A federal judge had ruled earlier Friday that the panel had no authority to deactivate the 111th Fighter Wing of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard without the approval of that state's governor. The commission voted Friday to leave the unit intact at its base, the Willow Grove Naval Air Station. It did, however, move its A-10 ground attack jets to bases elsewhere.

Commissioner James Bilbray, a former Nevada congressman, said the judge's ruling would have no bearing on the panel's action since the A-10s are federal property.

Closure Threatens Galena Nuclear Plan
Fairbanks Daily News – Miner (Fairbanks, AK)
R.A. Dillon
August 28, 2005 - , Staff Writer

A decision by the federal base closure commission to stop Air Force operations in Galena has put the Yukon River village's dream of going nuclear in doubt.

Galena officials have been working for two years to put a nuclear power plant in the village of 700 as a test case for providing cheap electricity to rural communities.

But Thursday, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted unanimously to shut down the Galena Airport Forward Operation Location as part of a Pentagon plan to save \$48 billion over the next 20 years, potentially robbing the City of Galena of its biggest power customer.

The Air Force buys 60 percent of the 8.5 million kilowatts of electricity produced annually by the city. Removing that demand raises the question of whether there's a need to operate a 10-megawatt nuclear power plant.

City Manager Marvin Yoder thinks there is.

When the Air Force reduced its presence in Galena in the early 1990s, Yoder and other local officials developed a plan to fill the empty military buildings with high school students from across the state.

The Project Education Residential School leases a dining hall, dormitory, classrooms, gymnasium and auto mechanics shop on the base and provides 35 full-time jobs in the community.

Last year, the program served 85 predominantly Alaska Native high school students from 43 communities.

City and tribal officials want to expand the school to 400 students and think they can use more of the military buildings to accomplish that plan. Increasing the size of the school would fill holes in the job market and power usage left empty from the Air Force's withdraw.

"We're going to take over as much of the base as possible," said Peter Captain Sr., first chief of the Loudon Tribal Council. "We're not just going to let them mothball it and go away."

Expanding the boarding school would make power use in the community about what it is with the Air Force, Yoder said.

"If we have a redevelopment plan in place, most of the electricity load is going to continue," he

said. "If we can't put a plan together, then the nuclear plant is in jeopardy."

Galena, like most rural Alaska communities, relies on burning \$2.55-a-gallon diesel oil to produce electricity. The diesel oil has to be towed to the village 350 miles by barge, contributing to electricity prices of 33 cents a kilowatt hour.

Yoder said installing a small nuclear power plant could reduce the cost of electricity to 10 cents a kilowatt hour. The national average is 8.71 cents.

The city is involved in discussions with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission about licensing a plant being developed by Toshiba Corp. But Yoder said it will take at least until 2010 just to know if the plan is feasible.

Galena's neighbors on the Yukon River have raised concerns over the possibility of putting a nuclear power plant next to North America's fourth-largest river drainage basin.

Rob Rosenfeld, director of the Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council, said tribal leaders passed two resolutions at the council's annual meeting in Dawson City, Yukon, in August against the use of radioactive material in the area.

Yoder said the opposition is premature.

"We're going to work to answer all of the questions and my hope is that everyone will reserve judgment until that work is completed," he said.

Yoder wants to bring together community members, tribal officials and state and federal representatives for a planning meeting set for Oct. 13-15 to come up with a detailed redevelopment plan.

"We want to make sure all the stakeholders in the community are involved," he said.

On Cape, A Display Of Pride And Concern Over Closing

Cape Cod Times, MA

Sean Gonsalves

August 28, 2005

Like clockwork, fighter jets roar over the homes of many Cape Codders living near the flight path of Otis Air National Guard Base.

And that's just fine with Anne Balcom of Forestdale, who, for the past 17 years, has considered the sound of F-15s flying overhead to be a part of her internal life rhythm, a security blanket, and a boon to the local economy.

"You get used to the planes. I'm going to miss them, actually," Balcom said yesterday while strolling along the Cape Cod Canal bike trail in Sandwich.

Like many people who live in the towns surrounding Otis, Balcom was disappointed to learn that the 102nd Fighter Wing will be relocated to Barnes Air National Guard Base in Westfield. The move was among the recommendations approved Friday by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

"It's sad to see all the jobs go," Balcom said, referring to the approximately 500 full-time local jobs that could be lost when Otis shuts down in the next two to six years, pending White House approval of the BRAC recommendation.

