

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY BIRD

July 30, 2005

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Baucus Language Reflects Mont. Effort To Woo BRAC Panel

Congress Daily
Megan Scully
July 29, 2005

As states are filing lawsuits to protect their Air National Guard units from the Pentagon's latest base-closure round, Montana lawmakers this week sought to use language in the surface transportation bill to entice the Base Closure and Realignment Commission to keep the Air National Guard's F-16 fighter jets near Great Falls. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., inserted language in the conference report that would have reopened Malmstrom Air Force Base's airfield, shut down in 1996.

House members said the highway bill should not be used to undo the BRAC process and forced Baucus to agree to delete the language (see story above).

On the Senate floor today, Baucus argued that the language had nothing to do with BRAC, but rather would have eased congestion in Great

Falls by decreasing military cargo cross-town traffic between Malmstrom and a municipal airport used by Guard and active units. "Despite the mischaracterization of the House, this provision would not have overturned a BRAC decision, or have influenced the current BRAC round," Baucus said. "Malmstrom is not on the BRAC list." Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., today said he supports reopening the runway but did not agree with Baucus' approach. Burns said he "questioned the timing of this, and it turned out to be very bad." Letters between the Montana delegation and the base closing commission portray a sustained effort to persuade commissioners to move the F-16s from Great Falls International Airport Guard Station to Malmstrom, rather than moving them out of state. The Pentagon in May recommended relocating three of the 120th Fighter Wing's F-16s to Iowa and another three to Alabama. The nine remaining F-16s would be retired, leaving the state's Air Guard without a flying mission.

On June 1, Baucus and Burns sent the commission a detailed proposal outlining the costs and benefits of relocating the Fighter Wing to Malmstrom -- a move they said would provide "the nation, and the total force, the best strategic capability." Four weeks later, representatives from the Montana Air Guard and Baucus' office met with BRAC staffers to propose reopening the Malmstrom airfield, located just miles from Great Falls. According to meeting minutes, the local community felt the move to Malmstrom was a "viable option because it offers great airspace and training areas and a chance to expand the mission of the Air Guard unit." During the half-hour meeting, the Montana representatives also said the Malmstrom airfield could accommodate other Air National Guard F-16s -- appealing to the Pentagon's desire to increase squadron sizes to 18 aircraft .. as well as F-15 planes. Even without the Baucus language, the BRAC panel has the authority to reopen the airfield in its list of base-closure recommendations next month.

Adjutants General Call Service's BRAC Recommendations 'Improper'

Inside the Air Force
July 29, 2005

Air National Guard officials are resisting the Air Force's base realignment and closure recommendations, arguing the service's suggestions are "outside the charter" of the law that established the BRAC process and therefore must be withdrawn.

The Guard contends the legislation pertains solely to the closure or realignment of installations, not to units, unit equipment, people or positions. A majority of the service's recommendations call for shuttering or realigning Guard and Air Force Reserve bases.

"The Adjutants General believe the proposed recommended actions are beyond the scope of the Base Closure Act and it would therefore be improper for the BRAC Commission to include these in its recommendation to the President and to the Congress," Maj. Gen. Roger Lempke, Adjutant General (TAG) of Nebraska and the president of the Adjutants General Association of the United States (AGAUS), wrote in a July 25 letter to Commission Chairman Anthony Principi.

The letter was sent less than a week after Air Force officials defended their proposals before both the BRAC Commission and the House Armed Services Committee. The service's proposals have received a steady stream of criticism since they were released in May from state TAGs who say they were not properly consulted during the service's BRAC decision-making process.

Lempke told Principi the letter was sent as a "collective action" of the AGAUS following a special July 22 meeting in Washington, DC.

In the letter, Lempke cites a July 14 legal opinion in which the BRAC Commission's Deputy General Counsel, Dan Howing, wrote, "The purpose of the [BRAC] Act is to close and realign excess real estate and improvements that create an unnecessary drain on the resources of the Department of Defense. The Base Closure

Act is not a vehicle to effect changes in how a unit is equipped or organized."

BRAC commissioners and House lawmakers have expressed concerns about the possible impact on Guard recruiting and a potential weakening affect on homeland security. They are also worried about the governors' ability to respond to crises in their states if the aircraft are removed from so many Guard units.

Air Force officials have defended their proposals over the past several weeks, arguing federal laws that dictate the chain of command prohibit consultations with TAGs about plans that directly affect the ANG.

Title X dictates the National Guard Bureau (NGB) is the service's channel of communication to the states, Lt. Gen. Stephen Wood, the Air Force deputy chief of staff for plans and programs, told both bodies last week.

Guard officials were briefed up to as many as three times before the Air Force submitted its BRAC recommendations, Wood told the commission July 18. He added there was a Guard representative on the Air Force Base Closure Executive Group who later personally briefed Army Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, the National Guard Bureau's chief.

A July 14 letter to the commission from acting Under Secretary of Defense Gordon England shows the Air Staff briefed Guard and Reserve officials in December 2003, July 2004 and April 2005 on the force structure, organizational and military value factors that helped shape the service's recommendations.

However, under direct questioning from House Armed Services Committee Ranking Member Rep. Ike Skelton (D-MO) during a July 20 hearing, both Lempke and Maj. Gen. Mason Whitney, TAG of Colorado, said TAGs were not fully consulted about the Air Force's proposals.

During that hearing, Lempke suggested a test program be implemented to determine exactly how recruiting, retention and training are affected by the BRAC concept of enclaves,

which seeks to provide a homeland defense force that includes key Air Force specialties considered important to the chief executives. BRAC recommends around 30 enclaves, according to the two-star.

Blum told panelists that the described lack of consultation was the result of federal statutes that often do not consider one another. "That's a matter for the courts or it's a matter for this body to clean up the language so we don't have future contradictions," he said.

Also last week, a number of lawmakers expressed disappointment over the lack of detail service officials have disclosed about the Future Total Force (FTF) initiative. FTF, which is separate from BRAC, aims to improve the service's overall effectiveness by basing and training Active Duty, Guard and Reserve personnel together in anticipation of emerging missions.

Panel members specific concerns centered around how the service plans to retain those Guard members whose bases may be closed through the BRAC process, but Wood assured them discussions are ongoing within the Pentagon to find new missions for those personnel.

The committee's concern was echoed by Lempke ,who said the ANG "has not yet written in sufficiently to much of the Air Force's plan for [FTF]."

"Our involvement . . . seems limited at this time and most new mission opportunities are in the discussion stage and not much further," he said.

Wood noted three TAGs serve on the Future Total Force General Officer Steering committee and "ably represent the TAG perspective and interest in the process."

In regards to BRAC, Lempke, in his July 25 letter, writes the AGAUS are eager to work with the service "outside of the BRAC process and its time constraints."

Without giving details, Lempke said the association has a plan that includes:

- * An ANG flying unit in every state;
- * Unit-equipped ANG air refueling and tactical airlift missions directly accessible to governors that would be strategically dispersed on a regional basis for responding to domestic emergencies including homeland defense and homeland security exigencies;
- * Sufficient and appropriate sovereign air defense protection for all regions and population centers in the continental United States;
- * Divestiture of legacy aircraft and weapons systems; and
- * Transformational and proportionate ANG participation in all new and emerging flying and non-flying platforms such as F/A-22, F-35, KC-X, Light Cargo Aircraft, C-17, unmanned aerial vehicles as well as during space and information operations.

The association is eager to help the commission identify those portions of the service's recommendations that "constitute programmatic as opposed to real property recommendations" and a special subcommittee of the AGAUS has been authorized to work with BRAC commissioners, Lempke penned.

Local News Articles

Retired Admirals Give Sub Base A Boost

Hartford Courant (Hartford, CT)

Jesse Hamilton

July 30, 2005

Those fighting to keep the submarine base in Groton from closing got the endorsement they have long been waiting for this week.

A letter signed Thursday by eight retired admirals, all former submariners and three of them veterans of the top post in the Navy, urged the chairman of the commission reviewing the base realignment and closure process to cross Groton off the list.

The base is a "proven strategic asset," according to the admirals. "It would take the Navy generations to reconstitute its unique military value elsewhere."

The eight - four admirals and four vice admirals - include chiefs of naval operations under the three previous presidents:

Adm. Frank B. Kelso II, was chief of naval operations - the highest ranking office in the Navy, reporting to the secretary of the Navy - in the 1990s.

Adm. Carlisle A. H. Trost was his predecessor.

Before him, Adm. James D. Watkins held that post.

Adm. Frank L. Bowman was former director of the Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program.

Vice Adm. Kenneth M. Carr was commander of the Atlantic Fleet's submarine force.

