

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

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**Closing Of Base Schools Opposed
GOP plan was offered as cost-cutting effort to
fund Katrina relief**

Richmond Times-Dispatch
James W. Crawley
October 3, 2005

WASHINGTON -- It must have seemed like a good idea at the time: Close dozens of schools on military bases, save hundreds of millions of dollars and spend the money on Hurricane Katrina relief.

But the cost-cutting plan earned a big, fat "F" from members of Congress and local school officials.

The Republican Study Committee, a coalition of conservative GOP congressmen, last week proposed closing stateside base schools and transferring the children to local schools as a way to save \$788 million over 10 years to help pay Hurricane Katrina relief costs.

The stateside dependent schools enroll about 27,000 students at 64 schools in seven states and Puerto Rico.

The dependent schools are in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky and New York.

A study committee staff member said the idea was suggested months before the hurricane in a Congressional Budget Office report on possible spending cuts.

Budget watchdog David Williams of the nonprofit and nonpartisan Citizens Against Government Waste liked the idea.

"Sounds like it has sound reasoning," he said. It's time to re-evaluate the defense-school programs and ask, "Are they a necessity?"

But a bipartisan group of six North Carolina congressmen, led by Republican Rep. Robin Hayes, sent a letter to Pentagon officials calling for continued support of the dependent schools.

While not mentioning the Katrina-offset proposal, the letter criticizes an ongoing Defense Department study examining the transfer of base schools to local districts.

"Dependent schools are integral to the retention and recruitment of dedicated military personnel," the letter stated.

Rep. Walter B. Jones, R-N.C., a member of the study committee, signed Hayes' letter supporting the schools. In an e-mailed response to a reporter's question, he stated, "DOD schools hold a strong and unique bond to both the family and the military."

The study committee's proposals have failed to gain much traction, as Congress weighs various ideas to offset an anticipated \$200 billion tab for hurricane relief.

Public school administrators are leery of the idea, said John Deegan, chief executive officer of Military Impacted Schools Association, which represents public school systems with many military dependents.

"It's a harebrained idea," he said. "It seems like a simple solution, but it doesn't work."

Washington does not fully reimburse districts for educating military students, said Deegan,

superintendent of the local school district encompassing Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

The leader of the defense schools' teachers union roundly criticized the proposed cuts.

"It's unfortunate that the Republican leadership can come up with no better way to cut spending than to penalize the military," said Sheridan Pearce, president of the Federal Education Association.

Any hope of saving money by transferring students to local districts would be lost because federal aid and local taxpayers would pay for educating the students, Pearce said.

Many potentially affected school districts are in rural communities with limited property-tax bases. Additional students would be a burden, he said.

A public school official in Virginia said transferring hundreds of Quantico Marine base students could compound problems of school crowding, transportation and housing.

"We would have serious challenges," said Wayne Mallard, deputy superintendent of Prince William County schools. The district borders the base in Northern Virginia.

Local News Articles

**Governor Still Optimistic On Oceana
But he warns that every city in the region
needs 'to step up' to keep jets at the base**
Richmond Times-Dispatch (Richmond, VA)
Bill Geroux
October 4, 2005

VIRGINIA BEACH - Gov. Mark R. Warner urged local political leaders yesterday to stay patient and hopeful about the prospect of keeping the Navy's main jet base at Oceana Naval Air Station. But he said every city in the region should be prepared to chip in money to the effort.

"We're all going to need to step up," the governor told Hampton Roads business and political leaders at a luncheon meeting.

Warner said Virginia officials were still deep in the process of gathering information on the potential cost of clearing Oceana's primary crash zones of thousands of homes and businesses, as the independent base-closing commission has demanded in exchange for not moving the jets to Cecil Field near Jacksonville, Fla.

The governor said Virginia officials should have enough facts by mid-November to make financial decisions about Oceana.

Warner reiterated that he is prepared to earmark state money to help Virginia Beach buy homes and businesses near Oceana's runways. But he said leaders of other cities in Hampton Roads should recognize that the loss of Oceana's 200 jets and roughly 12,000 jobs would reverberate through the region and could be the first step in a "steady erosion" of military facilities and jobs from Hampton Roads.

If Florida succeeds in its aggressive bid to acquire Oceana's jets, Warner said, that state will next seek one or possibly two of the five nuclear-powered aircraft carriers now based at Naval Station Norfolk. Each carrier is a floating city of more than 5,000 sailors.

