

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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'BRAC is moving on,' House committee head says

Copley News Service
Otto Kreisher
September 22, 2005

The chairman and top Democrat of the House Armed Services Committee said Thursday they expect the House to ratify the final base closure and realignment recommendations.

"I think BRAC is moving on," the chairman, Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., said as Rep. Ike Skelton, D-Mo., nodded his agreement.

The views expressed by Hunter and Skelton echoed earlier statements by the bipartisan leaders of the Senate Armed Services, adding to a consensus that the recommendations approved by the independent BRAC commission and by President Bush will become law.

Once Bush endorsed the findings by the nine-member commission, the base closures and adjustments could be stopped only if both bodies of Congress pass a resolution of disapproval within 45 legislative days.

Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill. (Peoria), started that process Tuesday by introducing a resolution to block implementation of the base closure report.

While arguing that the military should not be closing bases in a time of war, LaHood acted primarily in opposition to the proposal to disband the Illinois Air National Guard' 183rd Fighter Wing and to transfer its 15 F-16 fighters from the Abraham Lincoln Capitol Airport in Springfield to another Air Guard unit at Fort Wayne, Ind.

A similar resolution was introduced Wednesday by Rep. Harold Ford, D-Tenn., even though his Nashville-based district would not lose anything from the BRAC recommendations. Ford is considering a statewide Senate race and Memphis would lose an Air Guard unit.

But so far, no resolution has been introduced in the Senate, where the Armed Services Committee chairman, John Warner, R-Va., and the top Democrat, Carl Levin of Michigan, said they would support the BRAC report.

Attempts to block the four previous BRAC reports failed overwhelmingly. Asked how his committee would handle the disapproval resolution, Hunter said he and Skelton would "need to take the temperature of our members, look at the (BRAC) package" then "huddle on this."

Hunter noted that in the four previous rounds of BRAC, there's been "precious little opposition" at the end.

Although his committee must address the resolution of disapproval within 20 days, Hunter laughed and said, "I don't think it's going to take too much time off our schedule."

Legislators await battle as BRAC list goes to Congress

Pallone, Holt, Corzine say they'll vote against list approved by Bush

The Atlanticville

Sue Morgan

September 23, 2005

Area legislators who have led the battle to spare Fort Monmouth from the Pentagon's cost-cutting ax have pledged to vote against allowing

the Defense Department document that lists the local U.S. Army base and 21 other installations for shut down, from becoming the law of the land.

The federal Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) list of military installations targeted for shutdown or restructuring by the Pentagon is now on its way to Congress, having been approved in its entirety by President George W. Bush last Thursday.

Now that Bush has signed off on the Pentagon's list, Congress is charged with reviewing it and voting to either approve or reject it in an up-or-down decision within 45 working days.

Neither of the two local congressmen who chair the Save Our Fort Committee, a local advocacy group whose mission is to keep Fort Monmouth operating at full capacity, had expected any different action from Bush, who received the BRAC list from the Pentagon on Sept. 8.

"While I'm disappointed by the president's decision, I'm certainly not surprised," U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6) said in a prepared statement. "I will adamantly oppose the final BRAC report when it comes before Congress in the next 45 days."

Pallone's colleague, U.S. Rep. Rush Holt (D-12), expressed no shock either.

"The president did what he said he'd do — he approved the whole report without any changes at all," Holt said in a prepared statement.

Still, both congressmen are clinging to the caveat imposed on U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld by the BRAC Commissioners when they authorized the Pentagon's proposal to close Fort Monmouth — that the base not be closed until all of its missions and facilities are duplicated at the Aberdeen (Md.) Proving Ground, the installation expected to absorb the bulk of its operations.

Pallone, Holt and other Save Our Fort Committee members have predicted that recreating the laboratory buildings, equipment

and workforce now existing at Fort Monmouth at the 7,000-acre Maryland base will result in the Pentagon spending more time and money than originally estimated.

The Pentagon's game plan calls for Fort Monmouth to be completely relocated to Aberdeen within two to six years.

"I will continue to explore options to prevent the Pentagon from closing Fort Monmouth, and will work to ensure the proper Congressional oversight, required by the BRAC Commission specifically in regard to the fort, actually takes place," Pallone said.

Though the two legislators, joined by U.S. Sens. Jon Corzine and Frank Lautenberg, have already unsuccessfully taken legal action in federal court and subsequently the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia to head off the Pentagon's closing of the fort from going forward, Holt indicated that "future legal options might be considered."

