

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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Katrina Might Aid Base Closure Foes

Congress Daily

Megan Scully

September 7, 2005

When Mississippi lawmakers turn to life after Hurricane Katrina in the weeks to come, they might use the devastating storm to make their case once again to keep the gates to Pascagoula Naval Station open well into the foreseeable future.

Base advocates questioned whether Mississippi's Gulf Coast, ravaged by the hurricane, could stand to lose more than 1,000 jobs directly and indirectly tied to the naval station, which the independent base-closure commission voted to shut down late last month - just days before the storm hit.

Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., said Tuesday that he has spoken with President Bush about the intended closure of the naval station within the last week, and told him he plans to continue to oppose that specific decision, as well as base closures in general.

Meanwhile, House Armed Services Readiness Subcommittee ranking member Solomon Ortiz, D-Texas, plans to send a letter to Bush today, imploring the president to encourage the

commission to reverse decisions to close Pascagoula and Ingleside Naval Station in Texas in light of the hurricane's damage.

"Given our strategic vulnerability in this region, we request you closely review the ... recommendation to close our only two naval bases in the region," Ortiz said in a draft of the letter. "These people and assets were some of the very first responders on the scene to support victims of this disaster."

Several lawmakers from other Gulf Coast states have signed on to the letter, an Ortiz spokeswoman said.

A spokeswoman for Lott said the proposed base closure is "ludicrous" and would injure the local economy, already devastated by the hurricane. She added that with so many other facilities destroyed by Katrina, the military needs the base to mobilize out of into the foreseeable future.

The base faced significant structural damage from the hurricane, but no buildings were destroyed by the strong winds and flooding, Lott said.

However, Lott said he is not worried that the naval station would be left vacant should the administration go ahead with its plans to shutter it.

"If the Navy doesn't want it, there are going to be people lined up," said Lott, who attempted unsuccessfully last year to delay base closures until 2007. He added that the property could be of use for the Homeland Security Department or other agencies.

The community is expected to press both Lott and Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss., to persuade the administration to send the base-closure list back to the commission with instructions to review the Pascagoula closure, a source said Tuesday.

Some sources said they were skeptical any attempts to save Pascagoula would be successful now that the independent commission approved its closure. Bush has said that he expects to

approve the commission's list, which he will receive by Thursday, and forward it to Congress later this month.

"If the president came in and went back to the commission and said they needed Pascagoula as a facility to do relief, that would be the only way," said Paul Hirsch, a base-closure consultant who served as a staffer on the 1991 commission.

Others, however, argued the base-closure decision could be beneficial to a post-hurricane Mississippi economy.

"They will have the opportunity to take full advantage to rework the entire economy, rebuild to something," said Ken Beeks, a vice president at Business Executives for National Security, who has long supported trimming the military's infrastructure.

The base-closure commission also voted Aug. 24 to allow Louisiana to move forward with its plans to build a \$166 million "federal city" in New Orleans, largely for Marine Corps administrative and financial purposes. The facility would be paid for by the state, which the commission decided has until September 2008 to raise the money.

A spokesman for Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., said it was too early to determine whether the state could move forward with those plans.

"Right now, our only concern is the immediate help for folks on the ground," the Landrieu spokesman said. "We have not even thought about BRAC."

Congressional sources said the question of Katrina's effects on Gulf Coast military bases had not been raised yet, but there is every expectation it will be, perhaps within the next week.

"I expect there will be a lot of noise, but they are all pretty much in disarray right now," one aide said.

Federal judge dismisses suit to stop Illinois base closure

The Associated Press
John O'Connor
September 6, 2005

A federal judge on Tuesday dismissed Gov. Rod Blagojevich's lawsuit aimed at stopping the military from moving fighter jets from Illinois to Indiana.

Judge Jeanne Scott ruled that Illinois had suffered no economic loss or breakdown in security because a federal commission's recommendation to move 15 F-16s to a base in Fort Wayne, Ind., is not final.

