

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



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October 27, 2005

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Plan to close military bases seems certain to take effect next month

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

Liz Sidoti

October 26, 2005

A plan to close and reconfigure hundreds of military bases is sailing through Congress, on track to take effect next month in a blow to communities such as Springfield and Rock Island in Illinois that are hoping for an eleventh-hour reprieve.

In a long-shot attempt to halt the first round of base closings in a decade, the House planned a vote Thursday on a proposal sponsored by Illinois GOP Rep. Ray LaHood to reject the final report of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Even base-closing opponents considered the effort certain to fail, like Congress' attempts to stop the four previous rounds.

To kill the process, the Senate also would have to veto the report - and the chances of that are slim to none. In both chambers, opposition has been muted by the elimination of several major bases from the Pentagon's original list of closures and the recent focus on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

"I can't see anything that stops it," said David Berteau, a military analyst who oversaw base closings for the Pentagon in 1991 and 1993.

Even LaHood acknowledged that he expects the proposed shake-up of the far-flung domestic military network to become law during the second week of November.

"I know that this is an uphill battle," LaHood said. "I've been around long enough to know we'll be lucky to get 100 votes" in the 435-member House.

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., who led early opposition in the Senate after the Pentagon proposed closing an Air Force base in his state, said the House vote would put the epitaph on a dead issue.

The commission's report includes recommendations calling for moving 15 National Guard fighter jets from Springfield to Indiana, taking more than 600 jobs with them. Another of the commission's recommendations would move tasks from the Rock Island Arsenal to other bases, cutting what could be 1,300 jobs from that installation.

"We are at war in Iraq, we are at war in Afghanistan, but here at home we want to eliminate bases and uproot National Guard facilities to other states," LaHood said. "I do not believe that is something we should be doing while fighting a war."

But the Pentagon, the White House and GOP congressional leaders dismiss that argument. They contend that eliminating extra space will free up money that could be used instead to improve the United States' fighting capabilities.

Andy Ross, a spokesman for Gov. Rod Blagojevich, said the governor is hopeful that Congress will reject the recommendations because "they don't live up to their hype," including a supposed \$10 million savings at Springfield.

Also opposed to the recommendations are Democratic Sens. Dick Durbin and Barack Obama.

"I believe that the BRAC report submitted to the president by the Department of Defense is deeply flawed," said Durbin, the Senate's second-ranking Democrat. "The inconsistencies, contradictions and outright violations of BRAC criteria contained in the current report do not advance our national interest, and I cannot support it."

Obama agreed.

"Given the haphazard process by which some of the BRAC commission's decisions appear to have been made, and the unfair treatment I believe the Rock Island Arsenal received in the BRAC process, I cannot support the commission's recommendations," he said.

Among members of Illinois' delegation who are expected to vote against LaHood's proposal are Democratic Reps. Jerry Costello of Belleville and Jesse L. Jackson of Chicago. Costello cites how well Scott Air Force Base did under the report's recommendations and says it would be a waste of money to repeat the BRAC process.

Military analysts also say this may be the last chance the Pentagon has to save money by shuttering bases because Congress likely will resist approving another round of closures given the pain this one caused.

The nine-member commission reviewing Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld's plan to restructure the U.S. domestic base network sent President Bush the report in September. It called for closing 22 major military bases and reconfiguring another 33. Hundreds of smaller facilities from coast to coast also will close, shrink or grow.

The commission said the plan would mean annual savings of \$4.2 billion, compared with \$5.4 billion a year under the Pentagon's original plan.

Rumsfeld had recommended closing 33 major bases and realigning 29 others, but the commission made changes even as it signed off on most of the sweeping plan. In the biggest decisions, the commission voted in August to keep open a historic shipyard in Kittery, Maine, a submarine base in Groton, Conn., and Air Force bases in New Mexico and South Dakota.

Lawmakers representing those states had waged fierce lobbying campaigns to get the panel to spare their facilities. Commissioners denied politics played a role in their decisions.

The panel also crafted its own shake-up of Air National Guard units across the country, choosing not to endorse a Pentagon plan that drew heavy opposition from state governors and was arguably the most contentious issue in the round of base closures.