"If and when these recommendations become law, we're going to make sure Congress holds the Pentagon's feet to the fire on meeting the conditions imposed by the BRAC Commission before Fort Monmouth is closed," Holt said.

Corzine will reject the whole list when it comes before Congress, due to the inclusion of Fort Monmouth, according to David Wald, his spokesman.

"Closing Fort Monmouth is a disservice to our state, our nation, and most importantly, the men and women in combat who depend on the critical services and technology the base provides. This is a very bad decision," Corzine said.

Bush's fast-tracking of the BRAC list to Congress was not an unexpected move to Frank Muzzi, co-chair of The Patriots' Alliance, another fort advocacy group composed largely of military contractors who work on post.

Like Pallone and Holt, Muzzi pointed to the long-term expense of transferring and rebuilding

Fort Monmouth's research and development-oriented functions, particularly the Communications and Electronics Command (CECOM) at Aberdeen.

Asbury Park attorney Frank LaVergne, whom the Patriots' Alliance hired to fight the BRAC shutdown in federal court, might still be able to successfully argue that Fort Monmouth should remain open because the Pentagon violated six of eight selected criteria used to justify a base closure, Muzzi said.

In addition, five of the nine BRAC commissioners who reviewed the Defense Department's recommendations about which installations to shut down are former military generals or admirals who once reported to the Pentagon and would routinely agree to its proposals, he added.

"That [the BRAC Commission] followed the recommendations of the Pentagon is not a surprise," Muzzi said. "Had it been a different mix of BRAC Commissioners, things might have turned out differently."

The BRAC Commissioners voted 7-1 with one abstention to shutter Fort Monmouth during their final hearing on the Pentagon's listing on Aug. 24.

Aside from the court challenges, on Sept. 7 Corzine also unsuccessfully sought an injunction from the U.S. Supreme Court to block the Pentagon from forwarding its BRAC list to Bush for his signature.

Altogether, over 5,000 civilians and 467 military personnel are employed at the 1,126-acre installation. About 2,500 military contractors work on base and approximately 23,000 military retirees and veterans are served at Patterson Army Hospital Clinic.

N.J. lawmakers: Give Gulf Coast BRAC's funds

Two join late effort to save Fort Monmouth

Gannett News Service

Ledyard King

September 23, 2005

WASHINGTON — The battle to save Fort Monmouth has moved to Congress, where New Jersey lawmakers have joined a long-shot effort to reject the proposed closures of nearly two dozen major bases across the country.

Rep. Rush D. Holt, D-N.J., whose district includes the fort, and Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., who represents hundreds of the fort's 5,200 workers, are signing on to a measure authored by Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill., that would keep Monmouth and 21 other major installations open.

The Pentagon wants this round of base closures, the fifth since 1988, to save money and streamline and reorganize the military to better fight modern threats. The Base Realignment and Closure commission made changes to the proposal and forwarded it earlier this month to President Bush, who endorsed it.

Congress has 45 working days to reject it or else it takes effect. Most analysts and key lawmakers believe it will not be rejected.

The plan calls for closing Fort Monmouth and moving much of its communications and electronics research to Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland.

Holt and Pallone have argued the move would hurt military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan because the relocation would disrupt research on the technology and equipment that is developed for soldiers at the fort.

In a new tactic, they're now arguing that the \$21 billion in upfront costs for this round of base closures would be better used for hurricane relief.

"We cannot in good conscience go forward with the BRAC process now when the country is looking at spending more than \$200 billion to help rebuild the Gulf Coast areas," Holt said.

Ill. congressman introduces resolution to disapprove BRAC recommendations

Air Force Times

Rick Maze

September 22, 2005

Rep. Ray LaHood, R-Ill., is leading what is likely to end up being a failed assault on proposals to close and realign military bases. Worried about the loss of the Illinois National Guard's 183rd Fighter Wing and its 15 F-16Cs, LaHood introduced a resolution Wednesday to disapprove the recommendations of the Base Closure and Realignment Commission sent to Congress by President Bush last week.

Congress has 45 days to vote on a resolution of disapproval. Otherwise, the commission's recommendations are final.

LaHood, a reliable supporter of President Bush and a close ally of House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., said the base-closing process has been "bush league."

"I believe it is wrong that we are closing and realigning bases while we are at war," he said in a statement. "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 jobs to another state or even eliminate them altogether. That is wrong, wrong, wrong."

