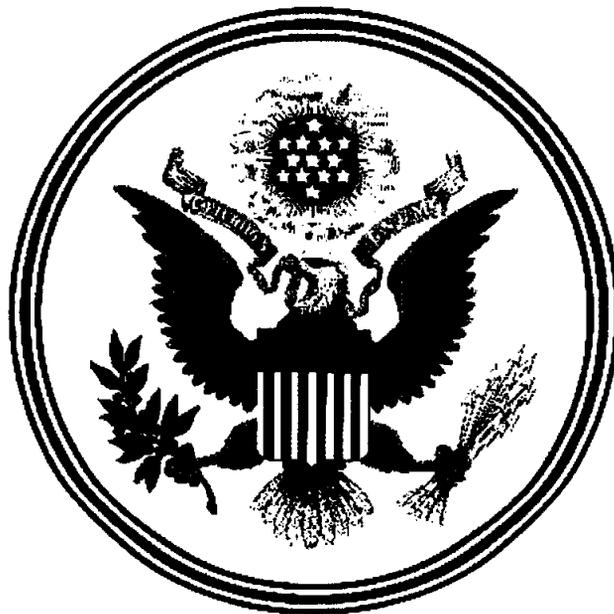


Charles Battaglia
Executive Director

**DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE AND
REALIGNMENT COMMISSION**



MEDIA BRIEFING BOOK

OCEANA NAVAL AIR STATION HEARING
WASHINGTON, D.C.



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MEDIA BRIEFING BOOK

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Media Advisory

Sequence of Events

TIME:

Doors Open to Public at 12:00PM
Hearing Coverage- Senate Hart Hearing Room 216
1:00PM-2:00PM / MEDIA PRE-SET 11:30AM

Media Availability – The BRAC Commission's media availability will begin promptly 15 minutes after the end of the hearing.

Logistical information for media:

Credentialed media please contact appropriate media gallery for coverage information.

Credentialing and Media Inquiries:

Credentials may be requested via this website up until 24 hours prior to an event. After that, email the hearing contact. Please provide name and affiliation in your request.

For all media inquiries, please contact Robert McCreary, BRAC Commission Deputy Director of Communications, 703-901-7835 robert.mccreary@wso.whs.mil

**2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission
Suggested Talking Points for NAS Oceana**

The commission is especially aware of the potential impact its recommendations carry on the community and local economy, should those suggestions be enacted, and therefore welcomes community input as a source of information, however the preeminent factor in the commissions deliberations must be military value.

- The Commission is completely non-political and non-partisan in nature, as the Commissioners were appointed by the President and key Congressional leaders from both parties. The staff was hired based upon the individual's competency and availability.
- The Commission was established by the Congress to provide accountability to the public for the decisions to close or realign a military installation, and welcomes community input as an important factor in its decision-making process.
- *The commission is aware that Oceana is the primary Master Jet Air Base on the East coast. As such the commission will strongly consider the strategic and economic ramifications of closure.*
- *We would like to express out thanks to the community for their input into this process. Currently we have received almost 2000 e-mails and numerous written correspondence from the area and the commission is also carefully considering the suggestion to close NAS Oceana would have on the community.*

As the Department of Defense (DoD) seeks to streamline our military in order to meet changing global threats, the Commission will evaluate whether the DoD has taken all pertinent factors into account and has made its suggestions in accordance with the law.

- The Commission is an independent entity charged with thoroughly reviewing all pertinent factors before offering its recommendations.
- Although the Commission will evaluate the economic, environmental, and other effects that the closure of the installation could have on the surrounding community, the Commission's final decision as to whether or not to suggest NAS Oceana for closure will be based almost entirely on military value.
- *The commission is aware of the problems of encroachment may be causing. The commission will analyze the issue with regard to the installations ability to continue its operational and training missions.*

**2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission
Suggested Q's & A's for Visit to Oceana Naval Air Station**

Q1. Recently, Oceana Naval Air Station was added to the BRAC closure list. Does this suggest that the base will definitely be closed by the Commission?

