Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY BIRD

September 12, 2005

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South bases hit with a brick over BRAC

Georgia not only fails to gain jobs but loses four installations
Knoxville News Sentinel (Knoxville, TN)
Jeffrey Mcmurray
September 12, 2005

WASHINGTON - A commission sent President Bush a military realignment proposal late last week that was less kind to Southern bases than the Pentagon wanted, and affected communities in the region were moving ahead with redevelopment plans even as their lawmakers hoped for last-minute changes.
The independent commission for Base Realignment and Closure, or BRAC, ultimately approved all but 14 percent of the closings and consolidations sought by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. Many of the rollbacks came as bad news for the South, but few decisions to salvage bases or major missions benefited the region.

"The commissioners seemed to feel that the Pentagon had been too hard on the Northeast, and it was their job to rebalance the decisions in order to prevent the demilitarization of New England," said Loren Thompson, a defense analyst at the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Va.

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Thompson said he expected Bush and Congress to approve the commission's recommendations. Still, Sen. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., was holding out hope something could be done to restore the Pentagon's initial proposal to close Navy bases in Connecticut and Maine. Those would have meant major job gains at Kings Bay Submarine Station in Georgia and Norfolk Naval Station in Virginia.

The BRAC panel reversed those decisions, but Chambliss suggested Bush should rethink them because they accounted for 80 percent of the Navy's cost savings.

The commission's final deliberations were particularly bad news for Georgia, which not only failed to gain jobs at Kings Bay but still lost four bases to closure - Naval Air Station-Atlanta, Fort Gillem and Fort McPherson in the Atlanta area and a small Navy supply school in Athens.

When it comes to finding a future after closure, however, the Georgia bases figure to have more options than some of the other doomed Southern bases, such as Naval Station Pascagoula in Mississippi or the Naval Support Activity in New Orleans.

Under the redevelopment process, federal and state agencies get first dibs on former military property before it is turned over to the community for private development. Often Southern bases are passed over because they are in less-populated areas, with a smaller available workforce, but Atlanta is a major exception.

Some agencies have already expressed interest in maintaining a presence at Gillem or McPherson, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which currently houses trailers there, said Fred Bryant, executive director for the McPherson-Gillem Foundation.

In late October, community leaders from the Southern bases targeted for closure or realignment will gather in Atlanta for a briefing by Pentagon officials for how to redevelop their bases.

Bid to keep jets rejected

Copley News Service
Adriana Colindres And Otto Kreisher
September 11, 2005

SPRINGFIELD - The U.S. Supreme Court dealt a setback Thursday to Illinois officials, who turned there after a divided federal appeals court refused to halt the transfer of F-16 fighter jets from Springfield to Fort Wayne, Ind.

Gov. Rod Blagojevich and Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan asked the nation's highest court Thursday for an emergency injunction that would stop the removal of the jets from the Illinois Air National Guard's 183rd Fighter Wing, headquartered at Abraham Lincoln Capital Airport. Hours later, the court rejected the request.

"This is definitely not the end of our legal battle," Blagojevich said in a prepared statement. "Our case is solid, our facts are indisputable and we will hopefully prevail."

The ongoing courtroom fight centers on a recommendation to realign the 183rd Fighter Wing by sending 15 active F-16 jets to an Air Guard unit in Fort Wayne. That would trigger the departure of 163 full-time personnel from the Springfield base.

Earlier in the day, the Bush administration asked the Supreme Court to overrule a Connecticut federal judge's action blocking the Base Realignment and Closure Commission from filing its final recommendations Thursday, as required by law.

Solicitor General Paul Clements told the high court the ruling by a U.S. circuit court judge in Connecticut was "antithetical" to the proper operations of the BRAC panel.

Illinois, Connecticut and other states have gone to court in recent weeks to oppose the recommended closure or restructuring of military bases. Those efforts have resulted in victories for some states and setbacks for others.

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In most instances, federal judges found the appeals were premature because the states had suffered no harm, since the BRAC recommendations would not be final until Bush and Congress have considered whether to accept or reject the panel's report. The judge in Connecticut and one in Tennessee were the exception in agreeing to stop the commission's actions.

