

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

September 2, 2005

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Despite Pockets of Discontent, Congress Unlikely to Block Base Closing Plan

Martin Kady II
CQ Today – Defense
Sept. 1, 2005

A federal base closing commission has been beleaguered by lawsuits, criticism from the secretary of Defense and threats from key members of Congress since it announced last week its final decisions on which military bases would be shuttered.

But while lawsuits filed by four governors seeking to block closure of National Guard facilities could delay the process, there is little chance the anger of a handful of senators and House members will stop a plan to shut down dozens of military facilities to save the Pentagon about \$37 billion.

“I don’t see any conceivable set of actions that would derail base closings at this point,” said David Berteau, who was in charge of base closings for the Pentagon in 1991 and 1993 and

is now a director at the law firm Clark and Weinstock.

The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission finished voting on its recommendations on Aug. 27, rejecting some Pentagon proposals and adding some of its own. President Bush has already said he will sign off on the BRAC recommendations, which he must do by Sept. 23.

The commission has spread the pain among Republicans and Democrats in Congress. The only way lawmakers could block the process is by passing a joint resolution of disapproval. While resolutions of disapproval may be introduced by members whose home states or districts are facing major base closures, experts said there is little chance such resolutions could find a majority support in both chambers of Congress.

Among the losers: Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., who is running for re-election in 2006 and whose state will lose the aircraft from the Willow Grove base; Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., whose hometown of Pascagoula will see its Naval Station shuttered; and Sens. Jon Corzine and Frank R. Lautenberg, both New Jersey Democrats, whose state will see its Fort Monmouth Army base closed down.

“I believe the BRAC Commission made a shameful error . . . and I will vote against their recommendation in the Senate,” Lautenberg said.

A spokesman for Santorum, however, said that “he is not going to play politics with the BRAC reports” and is “unlikely” to support a resolution of disapproval.

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, meanwhile, criticized the commission’s decisions, telling reporters on Aug. 29 that the panel seemed “to have put a much heavier weight on economic impact, [rather] than military value, than we did.”

The original Pentagon list of recommended closures — 33 major bases including proposed

shutdowns of facilities in South Dakota, Maine and Connecticut — could have run into more political trouble. But when the base closing commission made its final recommendations, those states, as well as several others, were spared, creating an unexpected list of “winners” in the BRAC process.

Three of the most prominent bases spared, Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico and the Portsmouth Shipyard in Maine, are home to Republicans John Thune of South Dakota, Pete V. Domenici of New Mexico, and Susan Collins and Olympia J. Snowe of Maine, all of whom had been critical of the Pentagon’s initial recommendations to close bases in their states. But when the BRAC issued its final list, it made the senators less likely to object.

And the Naval submarine base in New London, Conn., which the Pentagon wanted to close, also was left off the BRAC list, ensuring the support of Connecticut Democratic Sens. Joseph I. Lieberman and Christopher J. Dodd.

“When the first list came out, it was going to have real trouble in the Senate,” said Jeremiah Gertler, an analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who was the senior analyst for the 1995 base closing commission. “But by taking all these [bases] off the board, it increased the chances of passage.”

It has traditionally been much harder in the House to muster much support for blocking base closure efforts. While individual members can be hit hard if their districts are scheduled to lose thousands of jobs, a majority do not face major closures.

Meanwhile, governors in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Illinois and Tennessee have filed legal challenges to the proposed closure of National Guard facilities in their states, arguing that governors control their National Guard units. While this is true, Gertler said the BRAC may have found a way around this by leaving the National Guard units intact while shutting down the physical facilities and taking away the

hardware, including Air Force planes, which are the property of the federal government.

"The litigation is a risk here [of delaying the closures] but nobody is challenging the whole BRAC package," Berteau said.

Senators watchful of BRAC process

Great Falls Tribune
James E. Larcombe
September 2, 2005

Montana Sen. Conrad Burns said Thursday he expects that a plan to move F-15 fighters to the Montana Air National Guard in Great Falls will win final approval later this fall.

Burns, speaking at a news conference on the steps of the Great Falls Civic Center, said the plan to move the F-15s from a Missouri installation has drawn political fire from officials in that state.

But he said there is plenty of support for moving flying missions to the nation's borders.

"This is where they are needed," the Republican senator said, referring to Montana's location near Canada. "We need anti-terrorism missions on our borders."

