

## Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

# EARLY



# BIRD

September 19, 2005

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#### **President Sends BRAC Commission Report to Congress**

American Forces Press Service  
Gerry J. Gilmore  
September 16, 2005

WASHINGTON— President Bush concurred with and sent the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission's report to Congress on Sept. 15 for legislative review, White House officials announced.

Congress now has 45 legislative days to accept or reject the report in its entirety. Congress cannot make changes to the final report.

The commission delivered its final report to the president on Sept. 8. The report lists the commission's recommendations for revamping the U.S. military's infrastructure and force structure.

The president chose to approve the commission's report. He could have rejected it or returned it to the commission for revisions.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld cited the 2005 BRAC process as an opportunity "to reset our force." DoD took two and a half years to study and compile its recommendations for the 2005 BRAC. The department's BRAC report was released May 13.

The BRAC commission approved 86 percent of DoD's original recommendations -- 119 with no change and another 45 with amendments. However, the commission rejected 13 recommendations, significantly modified another 13, and made five additional closure or realignment recommendations on its own initiative.

DoD's BRAC recommendations would reduce excess military infrastructure between 5 and 11 percent and save \$48.8 billion over 20 years, Rumsfeld said.

### National News Articles

#### **All-or-nothing vote could close 22 military bases**

Beaver County Times  
Patrick O'Shea  
September 17, 2005

Among the recommendations in the list is maintaining current services and realigning the 911th Air Force Reserve base in Moon Township to become a joint regional readiness center that would combine efforts of area medical facilities and military groups to enhance homeland security and emergency response. The 99th Army Reserve Regional Readiness Command in Moon, however, would be sent to Fort Dix, N.J., while the Army's Charles E. Support Center would have its units moved from Collier and Neville townships to the 99th reserve center.

The list, which was approved by the nine-member congressional Base Realignment and Closure Commission and submitted to Bush on Sept. 8, endorses closing 22 major bases and reconfiguring 33 other large facilities in an effort to save approximately \$4.2 billion annually.

Bush, who previously said he would not change the list, announced Thursday that he was supporting the plan and sending it to Congress for an all-or-nothing vote within 45 legislative days.

But even staff members of U.S. Rep. Tim Murphy, R-18, Upper St. Clair Township, were unclear Friday on whether the clock had started or it begins once Congress receives the list. And what 45 legislative days as compared to 45 calendar days means also was uncertain, although officials said a decision definitely has to be reached by the end of the year.

Congress can vote to reject or accept the entire list, or take no action, which would result in the list becoming law when the deadline expires.

In previous rounds, Congress has never rejected a BRAC list.

### Local News Articles

#### **Many in Jacksonville fight plan to reopen Cecil Field base**

Orlando Sentinel (Orlando, FL)  
Wes Smith  
September 18, 2005

JACKSONVILLE -- Katja and Stephen Palmer, like thousands of others, bought into this city's vision for a rebirth of its Westside after the U.S. Navy left Cecil Field in 1999.

The Seattle transplants spent a year doing research before building their \$360,000 home in an upscale rural subdivision west of Interstate 295. They were just two miles from the old air base, then being transformed into an industrial aviation park at a cost to taxpayers of \$167 million.

But recently the Palmers and other Westside residents were shocked to learn that Gov. Jeb Bush and Jacksonville Mayor John Peyton are pushing for the reopening of Cecil Field as the Navy's master jet base -- and that they are willing to spend millions more in taxpayer dollars to do it.

"The chance of the city throwing away \$100 million to bring the Navy back was something that never occurred to us," Katja Palmer said.

City officials said the old airfield near Palmer's home could become the base for 244 fighter jets and about 11,500 military and civilian employees with a payroll of \$800 million.

"The mayor has said something like this comes along once in a generation," said Susie Wiles, the city's director of communications.

But Palmer fears her dream home will become unlivable if hundreds of F/A-18 Super Hornets -- reputed to be the military's noisiest aircraft -- descend on Cecil Field.

"My backyard garden is going to be a dumping ground for jet fuel," she said. "We wanted to start a family here, but I am not going to raise a child in a potential cancer cluster."

The Palmers' subdivision is just one of many new high-end developments that could be affected if Navy pilots return in droves to Cecil Field. The area around the former naval air base also has sprouted luxury apartments, parks, equestrian facilities, golf courses, schools, a junior college, libraries and shopping centers.

"People are scratching their heads. They bought into the plan for the Westside, and now the city is pulling the rug out from them," said Jacksonville City Council member Daniel Davis, who represents the Westside.

Preliminary studies by the mayor's office estimate that 7,000 to 10,000 residences could fall into the reopened air station's "noise zones," Wiles said. She said there could be as many as 240,000 fighter flights a year from the Westside airfield, depending on how many squadrons move in.

Computer consultant Russ Stalvey, who just built an \$850,000 home and horse-boarding barn within two miles of Cecil Field, said military officials have put the decibel level of Super

Hornets at 117 decibels on departure and 114 decibels on approach at 1,000 feet.

"A rock concert is 110 decibels," said Stalvey, who has given up on plans to board horses in his new 20-stall barn. "My home is already worth less than it was two months ago, and I would imagine it's still falling because of talk that Cecil Field will reopen."

Councilman Davis said the new development in his Westside district includes a 130-acre plot purchased for \$5 million by the local school district for a middle school, an elementary school and a high school.

"But they can't do it because they won't be able to meet sound requirements if Cecil Field reopens," he said.

Once home to honky-tonks, mobile-home parks and adult entertainment catering to military personnel, the Westside has seen rapidly rising property values and upscale development since Cecil Field closed six years ago.