Under the BRAC law, Bush would have until Sept. 23 to accept or reject the commission's decisions in its report. He cannot change the report. If the president accepts the commission's actions, Congress could only block it if both chambers approve resolutions of disapproval within 45 days.

Even after the BRAC recommendations become final, none of the proposed closures or realignments will happen for months, or years.

Blagojevich and Madigan went to the U.S. Supreme Court after the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected their emergency appeal early Thursday.

A majority of the three-judge appeals panel said the transfer of the F-16s, which the Pentagon recommended and the BRAC commission endorsed, is not yet final. That means it is not yet subject to court review, Judges Frank Easterbrook and Diane Sykes wrote.

But Blagojevich can fight the transfer in court after - and if - Bush and Congress approve moving the jets, the judges wrote.

BRAC panel submits report, questions 'illogical' time line

Air Force Times
Gordon Trowbridge
September 09, 2005

The Pentagon is using an "illogical" timeline in proposing to close or shrink of hundreds of facilities, has failed to boost joint military operations and will save far less than it estimates in latest infrastructure overhaul, the independent base-closings commission says in its final report to President Bush.
Despite Pentagon ambitions to improve cross-service cooperation, "very few of the hundreds of proposals increased jointness, and some actually decreased or removed joint and cross-service connections," according to the report, released Friday by the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

And, the commission said, it made little sense to make decisions before completion of a four-year strategy review and other massive changes affecting the military.

The report includes 182 recommendations to close or shrink military installations. If President Bush and Congress do not reject the list, it becomes law.

The report also criticizes the timing of this round, saying base closings should come after, and not before, the once-every-four-years review of defense strategy now under way. And it echoes prior criticism from panel members of the Air Force's handling of the Air National Guard, the most controversial issue in the process.

The final report omits one recommendation approved during the panel's hearings last month. A plan to remove A-10 attack jets from a Connecticut Air National Guard base was stripped after a federal judge in Connecticut ruled the move would violate federal laws giving states wide authority over National Guard units in their jurisdiction. In a statement, the commission said it would reinstate the recommendation if higher courts overturned that ruling.

Connecticut was one of several states to challenge Air Guard moves in court, but the only one to get a favorable ruling. Illinois, Missouri and Massachusetts had court challenges rejected Thursday.

In a section proposing future base-closings rounds, the panel "strongly recommends" closings decisions be made after — not before — future Quadrennial Defense Reviews.

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"Infrastructure decisions should flow from a strategic vision, not the other way around," it says.

The combination of the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the move of thousands of U.S. troops from overseas bases back to the United States, the Army's organizational reforms, the QDR and an ongoing study of airlift and sealift introduced too much uncertainty into the panel's deliberations, the report says.

"The commission finds illogical the seemingly inverse order that the department followed in arriving at its list of facilities for closure and realignment," the report concludes.

It also chides the Pentagon for combining large numbers of seemingly unrelated moves into single recommendations, and in other cases splitting proposals for a single base into multiple recommendations, making it far more difficult than necessary to understand how one move would affect others.

And commissioners repeated criticisms leveled throughout their deliberations that the Pentagon overstated potential savings from its proposals. Much of the estimated $49 billion in savings came from savings on military personnel costs, even though in most cases the services have no plans to reduce their uniformed forces.

Both the commission and the Government Accountability Office have criticized that accounting methodology. Overall, the panel estimates its recommendations would save $15 billion over the next two decades.

The commission also submitted recommended text for legislation authorizing future base-closings rounds, which it recommended at eight- to 12-year intervals.

The report is available on the commission's Web site. In its statement, the commission said it approved almost two-thirds of the 190 Pentagon recommendations with no changes, and overall approved 84 percent, some with changes. Of 33 Defense Department major closing recommendations, the panel approved 21 and forwarded another seven with changes.

President Bush now has one opportunity to send the report back to the commission with recommended changes, though he has said he will not do so.

Eventually, he must approve or reject the list in its entirety; if he approves, the list becomes law unless both the House and Senate reject it.