Beyond that, the governor said, Virginia could eventually lose such facilities as the U.S. Joint Forces Command in Suffolk, which has brought a boom in economic development to the northern part of that city.

Not all local officials agree the loss of the jets would lead to more losses of military jobs and bases - one Virginia Beach official called Warner's warnings "the Chicken Little scenario." But few would disagree that the impact of losing the jets would be regional, particularly if the Navy retains the 8,000-acre air base but sharply reduces its use.

The cities of Hampton Roads are better known for intramural squabbling and competition than for regional cooperation. Warner said saving

Oceana's jets could be the issue that finally brings them together.

After the governor's remarks, Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim said in an interview, "I think if there's a price to pay [to keep jets at Oceana], we're all going to have to pay it."

Warner said events unfolding outside Virginia may help the state's campaign. He said reports from Florida suggest that, contrary to what Florida officials told the base-closing commission, the potential crash zones at Cecil Field in Jacksonville may contain hundreds of homes that would have to be moved.

And the spiraling costs of the war in Iraq and the cleanup from Hurricane Katrina may strengthen Virginia's argument that moving the jets to Florida would be prohibitively expensive, he said.

"There are a lot more chapters of this story to play out," Warner said.

In August, the base-closing commission gave Virginia Beach until the end of March to decide whether to agree to clear Oceana's crash zones of homes and businesses, with an investment of at least \$15 million per year, or to allow the jets to depart for Florida.

A recent study by the city concluded that the crash zones contained roughly 3,400 homes, many of which were built before Oceana became a major jet base and expanded its crash zones. Crash zones are the swaths of land near the ends of runways where accidents are most likely to happen.

The study estimated the potential cost of acquiring those homes at roughly \$400,000. It did not take into account the potential political cost of displacing thousands of city residents, many of whom have said they do not wish to leave.

One of the key issues for the region and state is whether spending millions of dollars to clear the crash zones would keep the jets at Oceana for longer than several years. Members of the base-

closing commission said the Navy will need a new East Coast master jet base no matter how the city responds to the ultimatum.

But Warner reminded listeners yesterday that the Navy has consistently said it wants to keep the jets at Oceana.

Sen. John W. Warner, R-Va., has asked the new Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Michael G. Mullen, to clarify the Navy's long-term plans for Oceana before Virginia officials start spending money to try to retain the jets. Mullen said he hoped to have an answer by mid-November.

In the meantime, the governor encouraged local officials not to panic or to dwell on past zoning decisions that allowed development to encroach on Oceana. Saving the jets, he said, "is going to take cooperation as opposed to finger-pointing."

Group to consider missions for Cannon

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Clovis, NM)
October 4, 2005

The Pentagon is planning to form a special group to consider possible missions at Cannon Air Force Base and other U.S. military installations, according to Gov. Bill Richardson.

The governor met Monday with the Defense Department's deputy undersecretary and the Army's vice chief-of-staff. He said the Army is considering joint missions with another branch of the military and that Cannon could be a home to some of those potential missions.

Richardson said the assessment team would be represented by all branches of the military and some people from communities where bases are affected.

The group would have six months from its creation to offer suggestions, meaning a recommendation on Cannon could be unveiled next summer.

"This is very positive," Richardson said.

The Base Realignment and Closure Commission in August handed the eastern New Mexico base a reprieve of sorts. Instead of recommending to close it, commissioners directed the Pentagon to send Cannon's F-16 fighter squadrons elsewhere and to look for another use for the base.

Cannon would be closed if a new mission can't be found by Dec. 31, 2009.

Sens. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., and Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., have said legislation moving through the Senate would prohibit the Pentagon from withdrawing any assets from Cannon until the defense secretary certifies to Congress that he has looked for a new mission.

Newspaper: Wrong info about Cecil Field crash zones given to BRAC

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Jacksonville, FL)
October 3, 2005

City officials incorrectly reported to a federal commission the number of homes located in crash zones near Cecil Field, a former naval air station state lawmakers have lobbied to reopen, a newspaper reported.

City planners in Mayor John Peyton's office originally said in a report to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission that no one lived in the crash zones around Cecil Field.

But after a review of property records by the Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville, city officials said that up to 925 homes sit in the zones, the newspaper reported for Tuesday's editions.

City planners also failed to report weakened restrictions for development around Cecil Field after its 1999 closure, and that larger crash and noise zones the Navy recommended in 2000 have not been adopted, officials said.