A1. The addition of Oceana Naval Air Station to the suggested BRAC closure list only suggests that the Commission will review the possibility of closing the installation. The hearing that took place on July 19th provides the Commission the opportunity to further analyze options with regard to this BRAC round.

Q2. If the Commission votes to close Oceana Naval Air Station, it would be a vote to close the principal base for fighter jets on the East Coast. As such, Oceana Naval Air Station retains a specific strategic importance. Will the Commission take alternative sites into account in its analysis of Oceana Naval Air Station?

A2. The Commission will perform a thorough, accurate, and objective analysis, in a completely open and transparent manner, which will take into account, chiefly, the military value of Oceana Naval Air Station. In its analysis of Oceana, the Commission will consider alternative sites that are capable of continuing the operational and training activities currently conducted at Oceana.

Q3. Senator John Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Governor Warner have vowed to fight the BRAC recommendations concerning Oceana. Will the political influence yielded by these men affect the Commission's final recommendation?

A3. The Commission will evaluate current military value of an installation, according to the process prescribed by statute. In determining military value the Commission will review several criteria including jointness, ease of mobility, and the installations role in the changing global threat paradigm.

Q4. If Oceana Naval Air Station is closed, the Virginia Beach area will lose an estimated 17,000 employees (military and civilian) and billions of dollars in revenue. Will the Commission consider the economic effects that closure of Oceana would have on the local and State economies?

A4. The Commission will review the Pentagon's proposal based upon an evaluation of the current military value of the installation. In addition, the Commission will analyze the projected economic costs and human impact of the DoD BRAC recommendations.

Q5. The issue of "encroachment" or urban development was listed as one of the primary reasons why the base was added to the BRAC closure list. Is encroachment an issue that has affected many other bases on the list? Can Oceana be saved if the issue of encroachment is properly addressed by the local community?

A5. The issue of encroachment is very important to the Commission's analysis of military installations. While the Commission understands the value of land in certain areas of the country, it also has to strongly consider the affect that encroachment has on the military value of an installation—with regard to operations and training exercises. In reviewing the issues of encroachment, the Commission will take into account both Air Installation Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ) and Accident Potential Zones (APZ).

Q6. If Oceana Naval Air Station is closed, what will happen to the property on which it resides?

A6. The question of what will happen with a base after its closure is under the purview of the Federal Government and DoD rather than the BRAC Commission. Applicable laws dictate that federal property must first be made available to other federal agencies.

If the property is deemed excess by the federal government then it will be made available to homeless assistance groups. It is only after this point that the land may be offered to the local government or to private developers at market value.

Q7. Oceana Naval Air Station has avoided closure in past BRAC rounds. Why should the current BRAC round yield a result different from the others?

A7. The statute, *not precedence*, establishes the criteria. As outlined by the statute, the Commission will place priority on military value while also taking into consideration economic, environmental, and other effects that the closure or realignment of a base would have on the community surrounding that base. Information that is gathered in the analysis of a base, with the exception of information that is sensitive to national security, will be made accessible to the public.

Q8. Some have suggested that military assets at Oceana be transferred to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia. Will the Commission take into account Moody's ability to sustain operations currently conducted at Oceana?

A8. The Commission will primarily consider the military value of the installation recommended for change based upon jointness, ease of mobility, and role in the changing global threat paradigm. However, the Commission will also consider the recommendations to relocate military assets and will determine if installation slated to receive assets have the necessary infrastructure to continue to carry out operations.

Q9. How can the Community make the Commission aware of information that the Community feels may have been overlooked by DoD?

A9. The BRAC Commission encourages public input into this transparent and objective process. Community groups who wish to submit information for the appropriate regional hearing are urged to contact their Congressional representative. Additionally, the public may submit comments through the Commission's official website, which is www.brac.gov.

OCEANA NAVAL AIR STATION VIRGINIA

National News Articles

Navy's top admiral to testify at BRAC hearing on Oceana
Citing Sprawl, BRAC Panel Eyes Closure of Oceana Over DoD Opposition
Commission adds Brunswick, Oceana to BRAC lists

Local News Articles

On Oceana, time to face reality
A Tale Of Two Bases: Bearers Of Good, Bad Noise
From a whisper to a roar
Isolating our military. Encroachment and economics aren't the whole Oceana story
A crash landing for Oceana hopes
Virginia's Loss Could Be Texas' Gain

Editorial/Opinion Articles

I've voted, without exception, to support Navy's positions
Senator, Let's Launch

National News Articles

Navy's top admiral to testify at BRAC hearing on Oceana

Associated Press
Sue Lindsey
July 29, 2005

The Navy's new chief will testify next week at a defense commission hearing on whether Oceana Naval Air Station should be among military bases it recommends for closure.

Adm. Michael G. Mullen, who became chief of naval operations July 15, will appear before the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission in Washington on Thursday, a spokeswoman said. The Navy has said it wants to keep the Virginia Beach base open, but Mullen's spokeswoman said she did not know the specifics of his testimony.

U.S. Sen. John Warner, R-Va., sent Mullen a letter Wednesday asking him to testify on behalf of retaining Oceana, the Navy's principal base for fighter jets on the East Coast.

"Commissioners must be provided the department's best military judgment and professional advice available on the military value of Naval Station Oceana," Warner wrote. "You are the most qualified to provide this testimony."

Warner, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee who is leading the effort to keep Oceana open, also told Mullen that he would face "a difficult task to replicate this important installation."

Oceana, Virginia Beach's largest employer with nearly 17,000 on its military and civilian staff, is

home to about 140 F/A-18 Hornets and Super Hornets and about 50 F-14 Tomcats.

Oceana was a late addition to the bases that the BRAC Commission is considering recommending for closure. It was not on the Pentagon's original list in May, but the commission took the unusual step of adding it last week.

Commission researchers said neighborhood development is encroaching on pilots' ability to practice taking off and landing at all hours.

The BRAC panel will make its final decision next month about which bases to propose for closing or altering, with President Bush and Congress making a binding decision in the fall.

Four BRAC commissioners are scheduled to be in Virginia Beach on Monday to tour the base.

The city's mayor, Meyera Oberndorf, declared Monday "Support Oceana Day" and urged citizens to send e-mails "to let the BRAC commissioners know how much Oceana means to Virginia Beach."

Citing Sprawl, BRAC Panel Eyes Closure of Oceana Over DoD Opposition

Inside the Pentagon

Suzanne Yohannan

July 28, 2005

Severe encroachment from urban sprawl has prompted the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to consider shutting down a major Navy air base in Virginia and moving its assets to another location, despite Defense Department opposition to the proposed closure.

The proposal, if adopted by the commission, could also have repercussions for the Navy's controversial plans to build an outlying landing field (OLF) in North Carolina to support the Virginia-based F/A-18E/F Super Hornet aircraft, some of which are currently based at Naval Air Station **Oceana**, Virginia Beach, VA.

The **BRAC** Commission voted 7-1 July 19 to consider either closing or significantly realigning the major jet base located at **Oceana**. The commission will evaluate this option over the next several weeks and make a final decision before Sept. 8, when its final list of base closures and realignments is due to be submitted to the president, according to a commission spokeswoman.

The commission earlier this month also asked Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld what consideration DOD had given in the 2005 **BRAC** round to moving the master jet base from **Oceana** to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia, due to the severe encroachment problems at **Oceana**.

An analyst with the commission noted in July 19 testimony that the Navy has been unable to halt increasing development surrounding **Oceana** -- the country's busiest master jet base -- which is constraining the Navy's operational and training capability at both **Oceana** and the nearby Naval Auxiliary Landing Field Fentress.

"Despite significant efforts by the Navy and local community leaders over the last 30 years to

limit the encroachment, developers' demands and property rights issues have trumped the Navy's objections to new building in the high noise and accident potential zones, also known as APZs," **BRAC** Commission analyst Bill Fetzer testified.

For instance, flight patterns at Fentress must comply with noise-abatement procedures "demanded by neighborhood developments" near the field, Fetzer said. Fetzer proposed relocation of all the squadrons, personnel, equipment and support from **Oceana** to an alternative site.

The Navy is also facing lawsuits by numerous property owners over noise caused by operations at **Oceana**.