In a statement, Blagojevich said that the "battle to do what is right for Illinois and our country is certainly not over." But a spokesman said aides had not yet decided on the next step.

The Democratic governor argued that the 183rd Fighter Wing could not be relocated without his permission because it is part of the state militia he controls.

He asked the judge to issue a temporary restraining order to keep the Base Closure and Realignment Commission from sending its report to President Bush. The report is due by Thursday.

A Defense Department spokesman declined comment on the ruling, which runs counter to federal court decrees in other states.

In Connecticut, a judge issued a temporary restraining order and scheduled a hearing on a recommendation to move or retire planes from a fighter wing there.

And in Pennsylvania, a judge agreed with the governor that the military needs his permission to dissolve an Air Guard division.

On Wednesday, Massachusetts officials are planning to sue Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and the federal base closing commission in a last-ditch effort to keep Otis Air National Guard base open.

Lobby Shops Look To Build On Success In Latest BRAC Round

The Frontrunner
September 6, 2005

The Hill (9/6, Tiron) reports in its "Business and Lobbying" column, "Some high-powered Washington lobbying shops are banking on their freshly collected laurels to get even more business from the communities that hired them to get military bases off the Pentagon's chopping block. As the independent Base Closure and Realignment (BRAC) Commission is getting ready to send its final deliberations to President Bush on Sept. 8, lobbyists are monitoring the BRAC process here in Washington while corraling communities to extend their contracts. ... Among Washington lobbying shops scoring large victories for their clients are the Rhoads Group and Kutak Rock LLP, which represented Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota; the Washington Group, which defended the Naval Submarine Base New London in Connecticut; Patton Boggs, which represented the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Maine; Akin Gump, which worked for the states of New York, Kansas, Maryland and Arkansas; and Spectrum Group, which represented the state of Louisiana and a large Defense Finance and Accounting Service center in Cleveland. ... While several lobbying shops contacted by The Hill said that they did not receive so-called "success fees" for their work on BRAC, Keith Ashdown with Taxpayers for Common Sense said that it is possible for these firms to have an understanding with the communities to be retained for several more years."

Targeted Bases Unlikely to Stay Open

The Associated Press
September 07, 2005

WASHINGTON - The military base closings that the Pentagon and a commission have recommended are likely to be approved by President Bush and Congress, leaving

communities around the country with little hope that targeted facilities will be spared.

Bush is now focused on the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast rather than on base closures, analysts said. Scrapping the closure process now - after a nine-member commission has completed its review of the Pentagon plan - could leave him open to criticism when his poll numbers already are at a low point for his presidency.

"The president has got much bigger issues to worry about right now," said Loren Thompson, an analyst at the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Va.

Congress, too, is consumed with other priorities. And a GOP-led effort in the Senate to derail the process - one that Republican leaders privately feared could embarrass them - has largely fizzled out.

The commission that changed parts of the Pentagon plan last month denied politics played a role in any of its decisions, even as it chose to keep open bases in the home states of Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., and other senators leading the opposition. That all but eliminated the possibility of congressional intervention. The vast majority of House members overwhelmingly support this round of closures and consolidations, the first in a decade.

After five months of work, the commission must send its final report to the president by Thursday. He can accept it, kill it or, by Sept. 23, send it back to the panel for more changes. Congress has 45 days from the day it receives the report from the president to pass a joint resolution rejecting it in its entirety or it becomes law. Lawmakers have never rejected reports in previous base-closing rounds.

Last month, the commission largely endorsed Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's vision to restructure the domestic network of military bases to save billions of dollars over the next two decades and streamline the Army, Navy and Air Force.

But the panel also chose to keep open several major bases against the Pentagon's wishes, including a shipyard in Kittery, Maine, a submarine base in Groton, Conn., and Air Force bases in South Dakota and New Mexico.

Within days, Rumsfeld expressed reservations about such high-profile changes and said he was uncertain whether he would recommend that the president accept the proposed closures as modified by the commission. However, Rumsfeld also noted that the commission signed off on the majority of the Pentagon's recommendations.