Also Thursday, Sen. Max Baucus, in a letter, urged President George W. Bush to approve the Base Realignment and Closure commission plan unveiled last week.

"As one of the largest border states in the nation, it is critical that Montana maintain a fighter mission," Baucus, a Democrat, wrote. "Not only will this mission add approximately 85 new full-time jobs to Great Falls, Montana, but it will allow us to keep our pilots. The pilots of the Montana Air National Guard are our greatest strength."

While MANG will lose 15 F-16s under the BRAC plan, the 15 F-15s will put the installation on more solid ground in the future, officials believe. The F-15s are newer and are

believed to have a longer life span than the F-16s now used by MANG.

"Those old F-16s are tired," Burns said. "The F-15 offers a little more airplane with a more sophisticated weapon system."

Burns said he and other members of the congressional delegation would work with local military boosters to continue to seek new roles for Malmstrom Air Force Base. While the base was not affected by the latest BRAC round, some backers had hoped that the MANG planes could be moved to Malmstrom, reopening a runway closed since 1996.

The BRAC recommendation "doesn't close the gate to a flying mission at Malmstrom," Burns said, noting other missions could be available.

Great Falls airport director Cynthia Schultz welcomed the news about the F-15s, saying "we couldn't have done better." She was on vacation when the BRAC news broke last week.

Schultz said while the Montana Air National Guard will have plenty of work to do to prepare for the F-15s, the airport shouldn't face many issues related to new military planes.

"I think from the airport standpoint, we are in good shape," she said, noting F-15s had used the airport in past training exercises.

Keeping a MANG flying mission will allow the airport to maintain control tower and firefighting operations at levels not financially possible without a military presence, Schultz said.

A mission with F-15s will better position MANG to move to future aircraft, including possibly F-22s, in coming years, Schultz said.

"It couldn't have been more positive," Schultz said of the BRAC plan. "It creates big opportunity moving forward."

Burns said the BRAC plan had a good chance to be adopted, despite the commission's decision to reverse the Pentagon on several major base closures. If the president signs off on the BRAC

recommendations, Congress will have 45 days to vote on the plan but can't amend it.

"Our next hurdle is the President," Burns said, adding he hopes to talk to Bush and White House staffers about MANG and Malmstrom in coming weeks.

"The time to talk to the White House is when the final report is on his desk and it has his full attention," he said.

Baucus said it was "unlikely" that Bush will reject the BRAC recommendations.

"We need to continue fighting for Montana," Baucus said. "We've come a long way, but it's not over (until) it's over."

Local News Articles

**The meaning of Ellsworth;
Base closures and politics
A big decision for South Dakota**
The Economist (Rapid City, SD)
September 3, 2005

The air force has a future in South Dakota. Do the Democrats?

It would take a direct hit from an enemy warhead to breach the 25 tons of steel and 12 inches of concrete that encase the nuclear missile silo on Ellsworth air force base in South Dakota. But the Minuteman missile it so snugly houses is now just for show—the armed missiles were retired between 1991 and 1994. Now a site that once helped deter the Soviet threat attracts tour groups and the occasional rabbit.

The base itself survived a near miss last week. The nine members of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commission voted on the future of Ellsworth and 32 other big military bases the Department of Defence wants to shut down. The commissioners spared five of these bases, including the Pentagon's most controversial targets: Portsmouth naval shipyard in Maine; the submarine base at New London, Connecticut; and Ellsworth. The president can either accept their recommendations in their

entirety or reject them outright. But he cannot re-open any case they have chosen to pass over.

The Pentagon will be disappointed with the commissioners' conclusions. Closing bases was part of its push for "transformation" of America's armed forces. On the front line, "transformation" evokes something zippy, like replacing boots on the ground backed by heavy artillery with fleet-footed commandos and precision air strikes. But back at base it means something rather humdrum, such as minimising the amount of space the department leases from other landowners.

In total, the Pentagon made 222 proposals to close or modify bases, which it estimates would save almost \$50 billion over 20 years. But its calculations have been disputed by the Government Accountability Office. Though the Pentagon planned to cut a lot of jobs, accounting for 47% of its projected annual savings, it did not intend to sack many people. Instead it wanted to transfer them from one job to another. This would spare the Pentagon the expense of hiring new people to do those new jobs, but it would not shrink its payroll.