Vice Adm. George R. Sterner was former commander of Naval Sea Systems Command.

Vice Adm. Ronald Thunman was the deputy chief of naval operations for submarine warfare.

And Vice Adm. Albert H. Konetzni Jr., who spoke on behalf of Groton's base at a commission hearing in Boston, commanded the Pacific Fleet's submarine force.

Advocates for Connecticut's base had expected the letter, having encouraged support from these former Navy leaders. Until Konetzni spoke in Boston and Adm. Bruce DeMars wrote an unsolicited letter to the commission recently, retired admirals had been quiet about the Pentagon-recommended closure of Groton.

"The Silent Service is not as silent as it has been," said John Markowicz, chairman of the Subbase Realignment Coalition, which has worked for a couple of years on the base's defense. "They now speak in booming voices."

When a major portion of the base was listed for realignment in 1993, Markowicz said, there was no such open support from retired flag officers. Thursday's letter, he said, is "unprecedented and much appreciated."

The two-page letter, addressed to Chairman Anthony Principi, is drenched in language and arguments that are a clear-cut echo of what Connecticut advocates have presented to the commission.

Much of the letter dealt with the Navy's latest projections for what size sub fleet it will need in 20 years. The admirals claim the projections are flawed. "A future force level of 37 to 41 attack submarines could not meet the United States national security needs without assuming unacceptable risks," it said.

It also argues that "the attack submarine is the best anti-submarine weapon" and that the U.S. Navy cannot afford to let its fleet decline from its current 54 fast-attack subs while "the rest of the world ramps up production."

Letter-Writing Campaign Nears Deadline

Portsmouth Herald (Portsmouth, NH)

Joe Adler

July 29, 2005

PORTSMOUTH - They're signed, sealed and soon to be delivered.

About 300 letters urging President Bush to keep the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard open are sitting on Mayor Evelyn Sirrell's desk. Next week, the courier will arrive to escort them to Washington.

That courier is Rep. Jeb Bradley, R-N.H., who has agreed to take the handoff from Sirrell and to do what he can to get the letters to Bush's hands. But reaching the end of the chain may not be so easy.

Sirrell hopes Bush, as well as the nine members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, see copies of the letters as well as the more than 8,000 signatures on petitions

calling for the shipyard to be saved. She is accepting the letters until Aug. 1.

Bradley will accept the letters at a 2 p.m. news conference on Aug. 4 in Portsmouth City Hall.

"He may not physically be able to hand-deliver them directly to President Bush, but we are seeking a way to at least get them to the White House and get copies to the BRAC Commission," said Stephanie Dubois, a spokeswoman for Bradley.

"We're still trying to finalize the details because of security concerns."

The commission has until Sept. 8 to submit to Bush its final recommendations of bases to be closed or realigned. The president then has until Sept. 23 to accept or reject the list in its entirety. The Pentagon had included the shipyard on an initial list of recommended closures released May 13.

Separate from Sirrell's letter-writing campaign, the Save Our Shipyard Task Force launched a goal of sending 10,000 letters to BRAC commissioners in 10 days.

Capt. Bill McDonough, a former shipyard commander and head of the Save Our Shipyard advocacy group, said the 10 days are about to run out. In early August, the base-closing commission will stop receiving correspondences from base communities, he said.

"We want to encourage people to keep writing," McDonough said. "The worst that can happen is that a letter doesn't get read."

Where to send letters

Supporters still have until Aug. 1 to write letters on behalf of the shipyard to President Bush. Mail letters to City Hall, 1 Junkins Ave., Portsmouth, NH 03801.

The Save Our Shipyard Task Force's goal is to send 10,000 letters to BRAC commissioners in 10 days. Letters to any commissioner can be addressed to Defense Base Closure and

Realignment Commission, 2521 S. Clark St., Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22202. See details at www.saveourshipyard.org.

Cost May Hinder Moving TACOM

Quad City Times (Quad City, IL)

Ed Tibbetts

July 30, 2005

A member of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission said Friday that moving hundreds of Tank-automotive and Armaments Command, or TACOM, workers from Arsenal Island to Detroit Arsenal will cost more than the Defense Department estimated. But he added that the military's rationale for making the move is "hard to argue with."

Samuel Skinner visited the Detroit Arsenal on Friday, something he vowed to do after making a trip to Arsenal Island several weeks ago. At the time, Quad-City officials told Skinner the cost of moving TACOM workers would far exceed Pentagon estimates, prompting him to say he would go to Michigan to check out the situation himself.