The Navy air base, which opened 11 days before the attack at Pearl Harbor in 1941, encompassed nearly 20,000 acres. When it closed, 17,000 acres were sold to private owners, triggering the growth that has transformed the region.

The centerpiece is Taye Brown Regional Park, which features four softball fields, a community center with an Olympic pool, and a \$40 million Equestrian Center with a trail system that has lured hundreds of affluent horse owners to the area.

The center's 4,000-seat arena draws high-dollar horseflesh for national shows that might have difficulty co-existing with Super Hornet fighter jets, officials said.

"I am a supporter of our mayor, and it is hard for me to criticize him -- but on the other hand, from a personal point of view, I just want to slap him," said Joanne Connell, an Equestrian Center board member.

The governor's office did not return calls seeking comment, but Gov. Bush boasted to state legislators last week that landing the new jobs and jets would make Florida the biggest winner in the military base-realignment and -closure process.

He said if the deal goes through, he would call a special legislative session to arrange for a \$200 million state and local push to reopen Cecil Field.

The opportunity arose when the Defense Department's Base Realignment and Closure Commission voted last month to consider moving its master jet base to Cecil Field from Oceana Naval Air Station on 5,331 acres outside Virginia Beach, Va.

The final decision rests on whether Virginia Beach officials can find a way to remove 1,800 homes and a large number of businesses that have been built near runways. The Pentagon commission has given Virginia Beach until the end of March to come up with a plan that would save the base.

In the meantime, Bush and Peyton have pledged to use \$200 million in state and local funds to relocate 30 business tenants that set up in the old base-turned-commerce park if the deal goes through. Residents of a senior-citizens complex in former base housing also would have to be moved.

Alberta Hipps, a former president of the Jacksonville City Council who heads the board of the Equestrian Center, has helped organize The Better Westside Project, a group of property and business owners opposing the field's reopening.

Hipps oversaw the 1999 closing as the City Council member in that district. Since then, she has worked to revive the area where her husband's family has lived for generations. The former ally of Peyton now is concerned that he misrepresented the area around Cecil Field to military officials when pitching it as a relocation site for the Navy fighters.

"I called the mayor . . . and the tone of his response to me was like, 'Go away and be quiet and just don't worry about it,'" Hipps said.

She and others were dumbfounded when Westside property owners began getting offers from the state to buy their property just a day after Peyton's first public meeting with them on the proposed reopening of Cecil Field.

The letters direct residents to call staff members at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Florida Forever program, which receives \$300 million a year in state funding to purchase and conserve parklands.

Cragin Mosteller, a spokeswoman for Florida Forever, said nearly 174 letters have been sent to property owners but are part of a four-year acquisition program for the Northeast Florida Timberlands project.

"All I can say is that while [Cecil Field] is a factor, it is by no means the sole factor. Our priority is conservation," Mosteller said.

But Michael Griffin, owner of Diamond D Ranch on Jacksonville's Westside, said the Florida Forever staffer who inquired about buying his family's 500 acres made no bones about the Cecil Field link.

"He said there was 'obviously a correlation' with the air base coming back and jets coming back," Griffin said. "He also said they are not generally in the business of buying improved properties. They generally buy vacant lands."

Griffin, whose ranch lies southwest of Cecil Field and at the edge of the 20,000-acre Jennings State Forest, said he would find it difficult to sell out at any price -- even with fighter jets roaring overhead.

Three generations of his family live on the rolling land. Once a cattle ranch, it now includes a boarding operation with more than 200 horses and a livestock-trailer sales lot that caters to clients at the Equestrian Center up the road.

Griffin's mother, Jewel, 69, who still competes in 100-mile trail rides throughout the country, was equally upset at the thought of Super Hornet fighter jets screaming over her and her riding companions, destroying their once happy trails.

"Cecil Field left us, and they should stay gone," she said.

### **Bush Signs BRAC Report; 911 Wing Likely To Stay**

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Pittsburgh, PA)  
Jack Kelly  
September 16, 2005

The 911th Military Airlift Wing at Pittsburgh International Airport now has just one more hurdle to clear before its future is assured.

President Bush signed off yesterday on the report of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Congress now has 45 days in which it can reject, but not amend, the report. If Congress takes no action, the recommendations automatically become law.

The commission rejected the Pentagon's recommendation that the 911th be closed, voting instead to establish a Regional Joint Readiness Center at the base.

The Regional Joint Readiness Center will bring together area military units with federal agencies involved in homeland security as well as Pittsburgh hospitals and research universities to plan for emergencies such as a major terrorist attack on an East Coast city.

The Joint Readiness Center concept was devised by the Pit-BRAC Task Force, a coalition of Western Pennsylvania community leaders. The Pittsburgh center will be the first in the nation.

Nationally, the commission said its recommendations would mean annual savings of \$4.2 billion, compared with \$5.4 billion under the plan it received in May from Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld had recommended closing 33 major bases and realigning 29 others.

The Pentagon had wanted to move the eight C-130H aircraft of the 911th to Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina, but the commission recommended in its report that the "optimum" number of C-130s required to support the Regional Joint Readiness Center be stationed in Pittsburgh.

Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., who suggested the wording that the commission used in its report, said he had received assurances that the 911th would have at least eight aircraft and probably more.

The commission accepted the Pentagon's recommendation to close the Charles E. Kelly Support Facility in Oakdale, but most of its functions will be moved to the Army Reserve Center in Moon.

The commission also accepted the Pentagon's recommendation to move the 99th Regional Readiness Command headquarters from Moon to Fort Dix, N.J.

In a conference call announcing that the president had signed the commission report, Santorum described it as a "mixed bag" for Pennsylvania. He praised retention of the 911th but expressed regret that the Willow Grove Naval Air Station near Philadelphia is to be closed and the 99th command headquarters is to be moved.