That, analysts said, lessens the chance that the White House will reject the plan.

"Even though they didn't get everything they wanted, they got a lot of what they wanted," said Christopher Hellman, a base-closing expert at the Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation, a national security policy group.

Plus, analysts said, this may be the last chance the White House and Pentagon have to save money by shuttering bases because Congress probably will resist signing off on another round of closures, given the large amount of heartache lawmakers now are experiencing.

Congress reluctantly authorized this round of closures only after the White House threatened to veto an entire defense bill if it didn't give the Pentagon the go-ahead. Lawmakers have griped and vowed to stop the closures ever since.

The House never came close to passing measures to delay or kill the process. But GOP-sponsored legislation in the Republican-led Senate was gaining steam just before Congress left for its summer break.

Thune sponsored the legislation after the Pentagon announced in May that it wanted to close Ellsworth Air Force Base in his home state of South Dakota. He then secured the backing of other lawmakers, including several more Republicans, whose states also were slated to lose bases.

Then, the commission voted last month to reject Pentagon plans to close the South Dakota base, as well as major facilities in home states of Thune's GOP co-sponsors. "The biggest source of opposition has been mollified," Thompson said.

Despite the victory, Thune said he has not yet decided whether to pull his legislation that would have delayed the closures. Still, he allowed, "I think a lot of the co-sponsors of it probably are less inclined because of the commission's actions."

Sen. Trent Lott, a Mississippi Republican who long has worked to derail the base-closing process, said he had told the president he should reject the commission's final report, which calls for base closings - and, hence, job losses - in Mississippi.

Lott has often clashed with Bush, but he has the president's ear right now, given that Mississippi - including Lott's Gulf-shore home - was crushed by Hurricane Katrina. Still, chances are slim that the president will heed his advice on base closures.

Local News Articles

Lawsuit Over Fort Monmouth Is Dismissed

The New York Times (New York, NY)
September 7, 2005

TRENTON, Sept. 6 (AP) - A federal judge has dismissed a lawsuit filed by several New Jersey politicians seeking to keep Fort Monmouth open.

Judge Mary L. Cooper of United States District Court said in a ruling issued late Tuesday that federal courts do not have jurisdiction over the Base Closure and Realignment Commission process.

Judge Cooper's decision mirrored the reasoning of a United States government lawyer who

argued the matter before her on Tuesday afternoon.

Lawyers for the politicians who filed the lawsuit last week in a last-ditch effort to keep the base open said they expected it would ultimately be decided by a higher court - a hint that they would appeal if they lost.

The commission's recommendations are expected to go to President Bush on Thursday. He has pledged not to make any changes in them when he sends them to Congress for an up-or-down vote.

Mass. to file suit to keep base open

Nashua Telegraph (Nashua, NH)
Steve Leblanc
September 7, 2005

BOSTON – State leaders are planning to sue Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and a federal base closing commission today in a last ditch effort to keep Otis Air National Guard base open.

Gov. Mitt Romney and Attorney General Thomas Reilly say the Base Closure and Realignment Commission failed to obtain Romney's consent as required under the federal Constitution.

The complaint argues that, under the militia clause of the federal Constitution, any change to a national guard unit or base must be approved by the governor. The complaint will be filed in U.S. district court in Boston.

Romney and Reilly are seeking a temporary restraining order blocking the commission from including the recommendation to close Otis in a final report it plans to send to President Bush on Thursday.

"As governor, I have not agreed to the closing of Otis," Romney said in a written statement. "The (commission's) failure to solicit and obtain my consent as governor renders its recommendations legally deficient."

The joint decision to file a lawsuit was made Tuesday after a meeting between Reilly and Romney to discuss the state's legal options.

Reilly said the decision to file the suit was more than just an effort to save a military base.

"There is an important principle at stake here – that the governor must have input on decisions that impact the security of our state," he said in a statement.