Balcom also said she was concerned about how the land will eventually be put to use and whether the Coast Guard will be able to stay, given the costly maintenance of the airfield that the Air National Guard covered.

As the widow of a Coast Guard officer, Balcom said she relies on the health services the Coast Guard offers out of its Otis offices, such as her annual flu shot.

John Santoro, sales manager at Merchants Square Liquors & Convenience in Sandwich, said he's bracing for the negative economic fallout of the closure.

"It's going to hurt this business. We get lots of customers from the base," Santoro said.

But economics is only the tangible part of his disappointment.

"We have a lot of pride in the base around here," he added, pointing to a "Save Otis" sticker plastered above the store's front doors.

Tony Manfredi, commander of the Aptuxet Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5988, considers the closure decision a "huge mistake for our national security."

A retired Army lieutenant colonel, Manfredi said because members of the 102nd don't rotate from place to place every two years, the men and women in the unit work well together as a team.

"Because they've been a team for so long, they're more effective and proficient," he said.

Also, Manfredi said, the economic loss to the surrounding communities can't be easily shrugged off.

"The (local) economy doesn't mean anything to Washington, but it sure means a lot to us," he said.

Though local residents have more intimate community ties to Otis, Deane McCraight of Newton, who was shopping at the Bourne factory outlet mall yesterday, said she has followed the closure hearings and was skeptical of the decisions being made, particularly about Otis.

"I wish someone would give us a straight answer - that it was being decided on the basis of national security. But it sounds like political favoritism to me. The Pentagon says one thing and the BRAC commission says something else and then they say the governor in Pennsylvania has to approve these kind of things but not here in Massachusetts?"

Kevin McGonagle of Monument Beach, who was playing catch with his son yesterday

afternoon at the Bourne Braves field, also has a gut suspicion that backroom politics came into play.

"I was really bummed out to hear the announcement. We're losing a big part of our community. It's a shame," he said, adding that his son, Jordan, attended Otis Memorial Elementary School.

"It's pretty surprising," Jordan McGonagle said, adding that it's hard to imagine the upper Cape without Otis.

Despite the efforts of political leaders who are considering ways of saving Otis from closure, the feeling that it was a done deal was pervasive yesterday.

In fact, many expressed hope that Otis would eventually be the site of a homeland security training facility.

Gov. Mitt Romney has been lobbying the federal government to build a homeland security training center at the Massachusetts Military Reservation, which would be used by the military and civilian police and firefighters.

BRAC's Moves Likely Bombproof

The Huntsville Times (Huntsville, AL)
Shelby G. Spires
August 28, 2005

Virginia's Warner, possible foe, may be busy elsewhere

Little seemed to stand in the way when the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission's last week quickly voted to send at least 1,755 federal jobs to Huntsville.

And two experts doubt that Sen. John Warner, the Virginia Republican who heads the powerful Senate Armed Services Committee, will wreck the BRAC plan that would pull thousands of Defense Department workers out of northern Virginia.

Wednesday and Thursday, the BRAC panel voted to relocate the Army Materiel Command, the bulk of the Missile Defense Agency and the headquarters of the Army Space & Missile Defense Command from the Washington, D.C., area to Huntsville. By some estimates, those moves could bring an additional 2,000 to 3,000 contractor jobs to Huntsville.

The BRAC panel will forward its report to President Bush by Sept. 8. The president must accept or reject the recommendations as a whole.

By the end of September, the White House will forward the recommendations to Congress, which has 45 working days to accept or reject the plan as a whole. .

"Now we are just waiting," Dave Hargrove, incoming president of the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce, said Friday. "It's a cautious optimism."

Could powerful politicians like Warner wreck the BRAC plan?

Warner told The Washington Post in a story Wednesday that Defense Department recommendations for the BRAC were "rigged."

He said Pentagon managers based decisions with real estate management in mind, with the goal of moving work done in costly rented buildings in a 100-mile radius around Washington. BRAC's goal is military efficiency.

The BRAC plan is expected to move 23,000 workers out of leased space in northern Virginia, although some would be sent to other places in the state.

But rigged or not, it seems the decisions will probably win White House and Capitol Hill approval over the next couple of months, said Dr. Larry Sabato, director of the University of Virginia Center for Politics.

"It's possible Warner could derail this, but it is highly unlikely," Sabato said by phone Friday.

"The whole process was set up to prevent one or a group of lawmakers from changing it."