The Pentagon has as long as five years to implement the commission recommendations.

### **State gears for big base closure gains**

Annapolis Capital (Annapolis, MD)  
Robert Salonga  
September 18, 2005

WASHINGTON -- With proposals to trim the nation's military bases rolling toward approval, Maryland's installations must now begin the yearslong task of relocating thousands of personnel from inside and outside the state.

President Bush sent the report of the independent Base Realignment and Closure commission to the Capitol late Thursday, effectively guaranteeing its passage.

Though Congress has 45 days to reject the report it has never happened in four previous rounds of closures dating back to 1988 and is not expected to happen this time, either.

Maryland was arguably the biggest winner of the current round, as more than 9,000 personnel will be added or redistributed among its facilities. The state was also one of the largest beneficiaries from base closures in neighboring states.

"This influx of thousands of defense-related jobs will help fuel our state's economy for years to come," Sen. Paul S. Sarbanes said in a statement.

But now instead of bracing for closures, which occurred earlier in the year when a handful of Maryland bases were thought to be on the chopping block, military officials in the state have the new challenge of merging and expanding their operations.

When the 45-day period expires - making the BRAC report law - all installations included in the report must initiate changes within two years and complete them within six years.

Aberdeen Proving Ground expects about 2,200 new personnel and Andrews Air Force Base is slated to gain 400, according to the commission's report.

"We've been very busy," said George Mercer, a spokesman for the Aberdeen base. "Pretty much when the initial BRAC announcement was made, we were given marching orders to prepare as if this is going to happen."

Fort Meade is by far the largest gainer in the state under the report's findings, as several military functions scattered across the country will be consolidated in the complex near Laurel, a personnel gain of more than 5,300.

The National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda will grow largely because of its pending merger with the Walter Reed Army Medical Center, resulting in an influx of nearly 1,900 personnel to Montgomery County.

Spokeswoman Ellen Maurer said the Bethesda center is still holding off on any expansion moves until the commission's report officially passes through Congress, but that planning has been in the works for some time.

Ms. Maurer did say there is a sense of excitement in the center about having the best of both military branches' medical staff in one place.

That is, until the Army-Navy football game comes around.

"I don't know what's going to happen, other than more people watching TV," said Ms. Maurer, who served in the Navy before her current position. "That would be something we should embrace and have fun with."

It is unlikely that Congress will authorize more base closures anytime in the near future, as this round was particularly painful for members whose districts suffered closures.

"They will be reluctant to put themselves through this again," said Christopher Hellman, a BRAC expert with the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. "You will need the institutional memory to evaporate."

But Mr. Hellman says there will always be a need for future commissions, which have been reauthorized over the years to reduce residual excess since the nation's Cold War-era military buildup.

"BRAC is more than just closing bases. It's about providing the Department of Defense with the capability to make fairly dramatic changes in their force structure."

### **Oceana or Atlantis?**

Washington Daily News (NC)

Bill Sandifer  
September 18, 2005

The Virginia Beach City Council, on Tuesday, approved the spending of \$15 million to buy out a condominium project it had approved two years ago over the Navy's objection. The move, which concerns some Beaufort and Washington county residents, appears to mark the start of an effort to satisfy base-closure commission mandates.

The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission, known as BRAC, told Virginia Beach it must reverse years of development encroachment surrounding Naval Air Station Oceana or see its master jet base status shipped off to the former NAS Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Fla. Cecil Field was shut down in the last round of base closings.

The fates of Oceana and an associated Navy outlying landing field proposed for Washington-Beaufort counties are linked, and opponents have voiced concerns that efforts to keep Oceana alive may bolster a Navy bid to reselect the site. The Navy is currently under court order to review at least five alternative sites before it can begin construction at the Washington-Beaufort location.

Some local observers as well as Virginia Beach residents and officials question whether or not Tuesday's initial appropriation signals a long-term commitment to BRAC mandates. One observer described the appropriation as BRAC "brownie points," questioning whether Virginia Beach can muster the money or the political will to condemn several thousand homes and businesses that have been built in high-risk crash zones surrounding Navy airfields.

"I worry for the people of Virginia," said Jennifer Alligood, chairwoman of North Carolinians Opposed to the OLF. "They've got politicians out of control."

Alligood and others have indicated Virginia Beach officials may be jumping the gun in buying land slated for condominium development. Of 11 council members, only 7

voted for the appropriation, hardly a mandate, say observers.

Others -- including a Virginia Beach councilman who called it "troubling and precedent-setting" -- have said spending \$15 million for property appraised at \$6.5 million could come back to haunt Virginia Beach government when it begins buying homes and businesses.

"I hope the people who are selling their land expect the 250 percent (valuation) like the developer got," said Alligood.

A spokesman for Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise, a Virginia grassroots organization, agrees with Alligood.

"If the city is willing to pay two-and-a-half times the assessment to buy the (condo land), they should be willing to do it for them if the time comes that that happens," said Hal Levenson on Wednesday.

CCAJSN was organized in the 1990s and has worked with the Navy in an attempt to reduce neighborhood jet noise while preserving the Navy's mission.

Prior to the just-ended BRAC hearings, CCAJSN had written the Pentagon, requesting Oceana's mission be realigned, or modified, to exclude training of Super Hornet pilots, a stance the group maintains.

"CCAJSN favors the F/A-18s leaving Oceana," said Levenson. "CCAJSN feels that the strictures that the BRAC commission has laid on the city are very, very challenging and very difficult for the city and the state of Virginia to fulfill."

Who wants to be a billionaire?

The political and financial costs of acquiring through purchase or condemnation what is now estimated at around 3,000 homes -- not including businesses -- may approach or even surpass the \$1-billion mark, say some observers.

