

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

November 08, 2005

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Maine Senators Want Pentagon To Donate Shuttered Bases

Congress Daily

Megan Scully

November 7, 2005

Maine's senators plan to introduce an amendment as early as today to the FY06 defense authorization bill that would require the Defense Department to give military property scheduled for closure to local redevelopment authorities. Under this year's base-closure process, the Pentagon may, among other options, auction off defense property -- a move that would help the military recoup some of the environmental cleanup and other costs associated with closure. The amendment would require the Pentagon to first offer the property to the community before seeking private developers. "This amendment focuses on one goal: to allow the communities that are losing the personal and economic relationships with their military neighbors, through closure or realignment, every opportunity to control their own destiny," according to a Friday "Dear Colleague" signed by Sens. Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, both R-Maine.

The Maine delegation has opposed this year's base-closure round that threatened thousands of jobs in the state. In August, the independent Defense Base Closure and Realignment

Commission spared Portsmouth Naval Shipyard from being closed as the Pentagon recommended, but went ahead with its plan to shut down Brunswick Naval Air Station. "After you rip the heart and soul out of a community, you're going to ask them to pay for it?" asked Paul Hirsch, president of Madison Government Affairs, which does base-closure consulting work, and a senior staffer on the 1991 commission.

The Snowe/Collins amendment could draw support from senators representing the 33 major bases scheduled for closure over the next several years, but not everyone is convinced it is the right way to proceed. One Senate aide noted that requiring the military to first offer property to redevelopment authorities "shortchanges" other potential groups that would benefit from using the property. It would no longer require the Pentagon to determine whether installations could be used to help the homeless or be transferred via "public benefits conveyances" to veterans groups or other organizations, the aide said. While the amendment would give most communities a first crack at redeveloping closed properties, it also includes an exception that would allow the Defense secretary to transfer the property to agencies within the Defense and Homeland Security departments "if such action is necessary in the national security interest of the United States," according to the Friday letter.

State officials renew lawsuit for Air National Guard planes

Newsday
November 7, 2005

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) _ State Attorney General Richard Blumenthal returned to federal court Monday to stop the federal government from removing Air National Guard aircraft from Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks.

Acting on behalf of Gov. M. Jodi Rell and other state officials, Blumenthal said the federal government cannot be relied upon in an emergency. He cited the tardy response by the Federal Emergency Management Agency to Hurricane Katrina in late August.

"It's inept and incompetent at providing disaster relief. We have to rely on ourselves," he said. "Katrina demonstrates irrefutably that we cannot rely on the federal government in the event of natural disasters or even security emergencies."

Blumenthal said federal law prohibits the relocation or withdrawal of National Guard or Air National Guard units without the agreement of the governor.

Rell said in a statement that the "security and safety of this state's citizens" are at stake.

"I will not sit idly by as our rights are violated and our security is compromised," Rell, a Republican, said in a statement.

State officials this summer sued to keep the guard base off the closure list. The recommendation of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to move to Massachusetts A-10s assigned to Connecticut's 103rd Fighter Wing took effect Monday.

The U.S. Justice Department, which represents the Pentagon in the lawsuit, did not immediately respond to a telephone call seeking comment.

In addition to Rell, Sens. Joe Lieberman and Christopher Dodd, both D-Conn., and U.S. Rep. John Larson, D-Conn, are part of the lawsuit against federal officials. Bradley airport is in Larson's district.

President Bush endorsed a plan on Sept. 15 to close 22 major military bases and reconfigure 33 others, leaving their fate to Congress. He had until Sept. 23 to accept the entire report from an independent commission and send it to Congress, or return it to the commission for further work.

In his lawsuit, Blumenthal said transferring or retiring the 103rd Fighter Wing's aircraft would eliminate Connecticut's only Air National Guard fighter squadron.

"Transfer of these aircraft out of Connecticut would deprive the governor of a vital homeland

security asset, degrade her ability to defend the security of Connecticut's citizenry and leave Connecticut without a single Air National Guard aircraft assigned within its borders or under the governor's command," he said in the lawsuit.

He also said the recommendations by the base closing commission and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to transfer or retire aircraft assigned to the Bradley Air Guard unit are unlawful because the Base Closure Act does not grant the base closing commission the authority to change how a unit is equipped or organized, Blumenthal said.

Rumsfeld and the commission did not obtain the approval of Rell to change the branch or organization of the 103rd Fighter Wing, he said.