Sabato said Warner will be busy trying to find ways to save Oceana Naval Air Station and its more than 10,000 jobs it means to the Virginia Beach, Va., area. The BRAC panel gave the state until March to find ways to pay for a crash zone near the base.

"That's going to cost tens of millions, if not \$100 million, to buy out homes and businesses," Sabato said. "The local area doesn't have that kind of money, and I doubt the state of Virginia can pay for it all. Warner will probably have to get federal support from somewhere."

"If Warner is irritated enough about the outcome of Oceana, then it is not inconceivable that he could find a way to derail" the BRAC recommendations, "but it is still highly unlikely, and Oceana has some time to deal with its problems."

Otherwise, the Navy installation would move to Jacksonville, Fla.

John Pike, a defense analyst with GlobalSecurity.org in Washington, drew a sharper focus about Warner's motives. "Warner is just trying to get something," Pike said by phone. "He's the squeaky wheel that gets the grease."

Pike doesn't know exactly what Warner might want for his vote to keep the BRAC process moving smoothly on Capitol Hill, but, like Sabato, he thinks it could be money to help Oceana.

A majority of the BRAC decisions were hammered out before the public debates last week, Pike said.

"Most of the BRAC discussions have been theater," Pike said. "The real decisions have been made and were made probably the weekend before" the televised debates began.

Pike pointed out that of the major political decisions that were made last week, many were

major bases recommended for closure in key areas that affected Democrats and Republicans.

The Pentagon wanted to close Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, the New London Submarine Base near Groton, Conn., and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine. The BRAC commission kept them open for what Pike sees as nebulous reasons.

"The only reason given for keeping New London open was naval tradition, and the argument against moving B-1s from Ellsworth to Dyess (Air Force Base in Texas) was that a tornado would destroy them all. Tradition and tornados - that's just not sound judgment."

Reilly Plans A Lawsuit To Thwart Otis Closure Sees 'Tough Fight'; Effort Was Planned

The Boston Globe (Boston, MA)
Michael Levenson and Lisa Wangsness,
August 28, 2005

Girding for what he described as a "tough fight," Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly said yesterday that he would file suit in federal court to prevent the US Department of Defense from closing Otis Air National Guard Base on Cape Cod.

Reilly made the announcement a day after the Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted to accept the Pentagon's plan to close Otis, and to send its 18 F-15 fighter jets to Barnes Municipal Airport Air Guard Station in Westfield, Western Massachusetts.

Reilly said he had been planning for weeks to bring the lawsuit, and had been working behind the scenes with Governor Mitt Romney, Senators Edward M. Kennedy and John F. Kerry, and the state's congressmen.

Reilly said he plans to use many of the same arguments cited in a decision handed down Friday by a federal district judge in Philadelphia, who ruled that the Pentagon lacked the authority to close an Air National Guard base in that state

without the approval of the governor, Edward G. Rendell.

Governors are considered the commanders-in-chief of their state's National Guard units; Reilly said the Pentagon and the Base Realignment and Closure Commission had ignored this.

"States need to have some say in matters of not only their security but also their economy, and jobs, and families," Reilly told reporters outside his office in Boston. "And the people that live in this state need to have a say in what is happening to their lives."

A Romney spokeswoman, Julie Teer, said he would cooperate with Reilly, his main Democratic rival for the governor's office.

"Governor Romney will be working with Attorney General Reilly to review all legal options on the table to keep Otis open," Teer said.

Reilly said gubernatorial politics would not be an issue.

"There are matters that transcend politics and this is one of them," he said. "We are in total agreement here."

On Cape Cod, news of the lawsuit brought a glimmer of hope to residents who were reeling from the vote Friday to close the base. Otis supports 505 jobs in Falmouth and residents recall its 102d Fighter Wing scrambling planes for New York on Sept. 11, 2001.

"We're not giving up until the last gate is locked and the last plane leaves," said Dino Mitrokostas, owner of Dino's Sports Bar, a hangout that draws many workers from Otis.

"I have a saying -- there's right, wrong, and legal," Mitrokostas said. "It was right to keep the base open, it was wrong to close it, and now I guess we're going to fight it legally."

Others tempered their praise.

"I wouldn't say it's futile -- the opportunity is there," said the Mashpee fire chief, George Baker, who is also a member of the Otis Coalition, a grass-roots group formed to save the base. "It's worthwhile to keep fighting to save the resources we have there."

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes