Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY BIRD

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LaHood moves to block BRAC, unlikely to succeed
Copley News Service
Otto Kreisher
September 20, 2005

Launching an up-hill fight to save an Air National Guard unit in his district, Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill. introduced legislation Tuesday to block implementation of the base closure and realignment recommendations, which were approved by an independent commission and by President Bush.

To stop the extensive list of military installation reductions from proceeding, both chambers of Congress would have to approve a resolution of disapproval. Similar efforts in the four previous BRAC rounds failed by overwhelming margins, and the same result is considered likely this year.

But LaHood, who has opposed this base closure round from the start, said he is hopeful that a majority of lawmakers will join him in voting against the BRAC recommendations.

"As I have said before, I believe it is wrong that we are closing and realigning bases while we are at war," he said in a statement. "The especially egregious way in which Air National Guard units were treated under this round of BRAC only serves to underscore the problems with this system."

LaHood singled out the recommendation to transfer the 15 F-16s of the Illinois Air National Guard' 183rd Fighter Wing from the Abraham Lincoln Capitol Airport in Springfield to Indiana as an example of the problem.

In the initial recommendations sent to the BRAC commission, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had proposed to remove the aircraft from 29 Air Guard units across the nation, following the Air Force's request to consolidate

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its shrinking supply of planes. The commission rejected a substantial number of those proposals, but approved the elimination of the 183rd.

"That is just plain wrong," LaHood said. "We ask our National Guardsmen to do amazing things, from fighting for freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan, to helping rescue victims of Hurricane Katrina, and now the government wants to move their job to another state or even eliminate them altogether. That is wrong, wrong, wrong!"

LaHood's proposed resolution of disapproval appeared to be the first attempt by any lawmaker to stop the commission's recommendations, which were approved by Bush and sent to Congress on Friday.

Congress has 45 legislative days from then to pass a joint resolution of disapproval or the recommendations become law.

The BRAC law provides for expedited treatment of the resolutions. They go directly to the armed services committees in each chamber, which must report them to the floor within 20 days with either a positive or negative recommendation. Three days later, any member can call up the resolution for a vote.

Senate Armed Services Committee chairman John Warner, R-Va., and the senior Democrat, Sen. Carl Levin of Michigan, have said they will not oppose the closure recommendations.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter, R-Calif. and the top Democrat, Ike Skelton of Missouri, have not taken a position, but are considered unlikely to oppose the BRAC action.

Christopher Hellman, a BRAC specialist at the Center for Arms Control and Non-proliferation, said he considers the prospects of Congress blocking the recommendations "slim to none."

Hellman noted that the commission reduced the likely opposition to its report by rejecting or modifying many of Rumsfeld's proposals.

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich has attempted to stop the loss of the 183rd's fighters and 163 military and civilian personnel through legal action, arguing that Guard units cannot be closed or moved without the consent of the affected governor. But his lawsuit was rejected by a federal circuit court, as were the similar claims from other states.

Appeals of those initial rejections are expected. But the Justice Department and private legal authorities told the commission that the BRAC law supercedes the other statutes the governors are citing.

Local News Articles

Panel named to study BRAC Peninsula effect

Gov. Warner appoints Northrop Grumman Newport News' president to lead a group assessing local base moves.

Daily Press (Virginia Beach, VA)
Terry Scanlon
September 21 2005

Gov. Mark R. Warner created on Tuesday a 12-member panel, containing some of the Peninsula's most prominent political and business leaders, to study the consequences of Fort Monroe's expected closing and other troop movements on the Peninsula.

Among the issues to be examined is the effect on traffic as 2,600 people who now work for the Army's Training and Doctrine Command, known as TRADOC, at Fort Monroe switch their commute to Fort Eustis.

"It's part of a continuing effort to continue having the right people around the same table talking about issues of a regional concern, rather than jurisdiction by jurisdiction," said Kevin Hall, a spokesman for the governor. "The changes in Hampton affect Newport News and vice versa."

The president of Northrop Grumman Newport News, Michael Petters, will be the panel's chairman. It also includes two local members of

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the General Assembly and the mayors of Newport News and Hampton.

The group has no authority but is expected to offer recommendations by Dec. 1 for spending needs or new laws or regulations for the General Assembly to consider early next year, Hall said.

The base closing process has entered the final stage. If Congress doesn't reject the recommendations from the Base Closure and Realignment Commission, Fort Monroe will close within six years.

In addition to Fort Monroe's closure and the TRADOC workers shifting to Fort Eustis 20 miles away, about 750 people would transfer from outside the area to Langley Air Force Base.

The post-Army future of Fort Monroe is expected to remain unclear by the time that the panel finishes its work. Hampton city officials don't even expect to finish conceptual planning for the post's future until early next year.

Still, Hall said, the governor hopes that the panel might be able to play a role in one of the costliest and potentially most contentious issues of the historic post's transition - the environmental cleanup.

City and state officials fear that the Army might try to avoid fulfilling its obligation to remove unexploded ordnance and other hazards from the post's ground and water.

"We want to make sure they clean it up," Hall said. "We think they seriously underestimated the cost."

Oceana’s fate far from set; conversion would be costly

The Virginian-Pilot (Hampton Roads, VA)
Dale Eisman
September 21, 2005

WASHINGTON — With nearly 6,000 mostly open acres, Oceana Naval Air Station could become a center for Navy housing, a military office park, or home base for helicopters or submarine-hunting and transport planes if its 200-plus fighter jets are relocated to Florida.

But unless the Navy and the Pentagon want to invest years of effort, perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars to overhaul or replace Oceana’s facilities, and uproot thousands of sailors, airmen and families to bring them to a “new” Oceana, the base is likely to close if its fighters move, defense analysts and former naval aviators say.

“It would be easiest just to let it go,” said Jeremiah Gertler, a former congressional staffer who got to know Oceana well as an analyst for the 1995 Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

“I can’t think of a single thing the Navy would want to do with it,” said retired Capt. Eric Benson, Oceana’s commanding officer in the late 1990s.

Benson described himself as an Oceana fan and said, “It’s staggering to me to try to believe that the Navy would want to think about leaving.”

But considering the service’s tight finances and the cost of converting the base to a new mission, it’s hard to envision a future for Oceana if the jets leave, he added.

A Navy spokeswoman, Lt. Kathy Sandoz, said Tuesday that questions about the base’s future are premature because congressional action is pending on the 2005 BRAC Commission’s recommendation that Oceana’s fighters be moved unless local governments evict homeowners and dozens of businesses from neighborhoods deemed at high risk for crashes.

And with local and state officials focused on meeting the commission’s demands, the only discussion of alternative uses for the base so far is coming from the citizens group whose complaints about jet noise helped push the Navy and ultimately the BRAC Commission to search for a new master jet base.

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"Decision-makers should be looking at a Plan B," said John Shick, a board member and former president of Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise

As the BRAC Commission studied Oceana in August, the citizens group suggested that five squadrons of P-3 "Orion" submarine hunting and reconnaissance aircraft – about 45 planes – be shifted to Oceana from Brunswick Naval Air Station in Maine.

Instead, the commission recommended moving the planes and more than 2,400 uniformed and civilian workers to Jacksonville Naval Air Station in Florida.

Shick acknowledged uncertainty about how well Oceana's hangars and other facilities, all built for fighter aircraft, would accommodate the P-3, a lumbering four-engine turboprop.

But the Orion would be far more compatible than the Navy's F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets with the residential and commercial areas surrounding Oceana, he said.

Shick said if the P-3 isn't a good fit at Oceana, the Navy should be able to find other uses for the base, perhaps as the site for some of the training activities now scattered across the region, or as a staging area for emergency supplies used by the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"There's probably hundreds of things that I'm not thinking of," he added.

Under the BRAC law, the Navy would continue to own Oceana even if the jet base mission is relocated to Cecil Field in Jacksonville, Fla.

And because the commission's plan calls for a "realignment" rather than a closure of the base, the service could take whatever time it wants deciding what units – if any – would be moved in.

Any substantial move of personnel from another base to Oceana probably would require congressional approval, however.

About 3,000 of the nearly 12,000 people now working at Oceana have jobs not directly related to the fighter planes. The total includes physicians, nurses and clerical workers at the base's medical and dental facilities as well as students and instructors at Navy schools for landing signal officers and aircraft mechanics .

The base also is home to a pair of golf courses and Navy commissary and exchanges that serve service members and thousands of military retirees not stationed at Oceana.

"No matter what they do, it's going to cost a lot of money," said retired Capt. Jim Joyner, a former president of the Hampton Roads chapter of the Association of Naval Aviation.

Joyner said Oceana probably could be converted into a home for Navy helicopters or P-3s , but "there's just so much money involved" that the Navy and the Pentagon might decide instead to close the base or just "leave it and let the weeds grow."