At Ellsworth, the Pentagon wanted to cut about 3,800 jobs. It also wanted to realise economies of scale by putting all its B1 bombers in one place: Ellsworth's 24 "birds" would join the rest of the flock at Dyess air force base in Texas. This "legacy fleet" was inherited from the cold war. The aircraft were scattered around the country to prevent them all being destroyed in a single Soviet attack. Some commissioners wondered whether this cold-war wisdom was being dismissed too lightly. What if the Dyess runway were disabled by terrorism or tornadoes? Or tort lawyers for that matter. Dyess has been embroiled in litigation with local landowners who complain that the aircraft disturb their cattle, putting them off the vital business of breeding.

Ellsworth seems to enjoy better relations with its host region. It is not beset by angry cattle-ranchers. Nor do local people covet the more than 4,000 acres of land devoted to the base. The average square mile of South Dakota is shared

by just ten people; there are plenty of acres to go round.

Far from being seen as an obstacle to property developers, Ellsworth is the biggest employer in South Dakota—besides the state government and Sioux Valley Hospitals. Its annual payroll amounts to over \$160m, much of which is spent on businesses outside the base perimeter.

Less than nine miles from Ellsworth, in Rapid City, Donald Rice sells the four-wheeled Honda motorcycles (customers call them "crotch rockets") that occupy the driveways of some families on base. In years past, he even used to employ some of the younger servicemen at his dealership. "They thought it was fun," he says. "It was better than cleaning latrines." He appreciates the servicemen's friendship (many, he says, come back to South Dakota to retire) and their purchasing power. What they spend at local businesses, locals in turn spend at places like his. This is what economists call the "multiplier" effect, and what Mr Rice more vividly describes as "the round-robin effect". According to the Department of Defence, as many as 2,900 jobs outside the base depend on this round-robin effect.

The base is deeply woven into the state's politics. Tom Daschle, the Democrat who served the state in the Senate for 18 years, cast himself as Ellsworth's protector in Washington. Despite this, he famously lost his seat last November to John Thune, a Republican 13 years younger and a good bit taller. Had Ellsworth closed, as many people expected, the vanishing tribe of Plains Democrats would have claimed that Mr Thune was a walking example of the dangers of replacing a senior figure with a fresh face.

Instead Mr Thune mounted an energetic campaign to defend Ellsworth that some Republicans thought bordered on disloyalty. But the non-closure of the base will help his party. Six in ten South Dakota voters plumped for George Bush last November. The state's other senator, Tim Johnson, a Democrat, held on to his seat in 2002 by only 500 votes. South Dakota has kept its "legacy fleet" of B1 bombers;

whether "legacy" Democrats can survive in the Plains is another matter.

Officials Hold Out Hope For Hanscom Growth

The Boston Globe (Boston, MA)
Davis Bushnell
September 1, 2005

Last week's rejection of a multimillion-dollar expansion plan that would have brought more than 1,000 new jobs to Hanscom Air Force Base does not diminish the base's continued benefits to the region, local officials and defense contractors said.

The officials also held out the possibility that the Bedford base could grow sometime in the future, based on Defense Department needs.

Expanding the base "would have been icing on the cake, but the most important thing is that we still have the cake," said Sara Mattes, a Lincoln selectwoman and chairwoman of the Hanscom Area Towns Selectmen group. It is made up of officials from Bedford, Concord, Lexington, and Lincoln, the towns surrounding the base.

Getting "additional people at Hanscom would have been a bonus, but the number would have been a small blip on the big radar screen," Bedford Selectman Sheldon Moll said. "You have to remember that the air base is responsible for about 30,000 jobs in the area."

Moll's figure refers to base personnel as well as employees of companies who work on Air Force contracts. The base has 1,780 military personnel, 1,631 civilian workers, and 2,525 contractors.

It is now especially comforting, the officials said, that Hanscom's role as a premier electronic warfare systems center is secure for the foreseeable future, since further rounds of base closings nationwide are not being discussed.

"This was supposed to be the mother" of all base closings and realignments, "so I would think there wouldn't be any further action taken until 10 years from now, at the earliest," said Cort C.