Connecticut lost its bid to keep the Bradley realignment off the list, but stopped a plan to close the Navy submarine base in Groton. The base closure commission rejected the Pentagon's proposal to shut down the sub base.

Local News Articles

Denver community proves there's life after a base closes

Christian Science Monitor (Boston, MA)
Mark Sappenfield
November 8, 2005

It holds lessons for latest communities on closure list.

When the long and winding path of the Pentagon's base-closure process comes to an end Tuesday, as the list of bases to shutter becomes law, scores of towns across the country will take their first steps toward an uncertain future - shorn of the military jobs and identity that defined them for generations.

Yet here, not far from what was once Lowry Air Force Base's Runway 4, Amy Ford pushes her daughter on a park swing, surrounded by new homes and fresh-cut lawns. Now, 11 years after the base closed, Lowry is one of Denver's trendiest neighborhoods - and living proof that

there is life after Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC).

Although Lowry has had the good fortune of being near one of America's fastest-growing cities, it has matched those advantages with foresight, strong cooperation, and determination to plow through a process often fraught with bureaucratic frustrations. Now, as more towns face the prospect of life without their bases, Lowry serves as a road map of what these communities must do if they are not only to survive, but flourish.

"At first they were shocked and they fought it, but now they've come full circle and it's been such a boon for them," says Kenneth Beeks of Business Executives for National Security in Washington. "They've turned it into a showcase."

From the entrance on Quebec Street, Lowry does give the appearance of showing off. The homes sprouting along the Sixth Avenue Parkway turn their many-windowed facades and ample garages toward the street, looking every bit a suburban estate. Blocks away, streets curl around eateries and cafes where the latte crowd can preen and be seen.

It is the scene that BRAC communities dream of - a 7,000-job military base replaced by a thriving neighborhood of six schools and 3,000 homes, some of which sell for as much as \$2 million. In all, Lowry has generated \$4 billion for the area since 1994.

Much credit goes to Lowry's location on the eastern edge of Denver, where developers are eager to snatch up open land. But Lowry's success hints at broader lessons. After all, Lowry has achieved prosperity even as redevelopment at El Toro Air Station - located in a similarly desirable area, California's Orange County - has stalled.

The difference is in how local officials approached the closures. While those involved with El Toro remained divided for years over what to do, officials in Denver and nearby

Aurora began to move forward together before the base closed in 1994.

The key was thinking entrepreneurially - finding a way to shape the base to meet the greatest need of the surrounding community. For Denver, that meant new housing. In other places, "where you don't have a location that is easily absorbed, that's when you have to get creative," says Thomas Markham, director of the Lowry Redevelopment Authority (LRA).

For Ms. Ford, Lowry was an easy sell. She had never wanted to leave downtown Denver, where the supermarket and the symphony were equally accessible, and where the gas lamps of LoDo radiated an energy that suburbia could not approximate. Yet she and her husband were just starting a family, and the cramped quarters of downtown apartments were too small.

Lowry was the obvious answer, and now she wouldn't want to live anywhere else. "There are all these amenities within walking distance - you can get ice cream, drop off dry cleaning, or even buy stuff for your dog," says Ford. Planners "obviously knew who was going to move in."

Yet reminders of the neighborhood's past remain. Some are quaint, like the two massive hangars that loom above the rooftops of Lowry, or thoroughfares that follow the odd angles of one-time runways. Others are less endearing - like the day men in hazmat suits came to Ford's garden looking for traces of asbestos.

It is a legacy many bases face as the military seeks to clean up land it polluted. Here, the military and state agencies disagreed over how much asbestos remained and how much of a threat it posed - leading to the episode with the hazmat-suited men, who ripped up gardens and quarantined backyards in sealed tents.

The upshot was that the neighborhood was safe, but it highlighted the often stuttering process of handing over federal property to local authorities. In fact, the LRA is still waiting to receive several parcels of Lowry that have yet to be cleaned. "If we'd had a timely cleanup, we

would be done today," says Mr. Markham. "You have to have patience and flexibility."

Delays have hit the process since Day 1. Construction on the town center fell behind schedule, too, and Jeff Tetrick remembers moving his business into Lowry when the town was little more than a plan on paper and a thicket of construction workers.

"It was a real leap of faith," says Mr. Tetrick, chief financial operator of Pinnacol, Colorado's largest provider of workers' compensation insurance. "We had 550 employees and no place for them to walk to for lunch."