"People in the community are just beginning to realize just how much public money is involved to try to save the situation," said Levenson.

And a sampling of a community comment board provided by The Virginian-Pilot appears to support contentions of overwhelming public opposition to the apparent cost of saving Oceana.

The following are excerpts from the first few of almost 1,500 comments posted by Virginia Beach residents:

"Stop wasting my tax dollars! The Navy is moving the jets from Oceana no matter what you do! Get it through your skulls!"

"Close it. Every poll taken clearly indicates that 70 percent or more of the residents of the beach do not want the base if the BRAC commissions requirements have to be met."

"Time for ALL MEMBERS of the city council that voted for this and the 'mayor' to go."

"Shame on every person that sits on the VB City Council!"

"CLOSE IT I Don't want the city to be spending my money on trying to rectify something that the government should have done prior to letting the city encroach its space."

"The BRAC commission has stated that the future of naval aviation isn't with Oceana, so why the mad rush to try and save it, only to lose it later? We would be better served by biting the bullet now and be done with it."

Initially, at least one city councilman did sense the scale of the BRAC commission mandates, calling efforts to meet them "a fool's errand."

Virginia leaders, however, are clearly looking for ways to sidestep what could amount to political suicide and fiscal folly: They've hired a team of lawyers to advise them in dealing with the BRAC commission, reported The Associated Press this week. The Virginia attorney general, reported AP, advised the state to hire attorneys

from a Washington law firm, experienced in Department of Defense issues.

Likewise, the Virginia Beach City Council voted to consider legal action against the BRAC board, alleging it overstepped its authority in laying down ultimatums to keep Oceana.

And, despite earlier hints Virginia leaders might ask the White House to intervene, the state's top two Republican senators decided against pressing their case before the Oval Office, reported The Virginian-Pilot on Wednesday.

And on Thursday, President Bush beat by more than a week the Sept. 23 federal deadline for accepting the BRAC Commission's decisions, reported AP. The recommendations will now go to Congress where they will become final, unless rejected in their entirety within 45 days.

Virginia faces a March deadline for meeting BRAC ultimatums.

A straw man?

Since the BRAC board will disband just a month after Virginia's deadline, some have suggested Virginia Beach's current appropriations and City Council actions amount to a straw man. Those observers say the council may lobby the Virginia Legislature to give the city condemnation powers, while purchasing a number of homes from willing sellers in the meantime. One observer, familiar with the political climate in Virginia, is not confident lawmakers will be altogether willing to grant such authority.

In the meantime, Allgood suggests a cooling-off period for Virginia's leaders may be in order.

"They need to sit back and listen to their constituents and study the situation," she said.

Allgood, however, recognizes political realities have an inertia all their own.

"I think the politicians and the Navy have been working hand-in-hand, come hell or high water," she said.

While the bottom line in Virginia Beach has become complex and appears to pit residents against leaders, eastern North Carolina residents and officials appear unified in hoping for a sooner rather than later conclusion to the future of Oceana -- and its eastern North Carolina counterpart, the OLF.

### **Blunt asks attorney general to continue fight for bases**

Columbia Daily Tribune (Columbia, MO)  
September 17, 2005

ST. LOUIS (AP) - Gov. Matt Blunt on Friday directed Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon to resume the state's legal challenge to the federal government's plan to close an Air National Guard base in St. Louis and other military installations.

"I have not stopped fighting for the facilities that were inappropriately recommended for closure or realignment, and I will continue to do all I can to protect these installations," Blunt said.

A spokesman for Nixon did not return a phone call seeking comment.

On Sept. 8, the U.S. Supreme Court and the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Louis both rejected appeals filed by Nixon seeking to keep the 131st Fighter Wing of the Air National Guard at Lambert Airport in St. Louis. Illinois and New Jersey also lost emergency appeals aimed at stopping the Base Closure and Realignment Commission from submitting its recommendations to the White House.

The Pentagon plans to move fighter jets from the 131st Fighter Wing to bases in Nevada and Montana.

Closing the 131st Fighter Wing would cost the St. Louis area about 250 jobs, and Missouri officials claim it would jeopardize national security by leaving the Midwest without adequate air defenses.

"It is imperative that we do everything we can to ensure our ability to protect ourselves from threats to our state, and the 131st is vital to that mission," Blunt wrote in his letter to Nixon.

Overall, Missouri stands to lose more than 3,000 jobs, mostly from the proposed closure of three military accounting and finance offices in St. Louis and Kansas City.

President George W. Bush on Thursday endorsed and sent to Congress the BRAC commission's plan to close 22 major military bases and reconfigure 33 others. It is the first consolidation of bases since 1995.

The plan will become final in 45 days unless Congress acts to reject it.

### **Ellington Field must be saved for national security**

#### **Facility is security linchpin in terrorist-target-rich city**

Houston Chronicle (Houston, TX)  
C.J. (Jim) Reinhartsen  
September 16, 2005

In a region that includes the fourth-largest city in the country, the retention of jobs was never part of the argument to retain the Texas Air National Guard 147th Fighter Wing at Ellington Air Force Base.

By defending Houston and its neighbors, the full wing of F-16s provides strategic national defense for the only city in the country with nine terrorist targets identified by the FBI and Homeland Security.

If jobs were the prime objective, the Ellington Field Task Force would have issued a "stand-down" order after the joint reserve base was established, or when the announcement was made that 12 Predators were on their way. The movement of 2,300 reservists of the Marine Corps, Navy and Army from Old Spanish Trail to Ellington would have made the action "mission complete." The Predators, unmanned surveillance aircraft, will bring 450 jobs, an

initial \$250 million budget in 2006 and \$68 million in annual operating funds.

Still, jobs are not the point; national security drives retaining the 147th.

In a scenario in which every second counts, Kelly Air Guard Station in San Antonio can provide planes — but not the same defense as a full air-sovereignty-alert wing like the 147th.

In fact, jets responding from Kelly at maximum speed would have to be refueled after a 20-to-25-minute response time. The mission of Kelly Air Guard Station is to train pilots. Combat mission-ready pilots — not trainees — would be required to respond to an emergency in Houston. Complicating matters more would be the lack of a "bomb dump" configured to support the air sovereignty alert mission. Besides having to refuel, those planes would have to be loaded with ordnance, since they are not armed while on standby.

James T. Hill, a member of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC), said, "As we look at the distribution of aircraft under this BRAC round, and trying to place them in the right places, (in) this particular case, we put aircraft into Kelly Field [and the added] 18 F-16s that can respond."

The illusion is that planes at Kelly will be able to respond appropriately when they are not configured to do so. The 149th from Kelly does not satisfy the crucial requirements necessary for the ultimate air defense of the terrorist-target-rich environment of Houston and its surrounding region.

The catastrophic impact of a successful terrorist attack to Houston and the Texas Gulf Coast could bring down the nation's economy. The impact of Hurricane Katrina affected approximately 10 percent of the nation's refinery capacity — a secondary consideration after the tragedy of deaths.

A terrorist attack to our region could cut off 25 percent of the nation's refineries, 44 percent of the capacity of petrochemical plants and 100

percent of the capacity of the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve.

In defiance of logic, the BRAC overrode the recommendations of the Defense Department and the Northern Command (NORTHCOM), which is in charge of homeland defense, and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).

Military assets in Great Falls, Montana; Portland, Oregon; Barnes, Mass.; and Duluth, Minn., were deemed higher priorities for national security than a region that produces 25 percent of all aviation fuel. In Ellington's case, the BRAC commission agreed with NORTHCOM's recommendations and voted to phase out the F-16s.

For all the disappointment, the Ellington Field Task Force should be proud of the job they did. Everything possible was done to reverse the Defense Department's recommendation to get rid of the 147th by 2007. The most recent battle was lost but the war for Ellington is still being won. With the realization of the joint reserve base, and the Predators, Ellington's mission will increase.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Sugar Land, said he would continue the fight to "make Ellington Field stronger and more effective and to ensure the security of the Houston region."

The fight must continue — not for jobs or money saved — but for national security.

### **Navy base neighbors fear for their homes**

The Associated Press (Virginia Beach, VA)  
Sue Lindsey  
September 19, 2005

Virginia Beach, Va. -- Sam Reid and his family have a century-old white house next door to his father-in-law amid the towering oaks in Oceana Gardens. His son lives across the street, and two doors down a 29-year-old lives in the house his great-grandfather built.

The houses of Oceana Gardens and other neighborhoods that skirt Oceana Naval Air Station are not new, not large and not fancy -- Reid estimates the going prices lately at no more than \$200,000.

But the residents of these homes, which are among thousands that a federal base-closing commission wants condemned because they lie next to the Navy airfield, don't measure their value only in dollars. The closeness of family and lifelong friendships, they say, makes them priceless.

"You couldn't pick a better neighborhood," said Daniel Bolinaga, Reid's two-doors-down neighbor. When he got married in April, everybody on the street came to the wedding.

A 1906 plat of the neighborhood shows the layout of the lots as they are today. Most of the houses were built at least 50 years ago.

"They talk about encroachment," said Reid, president of the Oceana Gardens Coalition Civic League, which includes four neighborhoods totaling more than 650 homes. "We were here first."

Reid apologized when screaming jets interrupted a midday telephone conversation three times. "We live like this, so it's no big deal," he said.

But the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission decided last month that having neighborhoods close to the Navy's East Coast master jet base is, in fact, a big deal.

The commission declared that the jets will move to Florida unless state and local officials take steps to reverse development around the urban base. And the "unless" conditions are making local officials swallow hard.

To meet the BRAC Commission's demands, the city will have to acquire all of the property in the most accident-prone zones around the base. That's some 3,000 homes, worth upward of \$400 million, as well as businesses and churches. One church is almost 200 years old.

City officials have until March to get the process under way, and Gov. Mark Warner has pledged the state's financial help to meet a requirement that \$15 million a year be spent to acquire property. In addition, state law would have to be changed to condemn the property.

To keep Virginia officials on their toes, the federal commission told Florida to make plans for reopening Cecil Field near Jacksonville, closed in 1999 when the F/A-18 Hornets moved to Oceana.

U.S. Sen. John Warner, R-Va. and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, fought furiously to keep Oceana open and accused the panel of overstepping its bounds. But he and Sen. George Allen, R-Va., said last week they would not try to persuade President Bush to alter the report, which he must act on by Friday.

Mayor Meyera Oberndorf suggested the city might be able to meet the annual \$15 million minimum purchase requirement by just buying from willing sellers.

That would enable longtime residents to stay in their homes, she told fellow council members last week. Others were not sure that approach would pass muster, and Reid didn't like the idea.

"They'll turn the neighborhood into Swiss cheese," he said.

### **Candidates like funds for Oceana jets rescue**

The Virginian-Pilot (Virginia, VA)  
Susan E. White  
September 18, 2005

Candidates for governor and local candidates for the General Assembly are fairly united in supporting state money to help keep jets at Oceana Naval Air Station.

But most are unsure about giving Virginia Beach condemnation power to seize homes and businesses around the base.

A few think the city already has that authority.

Last week, The Virginian-Pilot asked all three candidates for governor and all 16 candidates in contested races for the House of Delegates in South Hampton Roads where they stood on two questions concerning Oceana:

- Do you support state funding to help Virginia Beach buy homes, businesses and development rights around Oceana Naval Air Station?

- Do you support legislation that would give Virginia Beach the power to condemn homes and businesses in accident zones around Oceana?

Last month, the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommended sending Oceana's jets to Florida unless Virginia Beach condemns and buys property in Accident Potential Zone 1, or APZ-1, the highest-risk zone outside the base, among other things.

City officials estimate there are 1,800 to 3,000 homes there, which could cost more than \$400 million. The city also may have to buy churches and businesses in the zone, assessed at more than \$300 million.

In its written report, BRAC said the state, Virginia Beach and Chesapeake must "establish a program to condemn and purchase" homes and most businesses in APZ-1 and spend at least \$15 million a year doing so.

President Bush endorsed BRAC's recommendations Thursday. The report becomes final unless Congress rejects it in full.

In a Mason-Dixon poll of registered voters last week, about half of state residents – 48 percent – said they support using public money to keep Oceana open.

But the number of undecided voters outside Hampton Roads was very high: about 40 percent. Support was somewhat higher in Hampton Roads than elsewhere. The margin of error was 4 percentage points statewide.

Support for state money is also fairly widespread among the candidates for governor and local candidates for House of Delegates.

Candidate support for condemnation, however, is very uncertain.

#### Governor

All three candidates – Democrat Timothy M. Kaine, Republican Jerry W. Kilgore and Independent H. Russell Potts – agreed that state funding should be used to help Virginia Beach.

But such funding should be a last resort, Potts said. The state should explore all options with the federal government before committing the money, he said.

"If push came to shove, I would do anything to keep Oceana," he said.

Potts and Kilgore said they are open to granting Virginia Beach condemnation powers, if necessary, though Kilgore said he is unsure if "Virginia Beach doesn't already have that authority."

Kaine said it is "premature to take any options off the table," but condemnation is a last resort that he hopes would not be needed.

#### 64th District

Republican Troy H. Lapetina supports state money for Oceana, but Green Party candidate Albert Burckard said no. Burckard said Virginia Beach's years of favoring "tax-income-producing development over citizen safety" created the Oceana dilemma.

"Not a single tax dollar, except their own, if they choose, should go to enabling this wealthy resort community to continue their irresponsible lifestyle at the expense of others," he said.

Del. William K. Barlow, a Democrat, said answers from a regional group are needed before taking "specific positions on these complex issues."

Barlow said the state needs a commitment that Oceana will remain open for years if all requirements are met.

Burckard said he thinks current eminent domain laws “are suitable for municipalities to acquire private property for legitimate public use.” He said Virginia Beach “must now decide whether it wants to host a master jet base or be a quiet seaside resort community.”

Lapetina said the legislature must be careful when drafting legislation that could expand condemnation powers to cities.

76th District

Del. S. Chris Jones, a Republican, said he would consider state funding for Virginia Beach but gave no definitive support.

Constitutional Party candidate James A. Scheideman would not offer state money. “I would not expect the taxpayers of Virginia to bail out Virginia Beach as a reward for decades of poor choices and mismanagement of land use,” he said.

Jones said more facts are needed before he can commit to condemnation legislation. “There must be a strong and compelling case when contemplating the expansion of the use of eminent domain,” he said.

Scheideman said he would only approve such legislation if the city had a long-range, land-use plan. “It appears that no such plan exists,” he said. “Without assurances from the Navy that the jets will remain at Oceana, evicting homeowners and businesses just makes a bad situation worse,” he said.

82nd District

Del. Harry R. “Bob” Purkey, a Republican, supports earmarking state money, but he doesn’t think it was clear that the city would need to condemn homes.

“We do not have a clear understanding of BRAC,” Purkey said. “We can’t condemn those

properties until we’re absolutely sure that’s what BRAC intends for us to do.” He said the city already has the power of eminent domain.

Independent John O.

Parmele Jr. said the city should not seek condemnation powers or state funding without a guarantee that the jets will stay long-term. “I can’t see spending all that money when it’s not a sure thing,” Parmele said.

83rd District

Del. Leo C. Wardrup Jr., a Republican, said he needs to know more about Virginia Beach’s commitment to saving Oceana and the Navy’s commitment to keeping the jet base there before supporting state funding or condemnation legislation.

Georgia F. Allen, a Democrat, said offering state money is “the only logical thing to do to correct past errors by many of the Virginia Beach political leaders, who did nothing to discourage encroachment in the past.”

Absent other options, Allen said, she would back condemnation to save the base. “How large that role would be would have to be determined as the situation plays out,” she said.

84th District

Democrat Supriya Christopher’s husband flies F/A-18 Hornets from Oceana. She said saving Oceana’s jets is her top priority. “I’ll be the voice to advocate for as many state funds as we can get,” she said.

Christopher said she would also support condemnation if there is no other option.

“I’m not saying I’m an advocate for condemning homes,” she said. “I’m going to have the courage to do what’s necessary to protect that base and the quality of life for our military families. We absolutely cannot lose that engine.”

Republican Sal Iaquinto also supports state money but said he needs more information

before backing condemnation. "They've placed thousands of residents in the APZ zone in a terrible predicament," he said.

87th District

Del. Paula Miller, a Democrat, said the state and Virginia Beach face an "outrageous" ultimatum on Oceana, but the jet base is too important and Virginia Beach deserves state funding if it "commits its share to save Oceana."

"They must take the lead in meeting the BRAC conditions for preserving Oceana," Miller said.

Miller said she also would back condemnation legislation as long as the law is restricted to buying property within an accident-potential zone and for the "purpose of protecting the public health, safety and welfare."

Property owners also must have the right to challenge the government's compensation offers, she said.

Independent John A. Coggeshall said he could not support state funding to "chase rainbows."

"There's no guaranteed pot o' gold at the end of the repurchased homes, businesses and development rights," he said. "All good things must end someday. Helping Virginia Beach begins by thinking beyond Oceana Naval Air Station."

Republican Michael L. Ball said he needs more clarification on BRAC's demands and the Navy's expectations for the region before making decisions on state money or condemnation.

"I'm aware that many people are thinking we should do whatever it takes to keep Oceana," Ball said. "But what is 'whatever it takes,' and what is the true cost to taxpayers and private property owners?"

89th District

Del. Kenneth C. Alexander, a Democrat, said a guarantee that Oceana will remain as a master

jet base must be in hand before any state money is allocated.

"You cannot unwisely spend the people's money," he said.

Republican Joshua G. Behr said Virginia Beach needs an economic impact study on how Oceana's closure would affect the city during 15 to 20 years.

"If you start on the path of buying up property, that's a large financial commitment," Behr said.

"If the Beach embarks on that, it ought to be fairly certain what it will do to the city over the long term."

Alexander said caution must be used with condemnation. "I think you have to be very careful that the criteria is set up before you go down that path," he said.

In the absence of a thorough economic review, Behr said, he would lean toward not letting the government take property.

"I think property rights are fundamental to our American culture," he said.

### **Booming Growth, Difficult Changes St. Mary's offers lessons for other base expansions**

Baltimore Sun (Baltimore, MD)

Timothy B. Wheeler

September 19, 2005

Lexington Park -- From his office window here, Todd Morgan can see how the Pentagon's periodic shuffling of military bases has changed the face and pace of rural St. Mary's County.

The large white-walled complex where Morgan works brims with the offices of defense contractors huddled outside the gates of Patuxent River Naval Air Station. Jets streak overhead as cars and trucks surge by on a highway widened from two lanes to six to accommodate nearly 20,000 civilian and

military workers toiling on and around the sprawling base.

"Ten years ago we were the great recipient of all those jobs coming from Northern Virginia," says Morgan, an executive with one of the contractors and president of the Southern Maryland Navy Alliance, a local business group devoted to supporting the base. The air station's work force jumped by 5,000 in the late 1990s as the Defense Department moved operations here from the Washington area and elsewhere.

With the president's signature last week on a base realignment plan, Baltimore-area officials are anticipating a similar influx to Fort Meade in Anne Arundel County and to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Harford County. State and local officials point to the Patuxent River expansion as a model for how to cope with a surge in employment at a military base.

Others, however, see it as a cautionary tale.

"If you take a ride down to St. Mary's County, you will see a phenomenal transformation," says Aris Melissaratos, state secretary of business and economic development.

Where most residents once got by raising tobacco or fishing, this county has a high-tech employment center that residents like to say contributes more to Maryland's economy than the port of Baltimore. There are Starbucks, chain restaurants and big-box stores galore along Route 235, the main drag through the county.

The surge in employment at the base has not been all smooth sailing for a county that until two decades ago had seen relatively little change.

Preparations for base-related growth in St. Mary's were huge - and inadequate. State and local governments spent more than \$250 million over a decade renovating and expanding public schools and widening Route 235 to the base. Officials recently spent \$13 million to buy and demolish a dilapidated housing complex near the base, hoping to remove anything that might limit

its operations and make it a candidate for closure.

Today, traffic flows more smoothly on the expanded highway but still backs up at rush hour, especially at the turnoff to Calvert County, where thousands of base workers live. And classrooms remain so crowded in parts of the county that residential development has been curtailed until new schools can be built.

"We're in essence right back where we started," says Joe Anderson, a former county commissioner who works for another of the defense contractors stationed outside the base's gates.

The growth has spawned new worries. While base expansion has eased Southern Maryland's chronic high unemployment and increased family incomes, the accompanying development boom has gobbled up farmland, depleted groundwater supplies, polluted streams feeding into the Chesapeake Bay and eroded the folksy country look and feel of a county steeped in history.

"The Navy base down here is one of the best things for the county and one of the worst things for the county," says James "Bubby" Norris, a Chaptico farmer. He raises goats, soybeans and grains on 300 acres but supplements his income with as nutrient management specialist working with other farmers to limit polluted runoff from their land.

Norris, 61, says the base and its attendant defense contracting have provided good-paying jobs close to home for his two daughters-in-law and his niece. But he says land prices are skyrocketing in the county as development pressures grow, crowding roads and changing the nature of the community.

"Back when I was a youngster, everybody knew everybody by name," Norris says. He says he recognizes fewer and fewer people on the roads and in the large chain stores and malls that have driven many of the county's small merchants out of business.

"We do have strains," acknowledges Morgan, a vice president with Eagan, McAllister & Associates who has lived in the county since 1979. "The school system in particular is strained."

With large-scale housing development barred under the county's adequate-public-facilities law until more classroom space can be made available, local officials have been struggling to find appropriate, affordable sites for schools. The county even tried to get land from the state, until that deal fell through amid controversy over the Ehrlich administration's moves to sell state-owned land, including some nature preserves and park sites.

Officials say that they are proud of how the county handled the base expansion but that the school crunch was unavoidable because of uncertainties about how many new students would show up. About 30 percent of base workers live outside the county.

"I don't think we've done a bad job of keeping up with" school needs," says Thomas McKay, president of the county commissioners. "As long as you have a community that's growing, it will be an ongoing issue."

Growth has continued apace, as St. Mary's increasingly draws retirees and Washington-area commuters, and building restrictions imposed by closer-in counties have pushed developers outward. The cost of land and housing, though still less expensive than in many suburbs, is soaring.