One observer says the dispute over **Oceana** underscores the growing incidence of closure due to encroachment. Retired Army Judge Advocate General Maj. Gen. Hugh Overholt says encroachment has played an "enormous" role in all of the **BRAC** rounds, with many of the bases closed in earlier rounds located in dense metropolitan areas.

Overholt, who now advises a private sector group that is advocating for keeping two military facilities in eastern North Carolina open, said that at last week's **BRAC** Commission deliberations one commissioner alluded to the view of many that the question of closure for **Oceana** is not "if" but "when."

DOD and the Navy are defending their decision not to propose closure of **Oceana** due to encroachment. Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Robert Willard, speaking before the commission July 18, asserted that "from the Navy's vantage point, we believe that **Oceana** continues to serve the fleet well, that the challenges that you mention regarding encroachment and **Oceana** have been and are manageable, that as we look forward to recapitalizing our fighter fleet and the advent of the Joint Strike Fighter in the 2012 to 2015 time frame, there may very well need to be considerations and adjustments made, but that yet remains to be seen."

The Navy dismissed Moody as an alternative site, due to the significant cost and the Air Force's needs for Moody, which would prevent the Navy from bringing the entire **Oceana** wing to the base. Some encroachment problems would likely also arise at Moody with such a transfer, according to testimony from another **BRAC** commission analyst. Other relocations were also dismissed due to a lack of over-water training areas, according to the commission's staff.

While the Navy considers **Oceana** to be the most suitable option for the master jet base, it concedes that development around the base "presents significant challenges to long-term operational requirements," Fetzer said. To deal with these issues, the service is now pushing a proposal to eventually build a new master jet base on the East Coast, outside of the **BRAC** time frame, which ends in 2011.

"Selecting a location and building from the ground up is by far the preferred choice as it gives us the most flexibility to ensure we accommodate future capabilities, while allowing for sufficient 'buffers' to preclude potential encroachment issues," acting Deputy Defense Secretary Gordon England said in a July 14 written response to the **BRAC** Commission. "This approach, if pursued, would allow for a truly modern air station, with commensurate energy, environmental and community consideration designed into the facility from the very beginning."

The commission's consideration of whether to shutter or realign the major jet base at **Oceana** comes as the Navy is fighting an environmental lawsuit over its plans to build an outlying landing field in eastern North Carolina to be used by several squadrons of Super Hornet aircraft to be

based at **Oceana**. The Navy wants to build an additional OLF in Washington and Beaufort counties, NC, to practice aircraft carrier landings, but environmentalists have charged the Navy failed to follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in considering the environmental impacts of such a project.

Closure of **Oceana** would quash any need for the OLF at the eastern North Carolina site, says one environmentalist involved in the case. The source explained the Navy had looked to the OLF "to export noise" from **Oceana**, but without planes at **Oceana**, the OLF becomes unnecessary. Under the Navy's proposal, the location of the OLF is midway between **Oceana**, where most of the Super Hornets would be based, and Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point, in Havelock, NC, where two of the squadrons would be based.

But a Navy spokesman calls it "inappropriate" to speculate on any future potential impacts from a **BRAC** Commission decision on **Oceana**. He says the commission's July 19 vote has "no immediate impact" on the eastern North Carolina OLF.

And Overholt, the former judge advocate general, says the OLF's future is dependent on where **Oceana's** assets are directed to go, if the **BRAC** Commission decides to realign them. A move to Moody would make the OLF in North Carolina less critical in the long term, but he speculated that the Navy may look to consider building a new master jet base at the several sites it studied for siting the OLF, including at the controversial Washington/Beaufort location.

The Navy looked to these other locations for an OLF due to the encroachment problems, particularly jet noise, at Fentress, according to the service.

Commission adds Brunswick, Oceana to BRAC lists

Aerospace Daily and Defense Report

Michael Bruno

July 20, 2005

The independent **BRAC** Commission voted 8-1 on July 19 to add Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine, to the Base Realignment and Closure list for consideration, but a majority of the commissioners decided against doing the same for the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, Hawaii.

The day before, Michael Wynne, deputy undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics, had told the commission that the Pentagon considered shuttering Brunswick completely, but the base was kept open due to its strategic presence in the northeastern United States and for its surge capabilities.