Now, however, it has proved a popular location. Some employees have moved to Lowry. "It feels like a little Pinnacol town," says Tetrick. "Our employees love working here so much that they stick around and play at movies and in the town center."

Federal government might want to keep doomed Atlanta bases

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Washington DC)
Jeffrey McMurray
November 7, 2005

The Department of Defense didn't want them, but a department of something else just might.

Georgia is losing four military installations as part of a base closure process that becomes official this week. However, the good news is local officials may be months - if not weeks - away from learning what the future holds for the prime real estate the Pentagon is leaving behind.

"We've lost, and we've lost absolutely utterly," said Tom Salter, who led the community group that tried to save some of the Atlanta bases on the closure list. "Unless somebody decides to get a revote, which is highly unlikely, it is a done deal."

With that reality, phase two of the process is just beginning.

Because three of the state's condemned bases are in the Atlanta area - Fort Gillem, Fort McPherson and Naval Air Station-Atlanta - Georgia may have less trouble than most states at finding takers for the land. In fact, its problem may be too many takers.

Federal agencies get the first crack at taking over the land, and they have only a month to indicate whether they desire to buy it from the Pentagon. Gen. Philip Browning, who led the panel that shepherded the state through the process, said there are already rumblings about possible federal suitors for the Atlanta bases.

While nothing is official, Browning said the Federal Emergency Management Agency has expressed an interest in acquiring storage space at Gillem and developing a regional headquarters at McPherson. NAS-Atlanta could be an attractive hub for the National Guard, he said.

The Athens Navy school, also on the Base Closure and Realignment Commission's list, would likely yield its space to a Georgia college or university.

"When BRAC becomes law, then the clock begins," Browning said.

Although most communities would love for the federal government to retain the land of their doomed bases, Atlanta might be an exception because it would have had no trouble selling the property, likely at a higher price.

All four of the bases have community support groups that are developing reuse plans, involving various commercial and real estate interests. That kind of development would be subject to local taxes, while a transfer to another federal agency would not.

"Obviously the communities want the opportunity to have a realistic reuse plan," said Fred Bryant, executive director for the McPherson-Gillem Foundation. "Depending on what the federal organizations might pick up, that could negatively impact being able to reuse the property."

At Gillem, the independent BRAC panel required that about 300 acres be kept under Pentagon control as a special enclave. That would leave about 1,100 acres, Bryant said, either for the federal government to take over or the community to develop.

Once the federal government determines whether it wants any of the closed properties, the communities get to make their case for what they would like to do with them. Browning estimates the future of the bases could be known as early as January.

**Post's housing plan ready to go;
Already talk of expansion, since Fort Benning
didn't then know about new armor school**
Columbus Ledger-Enquirer (Columbus, GA)
Mick Walsh
November 7, 2005

With groundbreaking set for February on a historic \$630 million project to modernize housing areas at Fort Benning, there's already talk of a possible Phase II to the plan.

That's because when the Army chose Clark Pinnacle Family Communities to finance, construct, renovate and manage approximately 4,200 family homes at Fort Benning and the Ranger training facility in Dahlenega, Ga., the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission decision to transfer the Army's Armor School to Fort Benning was a year away.

"The numbers may have to be adjusted," said Phil Cowley, project director for Clark Pinnacle, a joint venture between Clark Realty of Bethesda, Md., and the Seattle-based Pinnacle.

But for now, until the Army launches a housing marketing analysis as troops arrive at Fort Benning over the next few years, the Community Development and Management Plan -- a part of the Army's Residential Communities Initiative -- is ready for activation.

"The Army's program to privatize housing is going to work out great for the soldiers and their

families," said Jim Wiggins, the post's RCI chief. "We look at it as 'one stop shopping.' "

By that he means housing residents will be dealing with a single landlord, much like anyone living in nearby apartment complexes.

"Need help with your plumbing? Call Clark Pinnacle." Wiggins said. "They'll have representatives actually working at each of the housing areas."

The Army, Wiggins said, is committed to improving family housing as a means of sustaining the quality of life for approximately 15,500 soldiers and family members.

And Clark Pinnacle, which will now receive the soldiers' Basic Allowance for Housing each month as a form of rent, is committed to carrying out the Army's desires.

Terms of the deal

Official approval of the project came last month from Congress.