Talking BRAC: Who's gaining, losing planes

Air Force Times
Bruce Rolfsen
September 12, 2005

While the high-profile effort to close Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., was turned back by the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, most Air Force recommendations got the panel's blessing.
During Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John Jumper's final press briefing before retiring Sept. 2, Jumper estimated that the service got about 70 percent of what it had asked for from the BRAC panel.

"In Washington, I've never seen 100 percent," Jumper said. "If you get 50 percent, it's usually pretty good."

The Air Force couldn't get the BRAC panel to go along with most of the proposals for Air Guard installations. Only 34 of the original 72 recommendations for Air Guard bases were approved.

The wholesale changes to the Air Guard plan don't signal an end to the Air Force's Future Total Force effort, which is geared at putting airmen into emerging missions such as command-and-control and Predator operations.

The Air Force is now looking at how the BRAC commission manpower and aircraft recommendations will affect Future Total Force, said Lt. Col. Mike Odom, a spokesman for the Future Total Force office.

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Among changes the Air Force BRAC panel agreed to were:

• Grand Forks Air Force Base, N.D., trades its KC-135 tanker mission for remote-controlled Predators around 2010.

• Moody Air Force Base, Ga., gains two A-10 squadrons, receiving aircraft from Pope Air Force Base, N.C., and several other bases.

• Pope's active-duty C-130s leave for Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark., and are replaced by Reserve or Guard transports.

• The Air Force's largest hospital, Wilford Hall Medical Center in San Antonio, closes.

• Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas, sees much of its medical training mission made part of a joint school at the Army's Fort Sam Houston in Texas.

• Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., becomes home to the Joint Strike Fighter school.

• Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho, becomes exclusively an F-15E Strike Eagle base, giving up its F-16s and F-15Cs.

The BRAC panel's recommendation to keep 24 B-1B Lancer bombers at Ellsworth wasn't the only decision on active-duty bases that went against the Air Force's wish list.

The panel voted not to move C-130s from Dyess Air Force Base, Texas, to Little Rock Air Force Base, Ark. The commission also rejected plans to close Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., and move F-16s out of Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska.

While Cannon will stay open, the base is losing its F-16s, leaving the base with no flying mission. No one is certain what will replace the jets to justify keeping the base open.

The Air Force has no replacement mission on the horizon for Cannon.

The only Air Force flying mission that is expanding soon is the use of remote-controlled Predators. The Air Force wants to establish 15 Predator squadrons. About half of those squadrons have already been promised to bases in Nevada, Arizona, Texas, New York and North Dakota.

While Cannon could support an active-duty Predator unit, the base's long distance from major cities or airports makes it an unlikely candidate for a Reserve or Air Guard Predator unit.

The Air Force is also considering proposals to hire a contractor to teach the first phase of pilot and navigator flight school at a single location. The site of the school hasn't been determined — however, each of the bidders has submitted their preferred sites.

New Mexico political leaders are suggesting Cannon could become home to a Joint Strike Fighter wing or turned over to the Army as a satellite base for Fort Bliss, near El Paso, Texas, and 300 miles from Cannon.

Local News Articles

Dubuque facility still on base-closure list

Telegraph Herald (Dubuque, IA)
Ken Brown
September 11, 2005

A small military installation south of Dubuque remained on the Bush administration's plan for closures as part of streamlining military bases nationwide.

The nine-member Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission forwarded its final report to the president late Thursday after signing off on roughly 86 percent of what the Pentagon had recommended. Included was the Dubuque Navy Reserve Center.

The facility has seven full-time active-duty personnel and four units comprised of about 135 drilling reservists. Closing the Navy Reserve Center has a domino effect because it is the host facility of the U.S. Army Reserve's 389th

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Engineer Battalion's Headquarters Service Company.

President Bush can accept or reject the plan; Congress also will have a chance to veto the plan, but Congress has not taken that step in four previous rounds of closures.