Boulanger, spokesman for the Massachusetts Defense Technology Initiative, the lobbying group that waged a major campaign to preserve military installations. The group is cochaired by Governor Mitt Romney and Senator Edward M. Kennedy.

In May, the Hanscom base and the US Soldier Systems Center in Natick were left off the Pentagon's list of facilities recommended for closure. The list was then referred to a nine-member federal review board, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

At the time, the Pentagon also said it would bring more than 1,000 workers to Hanscom by shifting personnel from air bases in Ohio and Alabama.

But last week, as the commission was wrapping up its findings, the panel said it had shelved the shifting of personnel because these people were not critical to the base's core research-and-development mission.

At the same time, the commission let stand plans to relocate more than 200 specialists at two Hanscom research laboratories to Air Force installations in Ohio and New Mexico. These moves will be made from two to six years after the base closure process has been completed.

No further changes to the Hanscom base's operations are contemplated as the commission is set to submit its findings to President Bush a week from today. Bush has until Sept. 23 to approve or reject, but not change, the commission's recommendations.

Leaders of this state's defense technology initiative thought they had the most original plan for assuring an expanded role for the Hanscom air base well into the 21st century.

Released last year, the plan showcased Hanscom's ability to add 619,184 square feet of space to its current 811,468 square feet. Then early this year, the Legislature authorized \$242 million in bond money for expanded office space. Later, the Defense Department pledged \$131.3 million for the base expansion effort.

Now all expansion is off. "But the main thing is that we showed that a major expansion of Hanscom could be achieved," Boulanger said.

Moreover, the template is in place if the Pentagon decides in the future that the base should assume additional responsibilities, said James P. Regan, chief executive of Andover-based Dynamics Research Corp., an engineering and information technology company that is a major military contractor.

That is also the thinking of selectmen in the towns around Hanscom, said Mattes, even though "navigating the impacts of expansion, particularly traffic, would be tough" on the four communities. "But we were pleased that we were able to plan for all contingencies."

The Hanscom Area Towns Selectmen group took its own initiative by working earlier this year with Sasaki Associates Inc., a Watertown-based consulting firm, and MassDevelopment on redevelopment plans for Hanscom if the base were closed. The result was a village concept much like the one being played out at the former Fort Devens, under MassDevelopment's direction.

Officials for the four towns also assured the Defense Department and the base closure commission that they would do what they could to assist new Hanscom personnel in getting housing, some of it affordable.

In the end, the partnerships forged for preserving the Hanscom air base proved "that we all could work for the Commonwealth and the common good," said Mattes, who is also the town's committee representative to the defense technology initiative.

911th gets planes to fly

Pittsburgh Tribune Review (Pittsburgh, PA)
Brian C. Rittmeyer
September 1, 2005

Fortunes continue to improve for the 911th Airlift Wing in Moon.

Aircraft will be assigned to the base to support a new regional joint readiness center to be established there, U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Penn Hills, said Wednesday. The national base closing commission last week spared the 911th from Defense Department plans to shutter the facility, voting instead to create the readiness center to handle homeland security functions.

There had been concern that the base's eight C-130 cargo planes and their crews, numbering about 100 jobs, would be lost to Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina. The 911th currently provides 322 jobs.

Santorum said the Base Realignment and Closure Commission has approved placing language in its final report recommending that the Defense Department "permanently locate and operate an optimum number of C-130" cargo planes or equivalent aircraft at the new readiness center.

"This is a great win for the 911th and the entire Pittsburgh region," Santorum said.

The "optimum number" of aircraft could be anywhere from 12 to 16, Santorum said. As many as 20 planes could be located at the base depending on the mission, said Keith Dorman, a spokesman for the Pit-BRAC task force, the local group leading the charge to keep the facility open.

Air Force officials will determine how many and what type of aircraft will be located at the readiness center, Dorman said. A BRAC spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

Dorman said keeping planes at the base is a major victory and important to maintaining the facility's value.

When the BRAC decided Friday to spare the 911th, it did not specify whether planes would be maintained at the base.

"We knew we had an air reserve station in Pittsburgh after the BRAC vote, but we didn't

know we had planes here," Dorman said. "They are now recommending that the planes that sit here, stay here.

"It leaves the door open to numbers at least the size we had before, and possibly even greater."

Base supporters had argued that the Defense Department had erred in determining the base could not accommodate additional aircraft.