Under the plan, Otis would be closed, but all 18 of the F-15s of the 102nd Fighter Wing currently stationed there would be transferred to Barnes Air National Guard base in Westfield.

While some in Westfield are welcoming the decision, which could bring extra jobs and improvements to the area, the closing of Otis is a huge loss on Cape Cod. With about 500 jobs, it is one of the largest employers on the Cape and an important part of the local economy.

The plan, which still needs the approval of President Bush and Congress, would transfer the A-10 attack jets now stationed at Barnes out of Massachusetts.

Sen. John Kerry said Otis is key to the security of the state and nation.

"The decision to close Otis made no sense all along and makes even less sense now that it will play a key role in hurricane recovery," he said. "On 9/11 and now in the wake of Katrina's destruction Otis has played a key role in our domestic preparedness."

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., called the lawsuit "the most effective step we can take to protect Otis from the irrational decision by the (base closing) commission."

Other states have tried similar tactics with varying degrees of success.

A federal judge on Tuesday dismissed a lawsuit filed by Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich aimed at stopping the transfer of fighter jets from Illinois to Indiana. Blagojevich argued the jets could not

be relocated without his permission because they are part of the state militia. The judge denied his request for a temporary restraining order.

In Connecticut, a judge agreed to issue a temporary restraining order and scheduled a hearing on a recommendation to move or retire planes from a fighter wing there. And in Pennsylvania, a judge agreed with the governor that the military needs his permission to dissolve an Air Guard division.

Fighter jets from Otis were the first to arrive in New York on Sept. 11, 2001, when two planes were hijacked from Boston's Logan International Airport and crashed into the World Trade Center in New York.

Critics have said the Pentagon relied on inaccurate information in targeting Otis. Massachusetts lawmakers said they believed the shutdown would end up costing the federal government \$163 million over the next 20 years, rather than saving more than \$300 million as projected by the Pentagon.

**Oceana decision proving elusive
Virginia Beach officials say they lack
information on what's needed to save base**
Richmond Times-Dispatch (Richmond, VA)
Bill Geroux
September 7, 2005

Bracing for BRAC

VIRGINIA BEACH -- Frustrated members of the City Council said yesterday they were still too starved for information to decide whether to undertake a costly campaign to try to stop hundreds of Navy jets and thousands of jobs from being moved from Oceana Naval Air Station to Florida.

"I can understand everyone's frustration," Mayor Meyera Oberndorf told her fellow council members at a work session, broadcast throughout Virginia Beach via local-access television. But she said the city could do little until local and state officials pinned down exactly what the independent base-closing

commission was demanding Virginia Beach do and how much it would cost.

At the urging of Vice Mayor Louis Jones, the council took steps to hire a consultant to start adding up the potential cost of the commission's requirements, which include buying and clearing 1,800 homes and an undetermined number of businesses from the crash zones near Oceana's runways. Some city officials have suggested the price could reach \$500 million.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted two weeks ago to move Oceana's 244 jets and roughly 12,000 jobs to Cecil Field in Florida unless Virginia Beach takes steps to reverse decades of suburban encroachment on Oceana, which is now the Navy's main East Coast jet base. The commission gave Virginia Beach until the end of March to choose.

But City Manager James Spore told council members the city has yet to receive any formal documents spelling out the commission's demands. Even after those documents arrive -- probably late this week -- the city will need to discuss them thoroughly with the U.S. comptroller general's office, which would be responsible for deciding whether the city had complied, Spore said.

The council was advised to stay calm and keep all its options open in the meantime. But the strain was beginning to show for some council members, who may have to vote whether to give up Virginia Beach's largest employer or spend hundreds of millions of dollars to displace residents who have lived on the fringe of the air base for as long as 30 years.

A half-dozen of those residents attended the meeting yesterday carrying placards with messages such as "Save Our Homes" and "Stand up for Your Citizens." Councilwoman Rosemary Wilson told them that taking their land by eminent domain "is the very last thing we'd ever want to do." Councilwoman Reba McClanan said, "I don't want people to think the decision has already been made."