Approximately \$400 million in private sector debt and equity has been raised and will be spent during the 8-to-10-year initial development phase of the project, said Cowley, a West Pointer and former member of the 75th Ranger Regiment.

"This is no short-term deal," he said. "It's a 50-year partnership."

The Army's investment is about \$57 million. The building and renovation process will be spread out over 10 years; the Clark Pinnacle team will manage that housing for the remaining 40 years of the deal. The project is valued at about \$2.3 billion over the life of the contract.

Blueprints provided by Cowley, vice president for construction Chris Hirst and investor manager Lon Sperry depict planned communities along the lines of the Florida panhandle town of Seaside.

Neighborhoods will include such amenities as village centers, pools, basketball courts, tennis courts, play fields, picnic shelters and nature/fitness trails.

"We're competing with off-post neighborhoods," said Cowley. "What we're building is not the same old military housing complexes you're used to seeing."

Architect Torti Gallas and Partners of Silver Spring, Md., designed the Benning homes in Mission, Colonial Vernacular, and Arts and Crafts styles. All new homes, which will average about 1,900 square feet, will be EnergyStar-compliant.

"We'd like to have no two homes on the same street be the same color," said Cowley, "just like an old-styled neighborhood. We also plan on having sidewalks on both sides of the street."

Each house or duplex will have two-car garages and two off-street parking spaces.

And that's just the outside of each structure.

Extensive surveys were taken on post last spring.

Focus groups of post housing residents were asked what they would like to see in their new homes.

How about each home being wired for state-of-the-art phone, cable and Internet service?

Done.

What about a facility in the garage to wash the clay and mud off boots?

Done.

What about fenced-in patios?

Done.

"What our soldiers want and need might be entirely different from what a soldier at Fort Belvoir might need," Wiggins said. "Our

soldiers spend a lot of time in the field. They don't have muddy boots at Belvoir."

The McGraw Manor-McBride area on post will be the first to feel the wrecking ball.

What is now 952 housing units will be 600 single family homes after construction is complete. What about the historically significant homes on Main Post, one of which once served as home to Dwight Eisenhower?

No wrecking ball for them.

"There are 493 such homes," Cowley said. "And a majority of them have already been updated. We've identified some lacking modern conveniences. For example, we'll be adding a second bathroom to some. But since they are historic homes, there are certain things we can and cannot do to them."

There will be 27 phases of building all told, all of them in areas now occupied by post housing subdivisions.

Clark Pinnacle expects to work closely with local subcontractors and suppliers once the project kicks off in February.

In addition to this project, Clark Pinnacle is financing, developing, building and operating military housing at the Presidio of Monterey and Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey Bay, Calif.; Fort Irwin, Moffett Field and Camp Parks in California; and Fort Belvoir, Va.

Military Reshuffle Could Bring 60,000 People To Area

Baltimore Sun (Baltimore, MD)

Justin Fenton

November 8, 2005

Harford County officials said yesterday they are expecting at least 58,000 people to flood the region surrounding Aberdeen Proving Ground over the next decade from a reshuffling of the nation's military bases that will be signed into law today.

State officials have said Central Maryland could see 60,000 settle in the region as a result of new military and private-sector positions, many of which Harford County says it could see in its immediate area. Estimates of job totals - particularly those in the private sector - have climbed throughout the process, and officials say that will likely continue.

"My sense is that the numbers of people coming in will change dramatically and keep increasing," said Aris Melissaratos, the state's director of economic development.

The two epicenters of expansion are Fort Meade in Anne Arundel County and Aberdeen Proving Ground. Fort Meade expects 5,300 government jobs, while APG recently revised its projection to more than 6,100 new jobs.

In two to six years, those jobs - plus tens of thousands of contractors - are expected to spark an unprecedented influx that has federal, state and local leaders discussing billions of dollars in upgrades to infrastructure.

Maryland was one of the top gainers in the realignment process, possibly the winner. Melissaratos said differing estimates have the state at or near the top, along with Texas and Georgia.

Harford, with a population is 235,000, expects most of APG's new workers to settle there, with others landing in Baltimore and Cecil counties. The three jurisdictions have teamed up for a marketing effort to entice new businesses and developers.

"We made promises, now we have to perform," said Harford County Executive David R. Craig.

The county's director of economic development, J. Thomas Sadowski, told stakeholders yesterday that the expected number of jobs on-post and through contractors translates "conservatively" to 58,557 people. The number was calculated by multiplying the number of new jobs by the average household size.