"Once the commission removed so many bases from the list, they not only caused individual members to reverse their parochial positions, they also removed the concern that the Pentagon messed up the process so badly that it was fundamentally flawed," Berteau said. "They also removed the view that the commission was just a rubber stamp."

As a result, he said, wide-scale opposition in Congress to the plan dropped.

The president signed off on the report and sent it to Congress on Sept. 15. That triggered a 45-legislative day window for the report to become law unless both chambers pass a resolution killing the process.

Congress authorized this round of closures after the White House threatened to veto an entire defense spending bill if the Pentagon did not get the go-ahead.

Since then, the House has consistently supported closing bases.

Local News Articles

BRAC process nears end

Pensacola News Journal (Pensacola, FL)

Nicole Lozare
October, 27, 2005

The Base Realignment and Closure process is nearing its end as military towns nationwide, including Pensacola, wait for Congress to approve a report.

Congress has until the second week of November to act on President Bush's report, which is based on the recommendations of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

If Congress does reject the report, which will affect more than 1,500 jobs locally, the realignment and closure list becomes law.

U.S. Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Chumuckla, said he plans to vote against Bush's report when the issue comes before the House of Representatives this week. The Senate, so far, is not scheduled to vote on the recommendations.

"I would like to see the BRAC vote delayed, at the very least," Miller said Wednesday. "The timing for the process is not when our country is at war. However, I feel relatively certain that it is going to pass."

In the five rounds of BRAC thus far, Congress has yet to reject a president's report.

Military Regional and Oversight Committee member Don Salter said the group is confident the report will be approved by Congress.

"We are pleased that we were able to turn around some of the decisions regarding the Pensacola Naval Air Station," said Salter, a retired serviceman and a Santa Rosa County commissioner.

The group successfully lobbied to keep the Naval Education and Training Command at Pensacola Naval Air Station and the Naval Education Training Professional Development and Technology Center at Saufley Field, which would have affected a total of almost 800 jobs.

Employee launches effort to keep Air Force lab open

Lincoln Journal (Lincoln, MA)

Bethan L. Jones

October 27, 2005

When the Base Realignment and Closure committee determined over the summer that Hanscom Air Force Base would remain open, many missed the fine print detailing the closure of the Air Force Research Laboratory.

The AFRL was created by the Air Force after World War II and situated in the Boston area to draw on the academic resources available. The lab is a defense research facility for the Air Force Base with civilian researchers.

Under the BRAC plan, the AFRL will be moved to Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Ohio and Kirtland Air Force Base in New Mexico.

Lexington was one of the communities which took action when the news broke.

Jeanne Krieger, Board of Selectmen chairman and member of the Hanscom Area Towns Selectmen, sent a letter on behalf of the selectmen to the state expressing their concern over the closing of the facility.

"We're extremely disappointed ... we're [going] to lose the RL mission," said Krieger.

Edward Artshuler, an employee and researcher at the base since 1960, has launched an offensive, creating several scenarios which could save the mission of the premier research facility. Artshuler sent a short proposal to the offices of Sen. John Kerry, D- Mass., and Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., as well as Gov. Mitt Romney and state congressional representatives Marty Meehan, Edward Markey and John Tierney. In it, he outlined actions which could perpetuate the life of the research facility as, according to the proposal, only approximately 10 percent of the laboratory employees are willing to be relocated.

"We have a very fine lab here at Hanscom," he said. "It will all be lost if we can't find someone to take it over."

In his proposal, Artshuler suggested transferring the assets of the facility to the stewardship of the University of Massachusetts. He said the research lab already maintains established ties with UMass-Lowell and UMass-Amherst to perpetuate research.

Artshuler said UMass could administer the facility in the same way the Massachusetts Institute of Technology works with Lincoln Laboratory. He said the scenario is win-win as the Air Force does not have to go through the cost of constructing two new facilities and has a laboratory where needed military work can be conducted. Artshuler also suggested the lab would also be able to branch out into other areas of study under the new partnership.

He said he has not heard any official feedback from the chancellor of UMass but he has received positive encouragement from the staff who know of his proposal.