Councilman Ron Villanueva suggested Virginia "get equally cutthroat" with Florida, which aggressively lobbied the base-closing commission to move the jets to Cecil Field near Jacksonville. Villanueva said Virginia should send representatives to the Sunshine State to undercut its arguments that Cecil Field would be a better location. But state Sen. Kenneth W. Stolle, R-Virginia Beach, said the opportunity to make such a case apparently had passed.

Other council members suggested the state challenge the legality of the base-closing commission's ultimatum to Virginia Beach. Stolle and state Del. Terrie L. Suit, R-Virginia Beach, suggested lawyers were looking into that but declined to discuss specifics. Stolle cautioned that Florida officials were closely monitoring what Virginia officials said and did about Oceana.

Several council members said the city should research the history of development on the edge of Oceana so the public would know whom to blame for the encroachment. They said the news media had placed an unfair portion of that blame on past city zoning decisions.

Suit stressed there were no plans to close Oceana, only to move the jets. But she said it was unclear what Navy operations and jobs would exist at the base if the jets left. That is one more crucial piece of information the city needs to decide what to do, she said. Suit compared Oceana to "a high-performance car that we're looking at losing the engine from."

Mayor Oberndorf said Gov. Mark R. Warner was appointing a state task force to deal with Oceana and other Virginia base closures and realignments, and that representatives from cities throughout Hampton Roads probably would take part, because the loss of the jets would affect the entire region. The City Council took steps to form its own task force and said it would seek public comments.

The base-closing process is lengthy and complex. The commission is due to present its recommendations to President Bush at the end of this week, and Bush can accept them, reject

them, or send them back for revision. If he accepts them, Congress is to consider them in January.

If the recommendations survive Bush and Congress, Virginia Beach would have until the end of March to decide whether to comply with the commission's demands or to let the jets leave. The comptroller general's office would decide in June whether the city had complied.

Sub base dissenter explains vote

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)

Katherine Hutt Scott

September 7, 2005

WASHINGTON-- Former GOP congressman James Hansen of Utah, the only member of a federal base-closing commission who voted against saving the Groton submarine base, describes himself as "an old, hardheaded, Western redneck."

"I'm probably the hardest head of the bunch (of nine commissioners)," Hansen, 73, said in an interview Friday explaining his dissenting vote despite what he called a "phenomenal" effort by Rep. Rob Simmons to save his local base.

Some familiar with the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission's Aug. 24 vote, which overturned a Pentagon recommendation to close Groton, disagreed with Hansen's self-assessment.

Simmons, R-2nd District, who served on the House Armed Services Committee with Hansen, described him as "very rational, very logical" and "a wonderful person."

Simmons said he got to know Hansen when the Utah congressman was chairman of the House Resources Committee. The first bill Simmons introduced as a congressman, to protect Connecticut's Eightmile River by designating it as a "wild and scenic" waterway, had to be approved by Hansen's committee.

Simmons said to gain Hansen's blessing, he had to do some political horse-trading. Simmons, a

Sierra Club member, said he had to sacrifice his support of a proposed expansion of a park in Hansen's district that Hansen opposed.

"We had some interesting discussions," Simmons said. "We got to like each other."

Political theory

John Pike of GlobalSecurity.org, a defense analysis firm, had a political explanation for Hansen's vote on Groton.

Pike said Hansen appeared to be playing along with a political decision by the commission to save Groton as a favor to Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman, a prominent Democrat. The favor was necessary to offset a similar favor for Republican Sen. John Thune, to save South Dakota's Ellsworth Air Force Base, Pike thinks.

"They couldn't just do closures to help Republicans," Pike said. "It would be transparently political."

Pike said Hansen cast a dissenting vote so the Groton decision didn't appear to be "stinky."

"In order to save appearances, they didn't want it to be unanimous," Pike said.