A spokeswoman for the BRAC panel said no one was available Monday to address the city's inaccuracies.

"We represented the facts as best we knew them at the time," Peyton said.

A correct map of crash zones was scheduled to be given to the commission on Tuesday, said Susie Wiles, a spokeswoman for the mayor's office.

Peyton and Gov. Jeb Bush have lobbied lawmakers about the possibility of reopening the base, which closed in 1999, and offered \$200 million to relocate businesses at Cecil, plus another \$100 million for housing.

The BRAC panel voted to reopen Cecil Field if Virginia and the Navy fail to take steps to curb encroachment by homes and business that has caused safety problems at Oceana Naval Air Station, Va.

President Bush approved the commission's final report, which is awaiting Congress' vote.

Some residents are opposed to reopening Cecil Field and are angry they were not asked before state and city officials lobbied for its return.

BRAC Closure Recommendations In Virginia to Have No Rating Effects; New Jobs Possible

PR Newswire US
October 3, 2005

WASHINGTON, Oct. 3 /PRNewswire/ -- Standard & Poor's Ratings Services said today that, despite recommendations by the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) to close nearly two dozen major bases in Virginia and restructure more than 30, local governments in the commonwealth are not expected to be affected negatively from a rating standpoint.

"Although the BRAC plan includes the closing of many bases, including the Oceana Naval Air Station, a leading area employer, taxpayers are expected to save about \$15 billion over the next 20 years as a result of the moves," said Standard & Poor's credit analyst Kenneth Gear. "In

addition, preliminary estimates show that Virginia will be a net gainer of direct jobs, assuming that the planned closers and redeployments hold, with more than 100,000 jobs moving in, out, or between installations in the commonwealth."

While Virginia has a diverse economy, it depends on a sizable military presence as an important job provider and stabilizing factor for its economy. According to Economy.com, the federal/military sector currently accounts for 152,229 jobs in the commonwealth, which is the home to about 49 military installations. Government sector employment comprises 18.1% of employment in the commonwealth compared with 16.4% for the nation. With this concentration, Virginia was at a comparatively higher risk of losing jobs during this recent round of BRAC announcements.

"We will continue to monitor the exact effects the recommendations have on local jurisdictions, as the time for the actual closures is typically five years out, giving municipalities time to react and identify alternate uses for the closed bases," said Mr. Gear. "In some cases, as seen following previous BRAC actions, the base closings have created increased economic activity by freeing up strategically located land held by the bases."

This will likely be the case in Arlington County ('AAA') and Alexandria ('AAA'), two mature communities where the freeing up of leased space will most likely lead to the redevelopment of privately owned property for potentially more lucrative commercial and residential uses.

The most significant effects of the BRAC actions include the loss of 3,330 jobs due to the closure of Fort Monroe in the city of Hampton ('AA') and the net loss of 20,000 direct jobs in leased space in Arlington County and Alexandria. On the flip side, a net gain of 11,000 direct jobs is expected at Fort Belvoir, including a new Army hospital; a net gain of more than 7,000 direct jobs at Fort Lee in central Virginia; and a net gain of more than 1,000 direct jobs at Fort Eustis at the northern tip of Newport News ('AA'), which is only minutes from

Williamsburg and Langley Air Force Base in the Hampton Roads area. A net gain of 1,800 direct jobs is also expected at the Marine Corp Base at Quantico, which borders Prince William County ('AA+A significant gain in highly classified jobs is also a possibility.

The BRAC recommended the retention of four defense-related research activities at installations in northern Virginia: the Office of Naval Research, the Air Force Office of Scientific Research, the Army Research Office, and the Defense Research Project Agency.

The BRAC also outlined specific conditions for retaining the East Coast Master Jet Base at Naval Air Station Oceana, located in Virginia Beach ('AA+The possible realignment could be due to frequent noise complaints as a result of aircraft training that includes low-altitude flights and practice carrier landings. The actions include mandated state zoning controls, limiting the use of property adjacent to the base by local government, and developing programs to purchase development rights for undeveloped properties. The city and state are moving forward with these actions as they weigh the associated costs and benefits.

Rell vows to continue BRAC efforts

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)
Ray Hackett
October 4, 2005

GROTON-- Gov. M. Jodi Rell said she has not abandoned efforts to overturn a Pentagon decision to remove the Connecticut Air National Guard A-10 aircraft from Bradley International Airport, and will take the matter to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary.