"That's growth that we can target and shape," he said.

A handful of other projects not related to the base realignment plan could add another 5,000 jobs, he said.

Craig signed an executive order yesterday authorizing the formation of a planning and advisory commission to help the county accommodate the new jobs. Money for transportation projects will be expected to come from the federal government, but state and local officials are preparing to bear the burden of paying for new schools and police and fire protection.

The National Security Agency estimates it will hire three contractors for each of its 7,500 new counterterrorism jobs, most of which will be placed at Fort Meade. The number of new government and private jobs there could surpass 40,000.

Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens said the county has been planning for this influx for years, and has placed transportation and education issues at the top of its agenda.

Congress had until yesterday to overturn the Pentagon's recommendations for base realignment, which includes the closure of 22 major bases and the restructuring of 33 others. President Bush approved the list in September, making the expiration date merely a formality.

At APG, the Pentagon's original plan was to include a net increase of 2,200 on-post jobs. But officials said those numbers were altered after a change in how the military accounted for the outgoing ordinance school's personnel, raising APG's tally to 6,100.

Opinions/ Editorials

Five Shipyards Too Many;

The Pentagon Should Focus on Paring Down Private-Sector Facilities

The Washington Post (Washington DC)

John Shephard Jr. and Harvey Sapolsky

November 8, 2005

The latest base realignment and closure (BRAC) plan has prompted the usual round of complaints and disputes over which military bases should be closed, as well as sighs of relief from supporters of the bases that were spared. But a bigger question has been overlooked in arguments over the plan: Why doesn't the BRAC process also focus on the private-sector operations that the government supports at great and often wasteful expense?

These are the arsenals, assembly lines and shipyards that build and overhaul the nation's weapons -- and do essentially nothing else. They are too costly to maintain at a time when there is no need for them, and yet they go unconsidered in the periodic BRAC processes.

For example, four large government-owned shipyards and six large private shipyards work on warships. The government-owned yards do only repair and overhauls; the private ones do new construction. All are underutilized, having been geared for the Navy's Cold War fleet. The government yards tend a Navy that is roughly half the size it was in 1990. The private yards are able to build more than five times the number of ships that the Navy is ordering now. Maine's Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, which specializes in nuclear submarine overhauls, was on this year's BRAC plan, and its eleventh-hour reprieve blew an opportunity. Yet closing Portsmouth would have made only a small dent in the problem: There would still be too many yards building and maintaining too few ships.

The merger wave that has swept the defense industries has done nothing to reduce excess capacity in shipbuilding. The Big Six private yards were once owned by six different corporations, but now they are owned by just two: General Dynamics and Northrop Grumman. While there have been some savings from consolidating component purchases, the post-Cold War era yielded a change only in corporate logos.

The warship-building market won't fix the problem; there is essentially only one customer: the U.S. Navy, which has a taste for fast,

complex and expensive ships. No naval combat ship costs less than a billion dollars, and most cost a lot more. For practical, political and strategic reasons, the Navy can't seriously opt for foreign sourcing. Moreover, the Big Six yards have few options besides the Navy; most other navies buy locally or get their ships used from the United States. Commercial shipbuilding, which uses capital-intensive, mass-production methods and cheap labor, is a hyper-competitive, unprofitable business that already has too many yards chasing a handful of ship orders.

The private yards are wards of the Navy: public yards with private ownership. As long as they stay open, they get some Navy business. The Big Six are capable of delivering 20 to 25 ships a year and were building at nearly that rate during the Reagan administration's defense buildup. In the 1990s the rate dropped to seven or eight a year. Recently, it's been as low as four or five. No wonder shipbuilding costs have skyrocketed. With the costs of running all these facilities apportioned to fewer ships, and Congress making sure that each yard has a project, the government reaps no economies of scale. Worse, the underuse of each facility will prevent enough new capital investment to ensure that the best yards stay modern and technologically robust. Because these shipyards employ thousands of people, often in areas where their economic presence is dominant, they are hard to close. As with large military bases, closure means significant local economic hardship and a war with the local congressional delegation.

But hard decisions need to be made. In the end, the number of yards should be halved. The Navy spends about \$10 billion a year on shipbuilding and major refits, and the total is not likely to grow, given fiscal constraints. Sharing the appropriation among five yards instead of 10 would be more efficient and less costly. Three construction yards can easily accommodate the eight to 10 ships a year needed to sustain a fleet of 250 to 275 ships that seems to be the Navy's future.