Sixty percent of the new homes and stores, county officials acknowledge, have been built outside designated growth districts like Lexington Park and Leonardtown, the historic county seat. In addition to carving up farming country, the spread-out development adds to the road congestion and cost of providing public services.

The buildup around the base is also stressing streams that feed into the St. Mary's River, a bay tributary, according to Robert Paul, a biology

professor at St. Mary's College who's been directing a student assessment of the watershed.

McKay, a Republican who ousted a slow-growth Democratic incumbent three years ago, says that officials will do what they can to preserve open space and farmland in the county but that farming appears fated to decline. He predicts "steady growth" in the county over the next year, which he says will be manageable even if it does further erode the fields and forests that cover about 80 percent of the county's landscape.

"Yes, a slow erosion of our rural character, maybe," McKay says, "but there's an awful lot of our rural character that has and will be preserved."

Todd Morgan, whose job depends on the base, agrees that the county must do a better job of managing the development altering the county because the viability of the naval air station may also hinge on the quality of life here, he says. "The growth is coming fast," he says, "and it's going to take some political willpower to regulate it."

The Baltimore area won't know for several more weeks whether Aberdeen Proving Ground and Fort Meade will expand as proposed. On Thursday, President Bush signed and sent to Congress the recommendations of the Pentagon's Base Closure and Realignment Commission, which would result in a net gain of nearly 7,000 jobs. Fort Meade would gain more than 5,300 jobs, and Aberdeen Proving Ground would gain 5,000 jobs and lose 3,500 existing ones.

Congress has to approve or reject the plan within 45 days of receiving it from the president.

State officials say they aren't waiting for final word to start preparing for it. State and local officials have drawn up plans and prioritized needs. The state's congressional delegation, meanwhile, snared \$22 million in the most recent federal transportation bill to begin upgrading roads and transit service around the bases.

But Anderson, who was swept out of office after raising taxes to help pay for the growth accompanying the base expansion here, warns Baltimore-area officials to beware of thinking their plans are good enough to handle the demands posed by such a sudden infusion of jobs and people.

"It's going to be a scramble for them," Anderson predicts, saying the state government had far more money to spend on helping St. Mary's than it does now. "Thinking and planning for it, and then having it really happen are two different things."

### *Opinions/ Editorials*

#### **Final BRAC View**

Bangor Daily News (Bangor, ME)  
September 16, 2005

A final recommendation by the Base Realignment and Closure commission was one of its more sensible. It noted in sending its conclusions to President Bush last week that the commission's work could have been more complete had it been allowed to wait until after the release of the Defense Department's Quadrennial Defense Review. Given that the next one of these reviews is due to be completed in just a few months, the nearly concluded BRAC process could soon look rushed and badly informed.

Begun in 1997, the QDR uses the National Security Strategy to assess the Defense Department force strength, budget, plans for modernizing, programs and other resources. The department is expected to send its latest review to Congress this winter; it will be the first wartime review and the first since 9-11. The time span between it and the 2001 version represents important intelligence reforms as well as a shift from ballistic missile defense to fighting a war on terrorism.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld last week said the review "may have better informed and assisted the commission in making its final decisions." About a third of the major base closings proposed by Defense were rejected by

the commission. Whether the review would have helped is speculative, but it certainly would have created more confidence and trust in the closure process while providing more insight on which bases should remain.

Getting the order right is a job for Congress. If there is to be another BRAC round, before its deadlines are scheduled, it should take into account something as important and policy changing as the Quadrennial Defense Review. It could reduce a lot of the arguments affected states just endured.

#### **(Dis)unified front presented to BRAC**

The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)  
September 18, 2005

Virginia Beach will spend \$15 million to stop a developer from building condos on Laskin Road under the flight path for Oceana Naval Air Station. The City Council voted to buy that property, even though it doesn't lie within the crash zone the Beach was ordered to clear to keep the base's jets and jobs in town.

Approval of the condo project two years ago was an undeniably sharp stick in the eye of the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which scolded the city for its behavior before it delivered an Oceana ultimatum last month. The BRAC panel ordered the city to buy and condemn houses and businesses in the most dangerous crash zones surrounding Oceana, and spend at least \$15 million a year to do so.

At least 1,800 houses — perhaps up to 3,000 — and many businesses are covered under BRAC's instructions. If Virginia Beach doesn't buy and condemn them, Oceana's jets could go to Cecil Field outside Jacksonville, Fla., along with thousands of jobs and residents.

Faced with that threat, you'd think that everybody involved — in Virginia Beach, Richmond, Washington — would find a single strategy to protect Oceana.

But on the same day the Beach was buying 6 acres it wasn't strictly required to buy, and presumably trying to build good will with the BRAC commissioners, it ordered the city attorney to explore suing them.

There's a compelling argument that the BRAC panel, by ordering Virginia Beach, Chesapeake and Richmond to comply with its wishes or lose the jets, overstepped its authority. But it's a sure thing that you don't build good will with anybody by suing them.

All that came as Virginia's U.S. senators shut another avenue of appeal. John Warner and George Allen said that they won't try to get the White House to change the BRAC recommendations. Which means that they're likely to arrive intact on Capitol Hill, where Congress must vote on them as a package.

All of Tuesday's machinations seem to substantially narrow the options available for keeping Oceana. Most likely, now, will be some attempt to comply with BRAC's requirements, essentially spending \$15 million annually to buy houses in the crash zone.

The outcry from affected homeowners and property-rights absolutists will be tremendous. And the purchase program still might not appease BRAC and DOD's Inspector General's Office.

Right now, though, if the city, Richmond and Washington want to keep Oceana's jets in Virginia Beach, they would be wise to find some way to present a more united front, and a more coherent message, than the one on display last week.

### **Additional Notes**