In an Aug. 29 letter, Santorum and U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Philadelphia, urged the BRAC commission to adopt language to keep planes there, arguing that aircraft are essential for recruiting and training air and maintenance crews.

"The prospect of additional planes is a big win in a tough situation," Specter said by phone at a news conference.

"It's difficult to justify an Air Force base without planes," added state Rep. Mark Mustio, R-Moon.

Once the BRAC report is approved, Mustio said, attention can be turned to lobbying for a new post exchange and commissary next to the Army Reserve's 99th Regional Readiness Command.

The commission approved Defense Department plans to close the Charles E. Kelly Support Facility in Collier and to move the 99th from Moon to Fort Dix, N.J., which combined will cost the area 530 military and 315 private sector jobs.

The commission will submit its final report to the White House by Sept. 8. President Bush has said he will not change the list before sending it to Congress, which will have 45 days to approve or reject the plan in its entirety.

State moves to halt removal of fighter jets
Chicago, Tribune (Chicago, IL)
Christi Parsons
September 2, 2005

SPRINGFIELD -- In an escalating dispute with the Pentagon, Illinois officials on Thursday asked a federal judge for a temporary restraining order to prevent the Defense Department from relocating more than a dozen Air National Guard fighter jets based here.

The filing in U.S. District Court is the latest move in a legal fight by Gov. Rod Blagojevich and Atty. Gen. Lisa Madigan to stop the military from transferring most of the jobs and all of the aircraft of the 183rd Fighter Wing to Indiana. The state officials say the proposed change could leave the region vulnerable in times of emergency.

"In these very uncertain times, any actions that would threaten our homeland security would be a grave mistake," Blagojevich said in a statement. "There is absolutely no way to justify taking these F-16s out of Springfield. This indefensible decision will leave our country more vulnerable to attack and cost our taxpayers \$10 million."

The decision to move the 15 fighter planes out of state is part of a larger Pentagon plan to consolidate military installations around the country. All but one member of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted last week to move the F-16s to Ft. Wayne, Ind., with the single dissenter a Chicago attorney who sits on the panel.

The motion filed Thursday seeks to stop the commission from transmitting its recently approved recommendation to the White House.

Blagojevich and Madigan argue that the Pentagon's recommendation violates federal law, which they say requires the governor's consent before a state's guard unit can be moved.

A federal judge in Pennsylvania agreed with a similar argument last week in ruling the secretary of defense can't deactivate a guard unit in that state without the governor's agreement.

Blagojevich's staff argues that the Springfield-based guard unit is crucial for protecting nuclear power plants and locks and dams.

Madigan is asking the court to declare the proposed deactivation of the 183rd air wing illegal. The move is scheduled to happen in fiscal year 2007.

"We are taking this action because I am concerned that by disbanding the 183rd air wing, we are diminishing the ability of the Air National Guard to respond to homeland security threats, civil emergencies and natural disasters," Madigan said in a statement.

Saved! Region relieved sub base removed from closure list

New London Day (New London, CT)
Stephen Chupaska
September 2, 2005

Groton - Like a Seawolf wake in the Thames, word spread last Wednesday that the Naval Submarine Base, a 90-year-old facility, was spared in a 7-1 vote by the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

Joe Quaratella at the Nautilus Barber Shop, located near an entrance to the base, heard the news from a barrage of phone calls.

"I got five calls in five minutes," he said as he cut the hair of Eric Olsen, who works at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, which was also struck from the closure list that day.

Down Route 12 apiece, Stan Cardinal, an ex-submariner who settled in Groton after leaving the Navy, said he heard while driving listening to a New York AM radio station.

"I was really pumped up about it," the auto dealership owner said, adding that morale among his employees was high throughout the day.

Cardinal said nearly 50 percent of his customers are in some way connected with the sub base.

"It was really an emotional ride," he said. "The synergy in Groton between the Navy and

businesses, school and government is very close."

The sub base employs more than 8,000 people, and would have suffered the largest job loss of any military installation on the BRAC list.

Tony Sheridan, the president of the Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce, likened the decision to keep the base open to "dodging a cannonball."

"It would have had a devastating effect (had it been closed)," he said. "We would have recovered, but it would have taken 10 years."

Sheridan added, however, that the high tech jobs now at the base would never have been recouped.