But a longtime observer of Hansen confirmed the former congressman is an independent thinker who does what he thinks is right.

"He's not a go-along, get-along type of person," said Kirk Jowers, director of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics. "Especially at this stage in his career, he would not be persuaded by (politics) if he genuinely believes they have a mandate to close bases."

Hansen said his reason for not saving Groton was the same that he stated publicly just before he cast his vote: Navy officials had convinced him the country has more piers and other infrastructure to support submarines than it needs -- and that excess infrastructure would be costly for the country.

"I put a little more emphasis (than the other commissioners did) on the lack of savings when

it seemed obvious that we had way too much infrastructure," Hansen said Friday.

Hansen also said before he cast his vote that if the Pentagon wanted to close an East Coast submarine base, it should have put all three, including those in Virginia and Georgia, on the closure list for consideration by the commission.

On Friday, Hansen said he wasn't able to pick which of the three would be the best to close, because he hadn't visited all three. He visited Groton twice during his 1981-2003 tenure in Congress, he said.

Hansen, who now has a consulting firm in Farmington, Utah, praised Groton as "an outstanding base."

He also praised Simmons as doing the best job of all the people who petitioned this year's commission to keep their bases open.

"What really won that (decision in favor of Groton) was Rob Simmons," Hansen said. "He did a phenomenal job."

Hansen said he had no regrets about his vote on Groton: "I made the vote predicated on what I thought was right."

Opinions/ Editorials

Aggravation and futility

Monterey County Herald (Monterey County, CA)

Barbara Darrah
September 6, 2005

The sunny weather must have reflected many people's feelings as another round of Base Realignment and Closure "decisions" has "saved" our local military institutes, the Naval Postgraduate School and Defense Language Institute, from closure, although the aftertaste of the process is quite sour. As a retired DLI language instructor, who went through several of these rounds, I wonder if there is any benefit in conducting such assessments -- as they are done.

The cost savings of closing our local military schools (and reopening or consolidating them elsewhere) cannot outweigh the savings hoped for by the commission and do nothing to maintain the high standards of military training they provide without interruption/loss thereof. Added to that, the continuous lobbying necessary to fight being on those lists may well take away quite a lot from the expected or hoped-for savings, albeit on a different level of spending.

Also, on a human level -- hello, anyone in Washington, are we still by the people, for the people? The local community, including all those dedicated people directly involved in the schools, suffer deep stress and political disillusionment every time this happens. May I suggest -- in vain, no doubt -- that our government stop this power trip exercise in aggravation and futility?

Letter To The Editor

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (St. Louis, MO)
September 6, 2005

Blunt responded fast to area military closures In the editorial "The dust settles" (Aug. 31), on the Base Realignment and Closure Commission process, the Post-Dispatch failed to mention a few key facts.

The majority of states that kept sites intact had governors who began formulating arguments and hiring consultants two years ago when the impending BRAC review was announced. Former Gov. Bob Holden wasn't one of those governors.

The Holden administration left the Blunt administration no documentation about what it had done or, as it turns out, hadn't done to protect Missouri's military facilities. The argument put forth by the Post-Dispatch and others that the state's Washington, D.C., office could have prevented these actions is ludicrous.

The Washington office was a senseless waste of tax dollars and its staffers had no influence on

the Hill or on a process as complicated as BRAC.

Finally, it is indisputable that Gov. Matt Blunt acted quickly, decisively and in a bipartisan fashion to plead Missouri's case to the BRAC Commission. He hired a reputable consultant, personally testified before the commission and spoke directly to its chairman.

Gov. Blunt is not satisfied with the BRAC committee's recommendations and has instructed the attorney general to file suit against it and the Department of Defense. He has secured more than \$1 million from the federal government to help displaced workers and is committed to doing everything in his power to help those who are affected by these irresponsible decisions.

Spence Jackson
Director of Communications
Missouri Governor's Office
Jefferson City, Mo.

Additional Notes