Yet there must be compensation for the corporations that own the private yards, the laid-off workers and the communities that will face significant unemployment and potential decline. The communities will need money to start new industries and rebuild their economic lives. These restructuring costs, normal for any business, should have been paid a decade ago. It is better to pay them now than to have continuing underutilization in naval construction, with its higher unit costs and debilitating politics.

John Shephard Jr. is a former senior vice president of Northrop Grumman. Harvey Sapolsky is director of the Security Studies Program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

A tale of two cities and two bases

Daily Press (Hampton Roads, VA)

Dana Dillon

November 8, 2005

I read with interest the Oct. 22 opinion piece ("City did what was necessary to protect Fort Eustis") describing the efforts of the Newport News mayor, City Council and city manager to save Fort Eustis from closure under the Base Closure and Realignment Commission. Fort Eustis and Fort Monroe were identified as potential bases to be closed or realigned. Newport News Mayor Joe Frank and the City Council had a strategy to save Fort Eustis, while Hampton Mayor Ross Kearney had a grudge to settle.

While Newport News worked to save Fort Eustis, Kearney and council members Charles Sapp, Angela Leary and Randy Gilliland worked to fire the city manager, George Wallace. As a result of their actions they sacked the only person experienced in dealing with BRAC. Wallace was the city manager who waged two successful campaigns that assisted in keeping Fort Monroe off the BRAC list. The Kearney-led city government, supported by Sapp, Leary and Gilliland, fractured the city along racial lines over the firing of Wallace, causing a recall vote for Gilliland, and presided over the loss of

Fort Monroe and its 1,000 jobs, plus the loss of tax revenue generated by the fort.

Now Kearney wants control over the disposition of Fort Monroe. Something that important must be supervised by a component body, not one led by Kearney and his three loyal supporters.

No to BRAC; yes to homes

The Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)
November 6, 2005

Faced with the loss of 12,000 jobs and millions of dollars, Virginia Beach leaders say they won't condemn any houses to protect Oceana Naval Air Station.

Good.

The Navy never asked the city to do any such thing, even in the crash zones at the ends of the base's runways. Only the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission did, a ridiculous and poisonous overreaction to the encroachment that has crowded the base over the decades.

Members of the Virginia Beach City Council confirmed in a poll by Pilot reporters what has been politically obvious for weeks now: There is no support for taking anybody's house to protect Oceana's jets and jobs.

Since it had been ordered "to establish a program to condemn and purchase all the incompatible use property located within the Accident Potential Zone 1," the City Council's position pretty much ensures that Virginia Beach won't comply with the letter of the BRAC order, unless it passes an ordinance it never uses, and which most citizens oppose.

Still, most political leaders were keeping that quiet while the threat to move the jets to Jacksonville remained real. Once Jacksonville decided it didn't want the planes, the reason for keeping quiet evaporated, and people who live near the base received a welcome reassurance that their homes are safe.

Although the threat to Oceana isn't quite over -- Jacksonville has months to change its mind -- BRAC Chairman Anthony Principi has sounded a much more conciliatory note.

"If we as a commission accomplish anything, it is that we have brought the parties to the table," he said. "Ultimately, it's up to the communities and the state and the Navy to arrive at a solution." Strange but welcome words coming from the man who orchestrated BRAC's bitter slap at Virginia Beach over its decades of disregard for the base and its mission.

But since the punishment for not complying with BRAC's demands -- losing the jets to Jacksonville -- appears to be gone, it looks increasingly as if Principi's wish has been granted. Virginia Beach and the Navy will be left to find their own way, together, to protect Oceana.

That hasn't worked particularly well over the decades, but real progress has come in the past few years.

Virginia Beach still must find some way to change how many houses and what kinds of businesses it will allow in crash and high-noise areas. A vote is expected in November, the same month the city expects a consultant's report on the economic impact of Oceana. The Navy, for its part, must find some way to protect its mission without strangling the economic future of its host.

Condemnation was never going to be politically possible in a city that values property rights above all. The City Council's rejection should put an end to worries that City Hall will take people's property.

A few folks will continue to declaim against the 11 members of the City Council, but for more reasonable citizens, last week's decision provides a welcome end to an agonizing distraction, and an opportunity to finally focus on the real issues remaining in the quest to keep Oceana's jets flying from Virginia Beach.

Additional Notes