Mayor tapped for BRAC group
Suffolk News-Herald (Suffolk, VA)
Allison T. Williams
September 11, 2005

Mayor Bobby L. Ralph is one of several local lawmakers tapped Saturday by Gov. Mark Warner to serve on the South Hampton Roads BRAC Working Group.

The group, tasked with addressing the Naval Air Station Oceana recommendations issued on August 24th by the 2005 BRAC Commission, includes mayors, state lawmakers and business officials from across Hampton Roads.
"Our military installations in South Hampton Roads are critical to our nation's security, and are the lifeblood of the region," said Warner. "As a result of the 2005 BRAC process, we face unprecedented challenges, particularly in maintaining a Master Jet Base at NAS Oceana that will require solutions that are good for individual homeowners and the community as a whole."

Ralph, along with other local lawmakers from the region, met briefly with Warner, after the recent ceremony announcing the opening of the new Emergency Management Training, Analysis and Simulation Center.

"The governor noted that this is not just a Virginia Beach problem," he said. "The realignment of Oceana, through the ripple effect, would have a serious impact on the whole area.

"We need to do what we can to save Oceana from the realignment," he said.

"What happens at Oceana will have some bearing on the city of Suffolk."

Although Virginia Beach has not announced an official plan, Suffolk lawmakers informally agreed to support that city's course of action.

Warner's working group will be led by Sen. Ken Stolle of Virginia Beach, who will serve as chair; and Owen B. Pickett of Virginia Beach, former congressman and co-chair of Virginia Commission on Military Bases; who will serve as vice chair.

Other members include: Del. Terrie Suit, Virginia Beach; Del. John Cosgrove, Chesapeake; Sen. Yvonne B. Miller, Norfolk; retired U.S. Navy Adm. Fred Metz, Virginia Beach; Daniel E. Baxter, president of the Virginia Beach Council of Civic Organizations; Chesapeake Mayor Dalton S. Edge; Norfolk Mayor Paul D. Fraim; Portsmouth Mayor James W. Holley III; Virginia Beach Vice Mayor Louis R. Jones; Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf; Virginia Beach City Councilwoman Debbie Ritter; Virginia Beach City Manager James K. Spore; and Macon Brock, chief executive officers of Dollar Tree Stores Inc.

Additionally, the region's members of the U.S. House of Representatives members Thelma Drake, Randy Forbes, and Bobby Scott, and U. S. Senators John Warner and George Allen;, and Capt. Thomas F. Keeley, commanding officer at NAS Oceana will serve as non-voting, ex-officio members. Steven B. Sandler of Virginia Beach, owner of L.M. Sandler & Sons, Inc. will also serve as a non-voting member.

"This working group will operate under the auspices of the Virginia Commission on Military Bases, and provide us the knowledge and vision to address the recommendations of the national BRAC Commission in a unified manner," Governor Warner said.

"We are well aware the BRAC Commission's recommendations have caused a great deal of anxiety, especially in Virginia Beach," said the Governor. "This working group will provide a forum to flesh out a host of issues, and begin to answer many of the questions being asked."

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Keep sights on future of Guard base

Fort Wayne Journal Gazette (Fort Wayne, IN)
September 11, 2005

WASHINGTON – It's not 300 additional jobs and nine more fighter jets, but the 233 jobs and three-aircraft expansion projected for the 122nd Fighter Wing at the Fort Wayne Air National Guard base is a victory.

Or is it?

The region's political leaders, the economic community and the folks attached to the base should consider the recommendation of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to consolidate the Terre Haute and Fort Wayne fighter wings nothing more than a breather.

Perversely enough, they should be thankful that the Pentagon's original plan – to double the base's payroll and swell the fleet to 24 fighter jets – was scaled back.

The original plan would have encouraged celebration followed by complacency. However, in a decade or so, all that effort to retain and expand the fighter wing at Fort Wayne will be meaningless.

Change is coming, and it won't be pretty, at least for those who cling to the image of an Air National Guard base as a place filled with air jockeys and the crews that maintain – and take pride in – the sleek, sexy fighter jets.