In May, the Pentagon recommended moving the TACOM-Rock Island operation, as well as three other white-collar Arsenal Island commands, switches that — when balanced with other Defense Department proposals — would result in a net loss of about 1,600 Arsenal Island jobs. The TACOM move would have the biggest impact. About 1,100 people work at the command in the Quad-Cities.

Skinner did not indicate Friday which way he might vote on the recommendation. But in a telephone interview with the Quad-City Times, he said the Pentagon underestimated the cost Detroit would incur to house the additional Rock Island workers. "The buildout is going to be more than what was in the BRAC (report), so we'll have to take that into consideration," he said.

But he added that the Army's rationale for the move — the desire to create what it calls centers of excellence — "is hard to argue with." He said

the key will be to see whether it can work in practice.

Skinner called the Detroit Arsenal a "first-rate organization." During his visit here in May, he was similarly complimentary of Arsenal Island.

The Army also has said that putting TACOM-Rock Island workers in the same place as others who are employed at TACOM headquarters in Detroit will result in a leaner, more responsive organization.

Quad-City Development Group officials have disputed that argument. They say Rock Island ranks higher in terms of military value than Detroit, according to Pentagon ratings, and they say the cost of the move will negate any financial return that would ever be experienced by the military.

Development Group President Thom Hart said Friday night that he was gratified to hear Skinner's comments about the cost of moving TACOM-Rock Island to Detroit. He said area officials have been contending that the move does not make financial sense ever since the Pentagon proposal was released.

"The whole goal here is to save the military, and the United States, money," Hart said.

Congress set out several criteria for the BRAC process, among them the need to operate more cost-effectively, but it also placed a premium on improving the nation's military capability.

Hart said he was not troubled by Skinner's more positive comments about the Army's military rationale for the move. "In meeting with BRAC staff, we kind of debunked that," he added.

Skinner, an Illinoisan, is one of nine members on the BRAC panel that is reviewing the Pentagon's recommendations. It could vote on the Defense Department plan during the third week of August. It is required, by law, to make a report to President Bush by Sept. 8. He and Congress will make the final decision on whether to approve or reject the commission's recommendations.

Beach Mayor Proclaims Monday As 'Support Oceana Day'

Norfolk Virginian-Pilot (Norfolk, VA)
July 30, 2005

VIRGINIA BEACH — Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf issued a proclamation Friday declaring Monday as "Support Oceana Day.

Oberndorf urged residents to express their support of Oceana Naval Air Station by contacting the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission at www.brac.gov.

Last week, the BRAC Commission voted 7-1 to consider closing the base. On Monday, BRAC commissioners will tour the base. The commission must make its final recommendations by early September.

C-130J Hangar Work Goes On

Fayetteville Observer (Fayetteville, NC)
Henry Cuninghame, Military editor
July 30, 2005

Construction was humming along this week at Pope Air Force Base on a \$10.7 million two-bay hangar for an airplane that is probably not coming.

Work on the hangar is 68 percent complete. The building, on Surveyor Street, was intended to service the C-130J Hercules cargo airplane. The project includes \$1.8 million in infrastructure upgrades to provide natural gas and electricity.

People who work at Pope are trying to prepare for the future while decision-makers in Washington choose among proposals that vary from bringing in the new, computerized aircraft to having no permanently assigned aircraft at the base.

"There is a lot of 'fog' out there, if you want to use that term," said Lt. Col. Mark Schmitz. He was hired to work with the C-130J program at

Pope and also is handling issues related to the current base-closing process.

"There is some confusion out there, but the guidance to my guys and the guidance to us is we press ahead as if the program were to stay on schedule, because we can't afford to come to a screeching stop and not do anything."

Victories and losses

For years, the Air Force had planned to replace Pope's Vietnam War-era E model airplanes with the J model. The J is supposed to fly farther, higher and faster, as well as carry heavier loads and more paratroopers. Many of the 43rd Airlift Wing's E models have been grounded or are subject to age-related flight restrictions. Congress in 2004 appropriated \$25 million in military construction funding for the C-130J at Pope.

But in February, President Bush left the airplane out of his 2006 budget proposal. Congress objected, and in May the Pentagon put the airplane back in the budget.