The researcher also suggested the laboratory be converted into a military "purple lab." Under the current set-up, each branch of the armed forces has its own research facility. Artshuler said the Department of Defense has for a long time been considering combining forces and creating one facility which would service the needs of all departments. Artshuler suggested Hanscom could be the first of these such labs with a "larger and much more expansive" mission.

He made an additional recommendation that the facility be considered for a federal laboratory, maintained by a federal department. Artshuler suggested the Department of Homeland Security does not have a research facility and suggested the expertise of those at the Hanscom facility would be a good fit.

Though he has not yet received any real feedback on his proposal, he said time is in hand to go through a thorough planning phase to determine what will the future will hold.

"I have planted some seeds," said Artshuler. "[The proposal] is working its way up the chain of command."

Susan Murphy, director of public affairs at Wright Patterson Air Force Base where the Air Force Research Laboratory is based said the closing process has not been finalized. President George W. Bush submitted the realignment proposals to Congress on Sept. 15 and it has 45 days to accept or reject the proposals.

"Keep in mind, this is a process," said Murphy.

If the proposal is accepted, which is expected, the closing process will begin in the next two years and will have to be complete within six years.

LaHood fights base closing report

October 26, 2005
WQAD (Illinois)

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Congressman Ray LaHood is trying block the military base realignment plan that would bring cuts to the Rock Island Arsenal and a Springfield Air Guard unit.

LaHood is sponsoring a resolution to stop the cuts, and the House plans to vote tomorrow on whether to reject the final report of the 2005 base-closing commission.

To kill the process, the Senate also would have to veto the report -- and the chances of that are considered to be slim.

Illinois Senators Dick Durbin and Barack Obama say they would vote to reject the report, if given the chance.

Durbin calls it "deeply flawed," and Obama says it could end up costing taxpayers money.

Among those backing the report is Congressman Jerry Costello who says Scott Air Force Base

does well under the recommendations and he doesn't want to restart the process

Officials fear base jobs at risk Meet with Defense official to block rumored stealth move of jobs to Massachusetts

Dayton Daily News (Dayton, OH)
Jessica Wehrman
October 27, 2005

WASHINGTON | Concerned about rumors that the Air Force might try to quietly push through a Defense Department proposal to send Wright-Patterson jobs to Massachusetts, a group of Ohio lawmakers is urging the deputy undersecretary of defense to abide by the decision of the independent base closure commission.

The group — Sens. Mike DeWine, R-Ohio, George Voinovich, R-Ohio, Rep. David Hobson, R-Springfield, and staff members for Rep. Michael Turner, R-Centerville, met with Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Michael Wynne on Tuesday to reiterate their commitment to keeping jobs from the Development and Fielding Systems Group at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Wynne, who took the lead on many Defense base closure issues, is also President Bush's nominee for Air Force Secretary.

A Defense Department base closure proposal made this year would have stripped at least 2,250 jobs from Wright-Patterson and moved them to Hanscom Air Force Base in Massachusetts, according to Pentagon estimates. The Wright-Patterson jobs in question focus primarily on buying and supporting automated business systems.

A plan to close and reconfigure hundreds of military bases is sailing through Congress, on track to take effect next month. In a longshot attempt to halt the first round of base closings in a decade, the House planned a vote today on a proposal to reject the final report of the 2005 base-closing commission. Even base-closing opponents considered the effort certain to fail, like Congress' attempts to stop the four previous rounds. To kill the process, the Senate also

would have to veto the report — and the chances of that are slim to none.

DeWine spokesman Jeff Sadosky said that Tuesday's meeting was arranged in response to rumors in the Dayton area that the Defense Department might still try to go ahead with the move despite the commission's decision in August to keep the jobs at Wright-Patterson.

DeWine, Voinovich and Hobson sent Wynne a letter Wednesday reiterating their opposition to any DFSG moves from Wright-Patterson to Hanscom. "We are strongly against any effort to make such a move and appreciate your assurance that "nobody is looking to undo the BRAC outcomes," the group wrote.

"(Wynne) seems to feel that it's settled," Sadosky said, adding that the group plans to continue monitoring any job moves in or out of Wright-Patterson.

Opinions/ Editorials

N/A

Additional Notes

N/A