Likewise for Pearl Harbor, Wynne said the shipyard was among four naval shipyards analyzed for closure, but military judgment favored keeping the base open because of its "strategic location and multiplatform capabilities."

Instead, Naval Shipyard Portsmouth, Maine, was chosen for closing over Pearl Harbor because it would eliminate excess capacity but still satisfy Defense Department desires to build military capability in the Pacific, a **BRAC** Commission aide said July 19 (DAILY, May 18).

Commission members, who convened on Capitol Hill July 18 and 19, were split on Pearl Harbor partly due to unanswered questions about the degree of the Navy's self-described "excess" shipbuilding capacity.

"We need to determine, is there excess capacity or not? It's not clear to me right now that we know," said commissioner and retired Navy Adm. Harold Gehman. He voted to add Pearl Harbor to the **BRAC** list.

"I'm not convinced that Portsmouth should be closed, either," said commissioner and retired Army Gen. James Hill. He voted against adding Pearl Harbor.

Navy mulls jet base

Meanwhile, Wynne said July 18 that the Navy is considering building a new 21st Century master jet base, but it would occur "outside the **BRAC** window and **BRAC** timeframe." At the same time, the Navy eyed Moody Air Force Base, Ga., as an East Coast master base.

But Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Robert F. Willard told the panel that Moody is a "World War II vintage air base," and would need almost \$500 million in one-time military construction costs to build up.

Wynne said the Navy decided to keep Naval Air Station **Oceana**, Va., because it was the "most suitable option."

On July 19, commissioners added **Oceana to the BRAC** list for consideration for further realignment by a vote of 7-1. Many said they voted in favor of adding **Oceana** so that they could better review the Navy's options. By 7-1, they voted against adding Moody.

Local News Articles

On Oceana, time to face reality

The Virginia Pilot

July 25, 2005

If **Oceana** Naval Air Station's mission can't be saved, if the next generation of thunderous fighters must indeed take off from runways someplace else, Virginia Beach would be arguably better off with a quick military retreat instead of a prolonged campaign of attrition.

According to a letter and to testimony before the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, the Pentagon sees decades of commercial and residential encroachment as eventually making the base's mission impossible in the Beach.

Though it could survive this **BRAC** go-round, this may well be **Oceana's** last reprieve. The Navy hopes to eventually replace the 6,000-acre master jet base with a new, bigger facility elsewhere, one on a plot so large that surrounding development will never be an issue.

That's a very tall order. It has been decades since an airfield of that magnitude, civilian or military, has been erected on the East Coast.

If **Oceana** were to leave Virginia Beach under **BRAC**, it would take thousands of jobs and

billions of dollars with it, not to mention the military families that for 60 years have helped make the city what it is. But, under **BRAC**, there would be some federal help to minimize the economic blow from loss of the base, money for purging it of safety and environmental hazards, and some advice on figuring out what to do with the property.

Painful as that would be, there are worse alternatives.

The Pentagon could turn **Oceana** into a different kind of military facility that would attract neither the money nor the people a master jet base does. The Beach would still have thousands of acres of prime real estate out of commission and off the tax rolls, and far less economic benefit to show for it.

Or the government -- conceivably -- could just shut it down. City Councilman Richard Maddox, who worked on an agreement between Virginia Beach and the Navy to protect **Oceana**, calls that the "nightmare scenario," one that includes a huge plot of land lying waste behind a high fence, not generating any taxes, or providing any room to roam.

"If the handwriting is on the wall, prudence would dictate that we should be looking at a number of different scenarios," Maddox said in a Pilot story last week.

For the first time in memory, discussing such possibilities is something more than front parlor speculation. It's self-defense. And it's simply prudent governance.

"To put your head in the sand and say it will never happen is not realistic," Councilman Peter Schmidt said. "We need to look out for the best interests of Virginia Beach in the long term, with the potential of **Oceana** not being there."

If the jets can't fly, if **Oceana** won't be the city's largest employer, Virginia Beach must start now to consider life without the base, and -- just as crucially -- how to say farewell in a way that best protects what the military will leave behind.