LaHood would need 218 votes to get a resolution passed by the House, and is expected to be able to muster no more than about 60 and probably fewer. To stop base closings, the resolution would have to pass both the House and Senate, and no senator has stepped forward so far to sponsor a similar resolution.

It is not even clear if there will be a vote in the House. Although LaHood is close to Hastert, the Bush administration is trying to discourage a vote because it does not want to call attention to disagreements over national security policy.

Local News Articles

BRAC Commission Early Bird

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Eglin prepares community for busier base

Northwest Florida Daily News (FL)
Miaden Rudman
September 22, 2005

EGLIN AFB -- Expect a louder and much busier air base in the coming decade.

Eglin Air Force Base gave that message to county and city officials at a meeting Wednesday morning.

Air Armament Center commander Maj. Gen. Robert Chedister and one of his top aides, Bob Arnold, also stressed that preparing Eglin for the influx of more than 3,400 troops, contractors and scores of F-35 warplanes will take a lot of help from municipalities and state officials.

To foster the process, the air base introduced the civilians to the Eglin Encroachment Committee's new goal, and its new name.

Now dubbed the Mission Enhancement Committee, politicians and administrators can expect to hear from the 15-man group when Eglin requires help.

"Instead of all requests coming to the Air Force, we're going to have an arrow going in both directions," Arnold said.

In other words, when a city or business requests Air Force land for a project, it had better explain how the base would benefit.

Arnold and Chedister used the nearly finished Base Realignment and Closure process to make the case for more tight-fisted property leasing or land swaps.

The 7th Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, N.C., was realigned to Eglin during BRAC. The Green Berets --more than 2,000 are now expected -- have chosen a triangle of Air Force land across State Road 85 from the 33rd Fighter Wing to build headquarters and barracks.

Chedister, noting that getting onto Eglin already causes heavy backups at the west and east gates,

suggested a way of accommodating the additional traffic. He wondered if closing SR 85 between Gen. Robert W. Bond and Lewis Turner boulevards and rerouting it using Bond would help.

"This is one of the ideas where we can help each other. Now, this is just an idea," he stressed. "I need some more gates."

As the presentation turned to F-35 Joint Strike Fighter training for pilots and maintainers also coming to Eglin, Arnold offered numbers to help explain the immense mission.

One of the most telling was an estimate of takeoffs and landings when the program is fully up and running: 135 daily sorties. That translates into a takeoff or landing every two to three minutes, assuming a 10-hour workday.

Homeowners can expect more noise as a result.

"JSFs will be everywhere," chipped in Chedister. "This will be fighter town USA for the next 30 years."

Arnold added the armament center would also have to take a hard look at commercial flights that might come in the future. It's worried about crowded skies over Eglin's land and Gulf of Mexico ranges and its potential impact on testing munitions or training troops.

The Mission Enhancement Committee chairman also noted drilling for oil and natural gas in the gulf might adversely affect Eglin. Arnold hoped politicians at all levels would listen when the armament center presents its view on where rigs could be placed without hindering weapons testing. County commissioners in the audience greeted Eglin's briefing with good cheer. No one appeared to believe that making room and building infrastructure for the air base's growing needs would be easy, however.

Okaloosa County Commission chairman Bill Roberts said the county isn't ready for what's coming, "but we will be."

John Broxson, a Santa Rosa County commissioner, also jumped on the bandwagon.

"It's going to be a challenge," he said. "We've all got to pull together. It's not going to be an easy transition."

Crane Building Would Make Groton Base More Valuable

New London Day (New London, CT)

Robert A. Hamilton

September 23, 2005

Groton — A military construction bill that passed the U.S. Senate Thursday contains \$4.6 million to build an enclosed loading area at the Naval Submarine Base that would allow submarine maintenance and repairs to take place in any weather.

The project would eliminate one of the key complaints about the base, that waterfront work there can be hampered by severe winter weather. The state's congressional delegation still has a lot of work to do to secure the project, however.

The military construction bill working its way through the House appropriations process has no similar provision, so it would have to be added during a joint conference, and both House and Senate authorization bills have no mention of it yet.

Part of the problem is that until now, lawmakers in other states have been reluctant to put any Groton spending into the authorization or appropriations bills because Groton was recommended for closure by the Pentagon.

The Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted Aug. 24 to reject the recommendation and keep the Groton base open.

Despite the uncertainty about the future of the base, the delegation persuaded the Appropriations Committee to put the money in its military construction, or "milcon," bill.