The F-16s are aging, and although many details are vague, there are no plans to replace them on a one-for-one basis. The new fighter jets – called F/A-22 Raptors – are far more expensive. Besides, the Air Force says one Raptor does the work of two or three F-16s. It hasn't been made explicit, but it's also clear that the Air Force doesn't intend to outfit Air National Guard bases with Raptors.

Let's see: The lifespan of the remaining F-16s is quickly ending; the Air Force isn't buying new ones; and the replacement Raptors won't be assigned to National Guard bases. So a base built around F-16s has what kind of future?

Add to that the Air Force's strategy, called "Future Total Force," which projects a leaner service and less reliance on manned aircraft. The result is an Air Force/Guard/Reserve system with a radically different makeup.

The Air Force – like all aspects of life – is relying more on technology than on physical equipment. That's not to say that the Air Force will ever be without aircraft, but the technological aspects of warfare require more computer expertise, intelligence analysts, drone operators and satellite monitors. It will not require more fighter pilots and the crews that maintain their jets.

As part of the Total Future Force strategy, the Air Force anticipates a closer relationship among the active-duty Air Force and the Guard and Reserve. The Pentagon clearly would prefer a certain number of active-duty bases with Guard and Reserve components attached to them. That kind of streamlining is years away, and may not be politically viable. However, the Air National Guard bases that mesh with the technologically focused concept of the future Air Force will clearly be in a stronger position during future rounds of base closures.

Oddly enough, even bases with a cargo-jet mission – far less flashy than fighter jets – may be in a better situation than F-16 bases. Bases involved in the newest technology, such as the Predator drones, may be in the best position.

Thus, the lobbying effort to retain the 122nd Fighter Wing and its F-16s may have been a temporary success with a long-term down side.

The smart pols will now turn their efforts to repositioning the Fort Wayne base into something more compatible with the future Air Force. Whether that is cargo jets, the unmanned Predator drones or some other mission will need to be carefully considered.

This is not a decision a single member of Congress can make. However, the prep work started by Rep. Jill Long and followed on by Rep. Mark Souder positioned Fort Wayne's base

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to be competitive as a facility with a long runway, updated ramps and improved hangars. They used their allotted "pork" to bolster the physical plant of the base, and the results paid off when the Pentagon looked at the Springfield, Terre Haute and Fort Wayne bases and selected Fort Wayne as the best. That strategy worked for this round of base closures. It will not be a winning strategy in the future.

Souder is not unaware of this. Indeed, early on he warned that any expansion of the Fort Wayne base as a F-16 base was a temporary victory.

"We need to be realistic that long-term we need an additional strategy," he said when the Pentagon's plans were announced.

But positioning Fort Wayne to be essential in the new Air Force will be far harder than getting budget allocations for longer taxiways and a more modern hangar.

Opinions/ Editorials

National Guard Under Connecticut Jurisdiction

New London Day (New London, CT)
September 12, 2005

Letters To The Editor:
From my point of view, the Connecticut National Guard, including the Air Guard, is a department of Connecticut, not a part of the U.S. Department of Defense. It is an expression of the right of the citizens to bear arms.

Its primary mission is protecting the citizens of Connecticut from such things as invasion, riots, and emergencies. The governor may authorize its use to assist other states with similar problems. It probably might be considered a part of the Department of Homeland Security.

Therefore, the Department of Defense, while logically providing equipment, including aircraft, has no authority to order a member of the Guard to active duty. The Guard is not the Army Reserve. Only the governor can do this. The defense secretary may ask for assistance, but this should only be in the case of a major conflagration. Nor can the Base Realignment and Realignment Commission reorganize it.

This viewpoint also applies to other states, of course.

Credit Baldacci for saving 2 endangered bases

Kennebec Journal (Augusta, ME)
Debra Whitehouse
September 12

The odds were against keeping the bases open, but Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and the Defense Finance and Accounting Service office in Limestone survived. Only 14 percent of bases on the list were removed, but Gov. John E. Baldacci got two of ours off it. It took the leadership of Baldacci and Reps. Tom Allen and Mike Michaud to get the job done.