Later that same week, the Pentagon recommended turning Pope over to the Army under the Base Closure and Realignment process. It also proposed bringing in a squadron to fly the H model of the aircraft, which now belong to the National Guard and Air Force Reserve.

On July 19, an analyst for the BRAC commission suggested that the commission consider having no permanent aircraft at Pope. The commission makes its final decisions in late August. The president and Congress will then consider the plan.

The original plan was for J models to begin arriving at Pope in 2007, said Schmitz, who was assigned to Pope in late June.

"Are things continuing?" Schmitz said. "Well, I showed up here. I was not told, 'Don't go to Pope.' My job was to come here and lay down the J program."

Chief Master Sgt. Melvin Cooks is responsible for making sure maintenance workers are trained and have supplies and equipment to maintain the C-130J. First Lt. Chris Carnduff is the civil engineer for the C-130J office at Pope.

A \$4.9 million renovation project to convert a supply warehouse into a maintenance training building for people who work on the C-130J is 82 percent complete, Carnduff said.

This month, Schmitz has had a C-130J loadmaster report for duty and a C-130J pilot due to arrive. Schmitz said he can't afford to quit building and tell people not to come or send them elsewhere only to find the J model is coming to Pope after all.

The Pentagon has provided guidelines on how far to proceed with programs whose future is in doubt because of the base-closing process, he said.

"If there were to be a large penalty incurred - written in the contract there will be a penalty if you stop - there may be a decision to proceed," Schmitz said.

Momentum

Because of contract requirements and financial penalties, military construction projects are often completed, even if the need goes away.

"They usually bring the contract to term and complete the project," said Carolyn Hern, a spokeswoman for Republican U.S. Rep. Robin Hayes of North Carolina. "Expenses will become too high if the contracts are not brought to term."

The buildings can be used for other purposes, Schmitz said. On Thursday, A-10 attack jets were being washed in the Corrosion Control Facility next to the two-bay hangar. The CCF was designed to accommodate the C-130J, which is 15 feet longer than the E model.

"That's not uncommon in the Air Force for a weapons system or a program to be redirected, move, die ... the aircraft goes to the boneyard

and a hangar is used for something else," Schmitz said.

In addition to the BRAC process, the military has other studies about how it will do business in the future.

The Defense Department is completing a Mobility Capabilities Study concerning how much airlift the military needs, Air Force Gen. Norton A. Schwartz told the Senate during his confirmation hearings to be commander of U.S. Transportation Command.

The Pentagon also will review its forces, resources and program in an upcoming Quadrennial Defense Review.

"It is too speculative right now to say this is what's going to happen with the J," Schmitz said. "It would be premature to say, 'If Pope stays open this is what's going to happen to the J. If Pope closes, this is what's going to happen with to J.' There's just not enough information right now. You would be making, at best, an educated guess on what the future of the J model program is."

Galena residents fear closure of Air Force operations

The Associated Press State & Local Wire
(Fairbanks, AK)
July 29, 2005

Just like their distant neighbors in the Interior, residents of Galena are now bracing for the fallout from a recommendation by the military base review commission to stop all U.S. Air Force operations in the community.

Residents in this Yukon River community 275 miles west of Fairbanks are concerned the economic impact from shutting down the Galena Airport Forward Operation Location could affect as many as a third of the local work force, city manager Marvin Yoder said.

And if the military stops maintaining the airfield and buildings at Galena, it could cause a ripple effect, leading other federal and state agencies,

including a fire dispatch office run by the Bureau of Land Management, to pull out of the community, Galena First Chief Peter Captain said.

"These are all things we're afraid will go away if they close down," Captain told the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner.

Two members of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission were scheduled to visit Galena Friday to study the impact of the proposal on the military and the community. Commissioners James Bilbray and Philip Coyle were to tour the air base before meeting with city and tribal leaders.

Galena residents gathered in the local community hall earlier this week to prepare for the visit.

"The Air Force can reach the coast faster from Galena than it can from bases in Anchorage or Fairbanks," Yoder said. "We think that's a value worth keeping."

The commission voted unanimously last week to consider canceling the Air Force contracts for snowplowing at the Galena runway and maintenance of other military facilities at the state-run airport. The commission estimates ending military operations in Galena could provide savings of \$90 million over the next six years.

Local leaders fear closure would result in the loss of more than 100 jobs in the community of 700. The commission has agreed to look closer at shutting down the air station, but has not made a final decision, said Robert McCreary, a spokesman for the commission.