Rell made the comments while at the Submarine Force Library and Museum Sunday to celebrate the success of getting the Groton submarine base off the Pentagon closure list.

"The attorney general and I have spoken, and we'll wait until after the BRAC process is completed in Congress and then seek a court hearing on our motion," Rell said. "The U.S.

District Court has told us that our case should be heard on the merits, and that is what we're going to do."

Rell sought a temporary restraining order barring the independent Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission from including the Bradley reorganization in its final base closing recommendation until a hearing could be held.

A federal District Court judge issued the order Sept. 7, but was overturned on appeal by the U.S. Second District Court of Appeals. The commission forwarded the recommendation to the president Sept. 8. Congress has until the first week of November to act on the recommendations.

Rell said Sunday as soon as Congress acts on the BRAC recommendations, the state will request a hearing in U.S. District Court. Connecticut is arguing the Department of Defense cannot order a reorganization or closure of a National Guard facility without the permission of the governor.

"I'm prepared to go to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary to preserve the rights of my administration and future governors as commander-in-chief of the Connecticut National Guard," Rell said.

Warner raises doubts about Cecil Field as Oceana fallback

The Associated Press (Virginia Beach, VA)
By Larry O'Dell
October 3, 2005

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. -- Virginia's Gov. Mark R. Warner on Monday questioned the prospect of moving jets from Oceana Naval Air Station to Florida's Cecil Field, contending the dormant base could face similar development challenges.

Warner told community leaders a report in several days would disclose that several hundred homes are in the so-called accident-prone zone of Cecil Field. The Jacksonville-area base was

closed in 1999 when the F/A-18 Hornets moved to Oceana.

"We're going to make sure we share that with the Navy," Warner told reporters of the reported Cecil encroachment. "It's remarkable to me that the BRAC commission didn't do more due diligence."

In August, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission conditionally approved Oceana's status as the Navy's East Coast master jet base, provided it reversed development circling the base.

To achieve this, the city would have to acquire all of the property in the most accident-prone zones around the base--some 3,000 homes, worth upward of \$400 million, as well as businesses and churches.

Warner did not specify the source of the forthcoming report on Cecil Field, but he said the Florida air base did not receive the same level of scrutiny as Oceana.

Of Florida officials, he said, "They did a slick promotional job."

Warner encouraged regional cooperation to save Oceana, calling it an important asset for the region and the state. He said the state will contribute financially to the effort and called on Virginia Beach's neighboring localities to chip in as well.

"There's a price to pay, and we're all going to have to pay it," Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim said after Warner's speech.

Warner also urged community leaders to be patient while a 16-member panel he appointed to plan Virginia's response does its work. Officials also are awaiting results of a study on the economic impact of the BRAC action.

"We want to do everything we can to protect our citizens while also protecting a large employer," said Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf.

Oceana is the Virginia Beach's largest employer, with nearly 12,000 military and civilian personnel. The federal commission didn't order Oceana closed if the jets are moved, but the city hasn't determined yet exactly how many jobs would be lost.

President Bush endorsed the commission's report and it will become final unless Congress rejects it.

Opinions/ Editorials

Ellsworth missions need to be more vital to defense

Aberdeen American News (Aberdeen, SD)
October 3, 2005

Unmanned aerial vehicles. Aircraft with lasers to destroy missiles and satellites. Space-based weapons systems.

Those are some of the ideas for new missions that could make Ellsworth Air Force Base more vital to our nation's defense mission.

"We want to do everything we can to make Ellsworth a multi-mission base to BRAC-proof it for future rounds," said Republican Sen. John Thune.

Ellsworth was spared in the recent round of closings determined by the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission, and the commission has suggested that no new closings be contemplated for some years down the road.

But the Defense Department has sought to close Ellsworth before, and it could again. So our congressional delegation is seeking to add missions - to the primary one of housing about half our nation's B1-B bomber fleet - to make Ellsworth more important, more vital, more BRAC-proof.

Whatever it takes. Ellsworth is too important to South Dakota, and if our congressional delegation can add missions to it, to insulate it from future closing proposals, we'll take those.

Our delegation knows this well: While we seem to have avoided closure this time, Ellsworth isn't a sure bet for the future.

Work together and do what it takes. South Dakota needs Ellsworth.

Additional Notes