The governor brought everyone involved to the table four months ago, when the Base Realignment and Closure commission announcement came down the line. Working tirelessly, they mounted an aggressive defense that was unstoppable.

I know the naval station in Brunswick is destined to close. It's a shock and the result of a zealous administration. It simply was too much to ask that all three bases remain operational. After all, 86 percent on the closure list close won't.

The governor is doing everything possible to ensure that the Brunswick community comes out of this better off.

On the day of the closure announcement, he was there with plans for redevelopment and retraining. He's already talked to the workers who will lose their jobs, giving them assurance that Maine needs them and will look after them.

After four months of working nonstop, he still is at it nonstop. He cares. He is making Maine stronger. He fought like a tiger for our jobs.

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Count your blessings, Texarkana

Texarkana Gazette (Texarkana, TX)
Les Minor
September 11, 2005

It only takes a natural disaster of historic proportions to put things in proper perspective.

It was only a few days ago that we learned that most of our local military missions had survived the federal base closure and realignment process. While we lost Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant, much of Red River Army Depot will remain intact.

For months our local leaders were up in angst over the possibility of losing the 5,000 jobs these installations represented. They are two important cogs in the local economy, and the closure of both would have had a profound and negative effect on the local economy-but nothing like the effect Hurricane Katrina had on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

We should count our blessings.

And it's more than a little ironic that this natural disaster happened right after the BRAC Daddies decided to close Lone Star, and that it and Red River are now being used as a staging and distribution point for mobile homes that will be used as temporary housing for hurricane evacuees.

It's good that as a nation we're bringing all our resources into play. Still, it makes you wonder how they can dismiss so easily a place they have come to rely on so often.

Still, things could have been much worse for us.

We should count our blessings.

Completing Interstate 49 from Kansas City to Baton Rouge has been one of this community's long-time economic endeavors. It holds the promise of expanding our presence as a national transportation hub.

This dream got a boost when $200 million federal dollars were allocated to Louisiana to help build the stretch between Shreveport and Texarkana. With matching state funds, officials think it can be completed in seven years. As such, it holds the promise of creating a synergy between two cities of significant size where three interstate highways-and one day four-converge and interact with rail, river and air options.

But our fuss over this roadway pales when compared to the devastation that has overwhelmed our coastline to the south.

We should count our blessing.

And on one hand it is natural to ask-though the money has already been earmarked-if those millions wouldn't be better spent in another part of Louisiana. On the other hand, this money could represent many good jobs far from the disaster area where many displaced citizens from the coastal region could start a new life.

Many of them will be looking for opportunities elsewhere, anyway. They have no choice.

We do.

We should count our blessings.

And while sometimes we grouse about our manufacturing base and our low paying jobs and the things we perceive as lacking in our quality of life, they have no quality of life in South Louisiana and along the Mississippi and Alabama coast. Unemployment is expected to top 25 percent and remain there for an extended period. It will be months before even the most basic pieces of commerce are put back together again. If there were pockets of poverty down there before, there are suitcases full of it now.

Yes, the greater Texarkana region is not the most dynamic, diverse or innovative in the industrial sector, but we're functional.

The same can't be said about our neighbors to the south.

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We should count our blessings.

A few years ago we had an ice storm in Northeast Texas and Souhwest Arkansas that people still talk about, a century storm that crippled the region, left it freezing and powerless for days, reshaped our landscape and required months to clean up.

In the shadow of Katrina it seems like little more than inconvenience, a slap on the wrist compared to the full frontal attack the Gulf Coast endured.
We should count our blessings.

And it wasn't too long ago that many of us were poking fun at our new Texarkana brand "Western Spirit Served With Southern Hospitality."

But better it than "Where Katrina meets the coast," or "Where Katrina meets the Crescent City."

There is no brand that can adequately portray the tragedy that is the Gulf Coast. It is not what it was. It may never be again.

Words are fairly meaningless in the greater scheme of things. It is our actions that define us.

The only slogan people will remember for many months will be "We Survived. Somehow. Sort of," though even that is an overstatement. Too many did not.

We should count our blessings.

Additional Notes

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