"Sub Base New London was on life support earlier this year but thankfully, through a lot of

hard work and determination, it has been reborn," said Sen. Christopher J. Dodd, D-Conn. "This measure continues to invest in its health and its critically important to its mission by enabling vital submarine maintenance to be conducted unencumbered by weather conditions year-round.

"That's good news for our national defense and good news for the people of eastern Connecticut," he said.

Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman said, "In passing this legislation, the Senate is meeting its responsibility" to give the men and woman at the base the capability to work through any storm and meet their obligations to keep the fleet ready."

Todd Mitchell, chief of staff for Rep. Rob Simmons, R-2nd District, said the congressman would work to get the House committees to accept the military construction language in the Senate bill.

"We work with the senators all the time to make sure we get as much out of the milcon process as we can," Mitchell said. "If there's something in the Senate bill that the base needs, we're going to work like heck to make sure it passes the conference."

Mitchell noted that during the base realignment and closure or BRAC process, several commissioners who voted to overturn the Pentagon recommendation to close the base took note of the many recent improvements at the base.

"As we increase these investments and make the sub base more and more modern, the more valuable it becomes not only to the Navy but the nation," Mitchell said.

Senate approves bill for Cannon project

Portales News-Tribune (Portales, NM)

September 23, 2005

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Senate today approved Military Construction and Veterans

Affairs Appropriations Bill that contains \$13.2 million for a project at Cannon Air Force Base, according to press release from Sen. Pete Domenici's office.

Domenici, R-NM, urged the committee to keep construction funds in the bill for Cannon Air Force Base, despite the fact that the Pentagon had targeted it for closure, the release said.

The New Mexico Congressional delegation is currently working to find a new mission for Cannon Air Force Base, since the F-16s currently stationed there will eventually be moved.

The appropriation will be used to replace the fuel storage and loading facility at the base, the release said. The project would build a modern fuel storage and distribution system, renovating facilities constructed in the 1960s, to safely unload commercial fuel delivery trucks, according to the release.

The bill does contain language that might restrict the use of funds for bases affected by the Base Realignment and Closure, however, the exact impact on Cannon is not clear at this time.

"If Cannon is to remain operable, as the BRAC Commission has dictated, the base needs to have a modern fuel storage and distribution system for whatever mission may end up there, Domenici said.

Bill would waive costs for port to take over Ingleside from Navy

Fort Worth Star Telegram (Fort Worth, TX)
September 22, 2005

WASHINGTON - The Corpus Christi area could remain on the hook for \$250 million even if Naval Station Ingleside closes as planned.

An agreement between the Navy and the Port of Corpus Christi requires the port to pay the Defense Department for improvements to the naval base in the coastal region. But Rep. Solomon Ortiz, D-Corpus Christi, has introduced a bill that would waive the rule.

The Base Closure and Realignment Commission and President Bush have approved a Pentagon proposal to close Ingleside, one of several major bases closed or realigned to streamline the nation's military facilities. The list is awaiting final scrutiny from Congress.

"The injury of having a major Gulf base close and a loss of 8,000 jobs, followed by the insult of the local taxpayers having to pay over \$200 million for the Port of Corpus Christi to retain Naval Station Ingleside property is an inordinately exorbitant price for our community to pay," Ortiz said in a statement.

Ingleside property is deeded to the Navy. Ortiz's office estimated the cost for reimbursing DOD for money it spent improving the base would be between \$200 to \$250 million. The Base Closure and Realignment Commission valued improvements made to the base, such as buildings, barracks, piers and wharfs, at \$219 million.

Ingleside was built in the 1980s as part of a Navy plan to create "homeports." Ortiz said similar bases were given back to local communities.

Ortiz was skeptical he could persuade colleagues to support his measure, saying he had difficulty passing similar measures. His bill is co-sponsored by Rep. Gene Taylor, R-Miss, whose state's naval station in Pascagoula also is on the chopping block.

Opinions/ Editorials

BRAC finally is history

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)
September 23, 2005

With his endorsement of the plan to close 22 military bases and reconfigure 33 others, President Bush likely has ended this year's Base Realignment and Closure fright.

Only if Congress rejects the list in full will the plan not become final, and that is highly unlikely.

Bush had until Sept. 23 to either approve or reject the report of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Congress has up to 45 days from Sept. 15 (when Bush accepted it) to return the plan to the BRAC panel.

The U.S. Navy Submarine Base New London had been recommended for closure. Had that happened, 30,000 jobs and \$3.3 billion in annual economic activity statewide would have been lost.

We can all breathe a sigh of relief that the sub base has been spared.

Additional Notes