Galena used to serve as a station for fighter jets on 24-hour alert against possible attack from the Soviet Union. With the end of the Cold War, the jets were pulled back to Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage. The runway at the station is now maintained in case Air Force aircraft need to refuel or make an emergency landing and for training exercises.

Chugach Alaska Corp., the regional Native corporation for the Prince William Sound area, has an \$8.5 million contract with the Air Force and employs 44 people to maintain the facilities. The commission believes Eielson Air Force Base in Fairbanks could fulfill Galena's role, even though the Pentagon has also recommended removing most of the aircraft and personnel from Eielson.

The two recommendations are not connected, McCreary said.

Closure would be a serious blow to the Galena City School District, which runs a regional boarding and vocational school on the base, district superintendent Jim Smith said. Last year, the program served 85 predominantly Alaska Native high school students from 43 communities around the state.

The school's buildings belong to the military and are connected to the base's central utility system. If the base was closed, the city would have to step in to operate the heating system - if it could afford the bill.

Yoder estimates it costs the military \$3 million a year to keep the heat on at the base's facilities.

To add to the blow, the city's power plant sells 60 percent of its electricity to the Air Force.

While members of the BRAC commission are on a fact-finding mission to the village, local officials are hoping they can get answers to some of their own questions. The base sits on state land, but local officials have not heard what the military intends to do with the facilities if the station is shut down.

Even if the military agrees to turn the facilities over to the community, there's still the issue of several large diesel fuel spills on the base that have to be cleaned up before the city can assume ownership. Those environmental issues are still in remediation.

The full commission will hold its final vote on the list in the third week of August before it has to deliver it to the president Sept. 8. The

president can ask for changes but then must approve or reject the list in its entirety. The list is then forwarded to Congress, which has 45 days to reject it or it becomes law.

Former admirals criticize plan to close Groton submarine base

The Associated Press State & Local Wire (New London, CT)
July 29, 2005

The Pentagon's plan to close the Groton submarine base is drawing heavy fire from eight former high-ranking naval officers.

In a letter sent Thursday to the chairman of the federal commission reviewing the base closing plans, the retired admirals said the submarine base is a valuable asset that the military cannot afford to lose, The Day of New London reported.

"Closing (the sub base) would critically injure the capabilities and readiness of the United States' submarine force, the Navy and the armed forces at large," the retired admirals wrote in the letter to Anthony Principi, chairman of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission.

The admirals were once some of the most powerful military officials in Washington. Among those who signed the letter were Adm. James D. Watkins, chief of naval operations under President Reagan; Adm. Carlisle A.H. Trost, chief of naval operations under President George H.W. Bush, and Adm. Frank B. Kelso II, who served as President Clinton's chief of naval operations.

The letter writers also included Vice Adms. Kenneth M. Carr, former Atlantic fleet sub commander; George R. Sterner, former Naval Sea Systems commander; Al Konetzni, former Pacific fleet sub commander; and N. Ronald Thunman, a former deputy chief of naval operations.

Principi has also received letters recently from other military experts and politicians opposed to

closing the base in Groton - the first submarine base in the country and home to the nation's premier submarine school.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell and other leading politicians said the admirals' letter should be influential in efforts to keep the base open.

"Having this formidable group of admirals support our submarine base speaks volumes about the drastic error the Department of Defense made in recommending (Groton) for closure," Rell said.

U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons, R-Conn., added, "These are big-picture leaders who understand the strategic, industrial, operational and readiness value (of the base). All eight retired admirals understand what works and what doesn't."

Connecticut Sens. Christopher Dodd and Joseph Lieberman also praised the admirals' letter, which says the Pentagon made a serious error in determining the military value of the Groton base.

"These aren't abstract figures or numbers on some chart," Dodd said. "They are people who know our naval forces better than anyone."

The admirals said the Pentagon's projected size of the country's submarine fleet over the next 20 years would not meet national security needs.

The Groton base "is a proven strategic asset," the admirals wrote to Principi. "It would take the Navy generations to reconstitute its unique military value elsewhere. That is years the armed forces cannot afford to lose."

BRAC official leaves with 'positive' views
Battle Creek Enquirer (Battle Creek, MI)
July 30, 2005

Samuel Skinner stepped off the plane Friday at W.K. Kellogg Airport and was greeted by hundreds of supporters chanting, "Save our base."