At the Waterfront Bar on Thames Street in Groton, several civilian employees of the sub base celebrated the good news over cocktails. They were instructed, however, not to talk to the media, but said generally there was a jubilant mood at work after the vote was recorded by BRAC in Arlington, Va.

Beth Sabilia, a New London city councilor and attorney, said two of her employees in her small office would have been adversely affected by the closure.

"You can't go through a day around the area without meeting someone with some personal or economic stake in the base," she said.

One of those with a personal stake was Robert Walker of Groton. A retired chief petty officer and the current New England coordinator of the Navy College Pace Program, Walker received a frantic phone call from his wife Wednesday.

"She said to get to a television as fast as I could because the commission was voting," he said.

As Walker and others in Building 38 on the base huddled around the communal television, they watched as the BRAC commissioners voted to take Groton off the closure list.

"The cheers resonated around the entire building and you could actually hear similar cheers from other corners of the base. The applause was actually deafening," Walker said. "I think what it came down to was national security. They couldn't leave us unprotected."

George Murray, a retired submariner who served on the Nautilus, said he wasn't surprised BRAC voted to remove the sub base from the list.

"Financially, it didn't make sense to rebuild facilities someplace else," he said.

The Defense Department wanted to shift duties from Groton to two bases in Virginia and Georgia.

BRAC commissioners made two visits to the base since the Pentagon tapped it for closure in May.

Sheridan called the effort among politicians and local business leaders "phenomenal."

"A group of local people questioned the powerful organization in the country, the Department of Defense," he said, "and proved them wrong with facts and figures."

Walker agreed that public support for the base paid off in the end.

"Now I can take my 'Save Our Subbase' sign out of my car and put it in storage," he said. "One day it might be a collector's item."

Willow Grove: An end or start?

Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, PA)
John Grogan
September 2, 2005

Yesterday was another typical day at and around the Willow Grove Naval Air Station.

Behind the miles of barbed-wire-topped fence, forklifts lumbered back and forth, Marines in camouflage stood guard, officers walked between buildings. Overhead, a military prop

plane flew in low over the businesses lining Easton Road, banked hard and made its landing.

Just another day. And yet, up and down the base's perimeter lined with stores and fast-food joints, there was a sense of resignation.

The residents of Willow Grove and Horsham have called the sprawling air base a neighbor since World War II. And a good one at that. It is a federally funded job generator and, during its annual air show, a tourism generator, too.

During the next few years, much if not all of that will change. The federal Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted last week to close Willow Grove station and redeploy its airplanes to other bases.

The closure is necessary, commission members said, to streamline and reposition the military to meet the demands of a new age in which the enemy is not another superpower but amorphous cells of terrorists.

A populist cause

Gov. Rendell, the state's two U.S. senators and just about every other politician who could glom onto it fought desperately to keep the base open. Every elected official in every state with a threatened base has been doing the same thing. No state wants to lose its piece of the pork pie.

No doubt, making a die-hard fight to save an aging military installation in your community is good politics.

The governor knows that; the senators know that. They want to show voters they are fighting hard for Pennsylvania's fair share of the federal largesse. But is it good governance?

In an age of mind-boggling budget deficits and spiraling debt, "gimme mine" government is not the answer. This country needs to spend less and spend smarter. If that means closing marginal bases, I'm all for it.

Wouldn't it be refreshing if just one governor in just one state stood up and said, "You know

what, you're right. This base is no longer crucial to our national security, and it costs taxpayers a bundle. I agree it's time to shut this dinosaur down."

Not going to happen.

For his part, Rendell went to court to block the dismantling of the base's Air National Guard unit. He got his wish, at least in part. A judge ruled last week that the Feds do not have authority to dissolve the unit, which answers to the governor. But it does have authority to take away the unit's planes. So we would have a bunch of pilots with no planes. Three cheers for wise use of tax dollars.

A fight not yet over

Never mind the details. The governor vows to keep the base open in some fashion, "for decades to come," as a center for Pennsylvania National Guard and Army Reserve units. He still hasn't given up on keeping the A-10 aircraft flying out of the base.

As I drove along the perimeter of the base, I couldn't help wondering whether the governor's self-trumpeted win was a victory at all for the nation. Just inside the base fence, old, mothballed jets and helicopters sat on display. They stood as silent witnesses to the changing military landscape.