Retired Rear Adm. Fred Metz, a former pilot who once oversaw all the Navy's air bases, said using Oceana for anything other than an air base would require a particularly large investment.

And while the Virginia Beach base probably could accommodate the P-3s from Brunswick, bringing those planes to the area would wreck a Navy plan to consolidate P-3 operations on the East Coast at Jacksonville, he said.

The Navy has completed just such a consolidation of its East Coast fighter operations by bringing them to Oceana, Metz said.

"They really had a plan," he added, locating the fighters close to Norfolk-based aircraft carriers and commando units operating out of Dam Neck to build an integrated training system that will be destroyed if the master jet base moves south.

Sebelius: Kansas to gain 13,000 jobs from BRAC

Bill Wilson

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Wichita Business Journal (Wichita, KS)
September 20, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure program before the U.S. Congress would gain Kansas more than 13,000 military and civilian jobs, including 500 at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius says.

President Bush endorsed the BRAC Commission's recommendations late last week, sending them to Congress for expected approval.

Under the recommendations, McConnell would gain approximately 500 additional personnel to service 17 additional KC-135R air refueling tankers. The change would add $36 million to the base's $430 million annual payroll.

In addition, the 184th Air Refueling Wing at McConnell will convert to new military intelligence and information technology missions, in addition to similar missions currently under way.

"Kansas bases will grow," Sebelius said, "and our economy will prosper as a result."

Other recommendations:

All four Kansas installations will remain open and operational.
Fort Riley would receive the biggest jobs bump, approximately 9,700 additional military personnel in the repositioning of forces currently overseas. That brings to 12,000 the additional personnel at Fort Riley and is a $390 million annual impact to the regional economy. An additional $1 billion will be invested in base construction over the next few years.
The 190th Air Refueling Wing at Forbes Field will receive 12 new KC-135R tankers and about 247 additional personnel.
Fort Leavenworth, home of the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College, will retain that mission and be designated as the Midwest Joint Regional Correctional Facility. About 200 additional personnel will be stationed there.
The Kansas Army Ammunition Plant near parsons will be closed, costing 283 employees their jobs.

Opinions/ Editorials

Congress now has BRAC list

Bush signs off on report that will add jobs at depot

Chambersburg Public Opinion (Chambersburg, PA)
Jim Hook
September 21, 2005

President Bush has sent the base closure commission's report to Congress without revisions.

Letterkenny Army Depot stands to gain about 200 jobs from recommendations by the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

Letterkenny's recent success is the foundation for an ongoing effort to strengthen the depot for future rounds of base closings, according to L. Michael Ross, chairman of Opportunity '05, a group founded to see Letterkenny through the 2005 round.

The commission recommended a 2015 round of base closings.

"What we don't want to have to do in 2015 is to reintroduce Letterkenny to the community," Ross said. "We are very, very upbeat about the future of Letterkenny."

The depot has become an ongoing project in economic development. Staff and economic development officials have sought new missions and defense contractors in recent months.

To maintain communications and prospecting, Opportunity '05 will continue meeting, although quarterly instead of monthly, according to Ross.

Losing about 3,000 jobs in previous BRAC rounds, Letterkenny remade itself and leads the Army in efficiency.

The Pentagon had proposed adding 400 jobs to Letterkenny. More than half would have come from Red River Army Depot in Texas, which the Pentagon had slated for closing. The

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commission decided instead to keep Red River open, hold Red River's vehicle repair shop in place and move only missile maintenance to Letterkenny.

The commission reported, "The commission found that Red River is operating at twice its fiscal year 2003 level, when BRAC data-calls were issued, and that there is no current excess capacity within the Army's (five) maintenance depots."

Letterkenny also gets missile work from the realigning Marine Corps Logistics Base in Barstow, Calif.

"It's still a big win for the depot," Ross said. "This depot is rolling right now."

An August tour of Letterkenny by Secretary of the Army Francis Harvey shows the kind of progress Letterkenny has made, he said.

"It was a watershed moment for the depot," Ross said. "It's the first time we're aware of, that a secretary of the Army has been to the depot."

Congress has 45 legislative days to accept or reject the report in its entirety. Congress cannot change the report. Legislators have accepted all previous rounds of BRAC.

The commission approved 119 of the Pentagon's 190 recommendations, and rejected 13 recommendations and modified another 13.

The commission also concluded that the Pentagon's estimated savings of $49 billion over 20 years were vastly overestimated.

The task for the 2005 commission was more complicated than for the 1995 commission, according to the report. The commission had to piece together recommendations to judge their overall impact.

Additional Notes

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