Skinner, one of nine members of the independent Base Closure and Realignment Commission, toured the Air National Guard Base with military and elected officials working to get the base removed from a federal closure list.

"I know what the issue is here, and I know what's at stake here. We're looking very seriously at the recommendations of (Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld). We're going to really scrub them very seriously," he said.

After two hours on the base, Skinner reportedly left with a positive impression of the facility that is home to an award-winning jet unit and directly supports 334 full-time jobs.

"I know he's left Battle Creek with an exceptionally good idea of how committed this community is to the military, to the Federal Center downtown and especially to the 110th unit," said U.S. Rep. Joe Schwarz, R-Battle Creek.

The 17 A-10 attack jets of the 110th Fighter Wing, stationed in Battle Creek, are scheduled to be moved to Selfridge Air National Guard Base in eastern Michigan unless either the BRAC Commission votes to remove the base from the list or President George W. Bush rejects the list entirely.

"We will do what's right for the American war fighter and the American military that's serving in Iraq and Afghanistan and all over the world," Skinner said. "That is our primary mission. We're not going to compromise the kind of quality of support the war fighter gets throughout the world."

Currently, there are 334 full-time employees at the base and another 600 or so traditional guard members report there for training and deployment. It's not clear what would happen with those jobs, although elected officials said they most likely would disappear and not transfer to Selfridge.

As Skinner, a former transportation secretary and White House chief of staff under former

President George Bush, addressed the crowd, two A-10 Warthogs flew behind him.

"Now that's a first. Everywhere I've been, I've not had a fly-by," he said after the pair of attack jets roared past. "You're already one up."

Skinner said he has heard a lot about the importance of the base, but added no decision would be made Friday about the 110th Fighter Wing's future in Battle Creek.

"I am not surprised that the unit has so much support from the community, because I've heard so much about it already," Skinner said to the sea of people waving American flags. "It truly is an outstanding unit."

After the tour, a few elected officials said they were confident they made a positive impression on Skinner, but there was no indication of how Skinner may influence a possible decision on the base by the BRAC Commission.

"Conjecture is always a bad thing to do in a situation like this," said Schwarz, who attended the rally and met with Skinner after rushing home from Washington, D.C. "We put our best foot forward. Secretary Skinner was terrific, and we'll just have to see where it goes."

Schwarz said there is a feeling among many elected officials that Air Force officials did not paint an accurate picture of the Air National Guard in their report to the BRAC Commission.

"The one thing that I have gleaned from dealing with now eight of the nine BRAC commissioners is that they are suspect, let's say, of the data that's been given to them by the Air Force, vis-à-vis the Air National Guard," he said.

State Sen. Mark Schauer, D-Bedford Township, said the Battle Creek team has given Skinner accurate information to give a clearer picture of the base's importance on local, state and national levels.

"One thing we've heard consistently, and we heard from (Skinner), is that he's not happy with

the way the Air National Guard was handled nationally," Schauer said.

Schwarz said Skinner was in his element during his tour of the base.

"He's a pilot. He understands air transport, he understands military air, he understands airports, he understands what's a good airport and what's not a good airport," Schwarz said. "He was playing in his sandbox today."

Skinner learned about the accomplishments of the 110th Fighter Wing, Schwarz said, especially its deployments over the past decade.

"We think we made an exceptionally good case for keeping the 110th here, the aircraft here, the very talented personnel here, especially the pilots with over 2,000 hours in A-10s," Schwarz said.

Battle Creek Mayor John Godfrey said the tremendous show of community support made Friday a very good day for Battle Creek.

"I think that we made an extremely good case and (Skinner) did say that this in fact is a superior facility, and right there is a tremendous change from the data that they made their initial decision about," Godfrey said. "I think he was very impressed with the facility, certainly the combat record."

Schauer said officials talked with Skinner about deployments, recruiting and retention excellence, and the key role the 110th Fighter Wing plays in homeland security.

"We did exactly what we needed to do today," he said. "Commissioner Skinner told us he was very impressed with what he saw."

Schauer said Skinner acknowledged he has a tough job, but that Battle Creek's base is a superior facility.

"Frankly, having him here was tremendously critical to our process," Schauer said. "This was not a given for us. We had to fight to have Commissioner Skinner come and visit us today."

Schauer said the fight will continue. "We're going to turn over every stone possible between now and when commissioners actually vote, which we expect will happen in late August."

Opinions/ Editorials

Additional Notes