Directly across from the base, tile store coowner Helen Goodwin conceded the base closing would not affect her business. To the contrary, converting some of the base's 1,200 acres into subdivision would be a boon.

"But I don't want to see it close," she said. "It's been here forever."

"It's like history," her business partner, Carole Halasy, added. "We're across the street from history."

Several doors down, Gus Maris, coowner of the Red Lion Diner, paused from seating customers to agree. "Trust me, I don't want to see it close,

but most of my business is local" and not from the base.

Meanwhile, it is hard to ignore the unique opportunity 1,200 acres of prime real estate so close to the nation's fifth-largest city presents. Just imagine the possibilities.

There is life after military base closings. All that is needed is the vision and courage to seize the future.

Opinions/ Editorials

Effort to save Ingleside base was undermined

Corpus Christi Caller-Times (Corpus Christi, TX)

Solomon Ortiz
September 1, 2005

The base closure commission has rendered its decision about mine warfare at Naval Station Ingleside. The BRAC commissioners decided it was best to move the mine warfare fleet, which totally contradicts the BRAC decision made 10 years ago.

After that, my staff moved quickly to put forward an alternative mission for the base, one the Department of Defense will certainly create shortly. This would be a Center of Excellence for Homeland Defense and Security, a mission as large as Mine Warfare.

But that effort was ended before it was completely executed by the South Texas community with whom we were working.

I wanted to keep Naval Station Ingleside open to ensure homeland defense in the western Gulf of Mexico, and to keep jobs in this part of the country. My own family was made up of former migrant workers, so I understand the importance of having a good job.

The team working to keep the Ingleside base open was undermined at several junctures.

The state political leaders did not attend the site visits in July or in August.

My biggest concern all along was homeland defense and our ability to secure the Gulf, the Strategic Military Sealift Port here in Corpus Christi, area refineries, etc.

I have particular concerns about al-Qaida cells loose inside the U.S. and elsewhere.

BRAC commissioners told me they understood the need for homeland defense in the Gulf, and that they were intrigued by including that language in their report.

Keeping the base for Navy

We worked with San Patricio attorneys on a motion that would have preserved all options for the business community if a mission didn't develop by the time the base was scheduled by BRAC to close.

But it would have preserved the base as a Navy asset until that determination could be made.

My motion stated that the base would be there for 2 1/2 more years, which would allow plenty of time for us to put a new program together, and preserve the commercial interests for the property.

It is incumbent upon the Department of Defense to establish a mission shortly in the Gulf designed to deal with homeland defense.

We specifically designed the motion to prevent Ingleside from becoming a "warm base" - one open but without a mission.

I heard from Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison's staff that she supported my motion to keep the base open. We told each commissioner that the Texas delegation was united in support of it.

BRAC commission staff told me later that Sen. Hutchison had submitted very different language that could have sent this center to any location in the Gulf, not to Naval Station Ingleside.

Before the session ended, we heard from Gary Bushell on behalf of San Patricio Judge Terry Simpson, with whom we were working on the homeland defense language.

Judge Simpson asked us to stand down. Bushell said Simpson did "not seek any language or action that delays the Port of Corpus Christi to take control of the Naval Station Ingleside property and thus begin the redevelopment process."

My conscience is clear. I am at peace that we did our very best to save the base. Now this is in the hands of the Defense Department, which holds the deed to the land.

We will work closely with elected officials and with the port to change the current agreement, for the port to pay approximately \$250 million or more to take possession of the property.

Local taxpayers have already helped pay for Naval Station Ingleside.

In the last Congress, my colleague Gene Taylor, D-Miss., and I worked very hard to include language in the defense authorization bill that would have changed the deed between the Navy and the port.

It would have returned the property so the area taxpayers would not be saddled with the estimated \$250 million price tag.

But those efforts were unsuccessful. Others want to make sure the federal cost of bases is returned. Cost savings for Defense Department is the central issue in BRAC.

Obviously, we will continue that effort with our senators this year, but given the turn of events, we can only hope.

Not a single Navy ship will be left in the Gulf after BRAC. God forbid, but an attack in the Gulf would cripple our nation and our petrochemical industry.

