

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC

July 18, 2005

BRAC Commission

JUL 21 2005

Received

The Honorable Anthony Principi
Chairman, Base Realignment and Closure Commission
2521 S. Clark St., Ste. 600
Arlington, Virginia 22202

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I want to thank you for your leadership on the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission. It is a continuation of your lifelong and distinguished service to our nation. I also enjoyed seeing you in San Antonio, and while you missed our Ft. Hood presentation, I respect you for visiting Ft. Smith, Arkansas and so many other installations first-hand.

Knowing you have an experienced staff to brief you and so much material to review, I just wanted to bring a few fundamental points to your attention regarding the DoD recommendation to downsize Ft. Hood by nearly 9,000 soldiers from its presently authorized level.

First, given that the DoD BRAC analysis ranked Ft. Hood as third in military value and first in future capability, why downsize the Army's most efficient heavy division installation and then have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars at Ft. Carson, Colorado building facilities we have spent \$913 million to build at Ft. Hood over the past 14 years?

Fort Carson has never had more than two heavy brigades and will have to double its capacity to support and train two additional heavy BCTs at the cost of over \$1 billion to the taxpayer. Ft. Hood is currently accommodating and training six Brigade Combat Teams (BCTs) plus other units which have comprised as many as 48,000 soldiers over the past year.

The Department's recommendation was particularly misleading on this point, proposing a more than 9,000 soldier reduction at Ft. Hood but calling it a 73 soldier reduction, ignoring the new forces stationed there in recent years. The report highlighted other installations that had at least a 400 person loss because of the significant impact on soldiers, families and local communities. Ft. Hood's reductions were buried.

Second, in addition to military construction costs saved by fully utilizing Ft. Hood, data shows that it costs 20% to 30% less to train soldiers at Ft. Hood rather than at other installations. Shouldn't those millions of dollars of savings be used to improve Army training and quality of life facilities all across the country?

Third, if the Army wants surge capacity, wouldn't it be best to fully utilize the Army's most efficient and only two-division installation full-time and then use Ft. Carson and Pinion Canyon

WASHINGTON, DC:

2264 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-6105
FAX: (202) 225-0350

WACO:

600 AUSTIN AVENUE, SUITE 29
WACO, TX 76701
(254) 752-9600
FAX: (254) 752-7769

CLEBURNE:

115 SOUTH MAIN STREET, SUITE 202
CLEBURNE, TX 76033
(817) 645-4743
FAX: (817) 645-4796

COLLEGE STATION:

111 UNIVERSITY DRIVE EAST, SUITE 216
COLLEGE STATION, TX 77840
(979) 691-8797
FAX: (979) 691-8939

for surge capacity? This is especially relevant since Pinion Canyon is 150 miles from troops and equipment at Ft. Carson (incurring a \$2 million per brigade roundtrip cost), has serious environmental restrictions and has limitations on large caliber live fire training. There were many other questionable comparisons between Ft. Carson and Ft. Hood, but it is worth noting that Ft Hood's data call inputs were audited by the Army Audit Agency, and Ft. Carson's was not.

Finally, it appears to me that the Army strategy assumes that Congress will have almost unlimited military construction dollars to implement BRAC recommendations. Frankly, I wish that were the case, but the truth is that the 2005 military construction budget is approximately \$1 billion below pre-Iraqi war levels over three years ago, despite a \$69 billion increase in annual defense spending, and the entire 2005 Army military construction budget is only about \$2 billion.

Given the massive cost of the reassignment of troops from Europe and South Korea to the United States, in addition to massive expenditures for Army military construction projects under the proposed 2005 BRAC recommendations, I am seriously concerned that the Army's plan to downsize the Ft. Hood force structure while upsizing Ft. Carson will not be fully funded or that fully funding Ft. Carson military construction will cause cuts in important military construction projects at numerous other Army installations. Has anyone added up a total cost for the overseas base re-alignment plus BRAC costs plus ongoing military construction projects?

It would seem to me that the new BRAC and overseas realignment costs would be a strong argument for saving hundreds of millions of dollars by fully utilizing Ft. Hood and its efficiencies rather than downsizing and underutilizing it. If not, why then did DoD argue that Ft. Hood is first in future capability, even before considering the recent addition of over 37,000 new acres there available for training?

As the Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, I will work hard to support whatever final decision is made regarding the future of Ft. Carson and Ft. Hood, but I have serious doubts that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will support full funding of BRAC, overseas realignment and ongoing Army military construction needs.

I respect OMB, but this is the same OMB that wanted to cut impact aid military education funding while military children's parents were being deployed to Iraq in 2003 and the same OMB that, in my opinion, has seriously underestimated the funded needed to prevent significant funding shortages in the VA health care system during a time of war.

I genuinely hope I am wrong, but I predict a shortage of military construction funding over the next several years when we are in the midst of a massive reorganization of Army installations at home and abroad, and that could put at risk both training facilities and quality of life improvements for our Army soldiers and their families. While I might be wrong about this, on the VA issue, the facts now prove I and veterans' service organizations were right and OMB was wrong. If the same mistake occurs on Army military construction over the next several years, soldiers' training and quality of life could be compromised.

It appears to me that given all of the other increased costs the Army is facing over the next several years, it makes common sense to fully utilize Ft. Hood, an installation that has a proven track record of effectiveness and efficiency and one where soldiers living in \$95,000 homes today near the installation will have to spend over \$170,000 to purchase comparable homes near Ft. Carson.

I respect the complexity of the many decisions facing you and your fellow BRAC Commissioners and appreciate your taking the time to listen to so many people in this process. In the end, we are all on the same team working together to defend our homeland, and I will have the highest regard for the integrity of your final recommendations to Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chet Edwards". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Chet Edwards
Member of Congress

CE:jc