Memo: BRAC Ignored Facts;

Analyst Warned Of Mugu 'Brain Drain'

The Daily News of Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA)

Lisa Friedman

September 1, 2005

A member of the Pentagon's base closure team who helped decide the fate of Naval Base Ventura County warned the agency months ago that it was using a "flawed process" that prejudged cutbacks at several military sites, a series of internal memos shows.

The memos - obtained earlier this month by the Federation of American Scientists and released to the public - do not specifically mention Naval Base Ventura County.

But local officials have seized upon the memos as proof that the Defense Department panel and base closure commission erred in deciding to move more than 2,000 jobs from Point Mugu to China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station in Kern County.

"All of us have read it," Ted Rains, a member of the Ventura County base retention task force said of the documents.

"In our opinion, it was very explicit that the Joint Cross Service Group went about the process by deciding what they were going to do and then finding the data to support their decision. There was a breakdown in the process."

Written between March 2004 and May 2005 as the Pentagon drew up its proposals, Navy analyst and base closure veteran Don J. DeYoung repeatedly warned the joint cross service group that it was improperly rating bases.

The group was the Pentagon team responsible for evaluating installations such as China Lake and Naval Base Ventura County that perform research, development and acquisition functions.

Specifically, DeYoung alleged, many of the group's recommended closures and realignments were developed long before members obtained

the data they were supposed to use to make the decisions.

“Not one scenario was developed as a result of quantitative military value analysis or on the basis of excess capacity determinations,” DeYoung wrote in an April 23 memo.

He also said the group used a ranking system that favored bases spending a lot of money, and warned that by moving workers, the Pentagon is in danger of treating top military scientists and engineers “as interchangeable, conveyable, replicable items much like military housing, piers and hangar space.”

“Such simplistic treatment is harmful to national security because top technical talent is critical to the success of defense programs,” he wrote. “We all know the blunt truth is the best will not move with the work.”

DeYoung did not return phone calls, but his “brain drain” argument was noted by advocates of Naval Base Ventura County, with facilities at Point Mugu and Port Hueneme.

“I’ve said many, many times that most people won’t go,” said Rep. Elton Gallegly, R-Thousand Oaks, who had not yet read the DeYoung memos.

Pentagon spokesman Glenn Flood did not reply to specific questions about the DeYoung memos, but said the agency tried to incorporate dozens of views during two years of deliberations leading up to the base closure recommendations.

He also noted that an independent commission has reviewed the Pentagon’s proposals.

“If they found anything that was different, they had an opportunity to modify as the law prescribes. And they have made changes, and we are analyzing the actions taken by the commission,” Flood said.

While technically the base closure commission’s work is done and it is now up to President George W. Bush and Congress to approve its proposals, Ventura County officials say they

remain hopeful that they can still influence the process.

Readers critical of BRAC, officials for fort decision

Asbury Park Press (Asbury Park, NJ)
September 2, 2005

Overall savings not worth it
Our U.S. senators and representatives should employ a broader strategy in defending Fort Monmouth against the proposed Base Realignment and Closure bill. While Fort Monmouth’s contributions were downplayed by the commission, as were the negative impacts of moving, it seems advisable to consider the entire BRAC package, as this is the level at which a consensus in the Congress is best achieved.

The BRAC process seems to have had some value in previous iterations; less so in each successive round. The low-hanging fruit was picked early. This BRAC is nonsensical, if for no other reason than we are approaching the point where the vast majority of Americans will never see service members in uniform. Recruiting and public support are not served by diminishing the military footprint geographically.

More importantly, the macroeconomics of this BRAC is ridiculous. The numbers need to be exposed to those who will vote on the entire package.

The latest figure available is that the savings after 20 years are projected at \$48.8 billion, after losing money in the first five years. Yes, \$48.8 billion sounds like a lot at first blush. But then one has to consider that the annual Defense Department budget is about \$420 billion. Project that out 20 years, and in constant dollars you have \$8.4 trillion. So the 20-year savings divided by the total budget program is not even 1 percent (0.58 percent).

BRAC savings are supposed to keep the defense budget level, while enabling modernization of forces. This percent savings is supposed to be

the enabler of force modernization? This is chump change.

Even this level of savings is questionable. Will none of the elements of cost experience an overrun? Cost overruns are the rule, not the exception. It is an application of poor business sense to incur cost risk on top of brain drain, on top of intangible losses to pursue such a tiny percentage savings.

Additional Notes