A Tale Of Two Bases: Bearers Of Good, Bad Noise

The Daily Press (Newport News)

Jim Hodges

July 24, 2005

The difference between Langley Air Force Base and **Oceana** Naval Air Station on the base closure list is a case of sound and fury.

Every nine minutes or so, an F-15 or F/A-22 comes in over Back River at about 245 mph on a path that's gradual and shallow and which leads to the softest, quietest touchdown possible.

Col. Tom Tinsley calls it a "don't-spill-the-coffee-on-the-guy-in-first-class" landing.

The pilot cuts power, works the brakes and eventually coasts to a stop on an adjoining concrete parking lot.

Langley Air Force base has received five complaints this year from people who say their lives are disrupted by the noise. Two came from western Virginia, where there wasn't an Air Force plane within 100 miles at the time.

To the southeast of Langley, 26 miles as the Hornet flies, every two and a half minutes, an F-18 comes in at a hard angle over Virginia Beach Boulevard and slams down hard on the concrete runway to dissipate energy. The pilot then pours on the afterburner, raw fuel spilling into jet exhaust to push the plane back into the air with a roar that makes a rock concert in an arena sound like "shuush!" in a library.

Oceana Naval Air Station is under assault from Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise, a citizens group that claims 5,000 members who complain constantly, both to the base and to Washington.

The difference in how they fly their airplanes offers insight into why Langley is on the military's favored roll and **Oceana** was added to the Pentagon's Base Realignment and Closure list on Tuesday.

"We do have noise complaints, but you have to remember that our base has more water around it than over there," says Tinsley, deputy commander of the First Fighter Wing at Langley, adding that he could not speak for **Oceana**. "When we're taking off on a heading of zero-8 over an eastbound runway, as soon as we break ground, we're over water."

When they take off to the west, the pilots quickly turn north, then east, heading back over the airfield and out over the Atlantic. For a while, they're over populated areas -- including Bethel Manor and the Tabb school district -- but they're gaining altitude as quickly as possible to cut back on the noise. At **Oceana**, the F-18s are over houses in any direction.

Frequently, they're over Hal Levenson's house in Great Neck Meadows.

"They're at 400 to 500 feet and very loud," says Levenson, a founding member and spokesman for the jet noise group. "You can't go outside. You can't hear anyone speak, you can't listen to the TV. I have headphones to listen to the radio."

He adds that the noise occasionally reaches 107 decibels over his home, 1.5 miles north of the end of one of four **Oceana** runways.

That's as loud as an automobile horn from three feet away.

Their missions, even the nature of the services themselves, are other reasons Langley can peacefully coexist with Hampton while **Oceana** and Virginia Beach seem constantly at odds.

Langley offers a 10,000-foot runway and a wide expanse of buffer zone, both wet and dry.

Oceana's longest runway is 12,000 feet, but the naval aviation's mission is predicated on being able to land an airplane on that part of it which corresponds to the flight deck of a ship.

"They paint an aircraft carrier on the runway over there," Tinsley says.

"As soon as they touch down they go to full power, just in case (they miss the arresting cable) on that short runway they have on the ship."

It's a safety maneuver for the pilots, but even when they cut off afterburners at **Oceana's** edge, the sound carries into neighborhoods.

The existence of those neighborhoods is the primary threat to **Oceana's** continued use by the Navy. That existence involves two acronyms that are in vogue these days: AICUZ --air installation compatible use zones -- and APZ -- accident potential zones.

One has much to do with noise, the other everything to do with danger.

The **BRAC** Commission has been told that the Virginia Beach City Council approved rezoning requests opposed by the Navy 73 percent of the time in recent years.

Most of the time that has involved noise, primarily in the 65-decibel range.

That's about the same amount of racket your vacuum cleaner makes.

Two Lynnhaven elementary schools, Brookwood and Parkway, are in the 65-decibel zone.

At Langley, "I look at every Hampton city plan for development," says Vic Johnston, the base's director of community services. "If there is input needed, we give it."

In one case, Johnston says, a Langley engineer suggested to a developer that more insulation be added to new houses to muffle jet noise.

"They do their business, we do ours," Johnston says of **Oceana**. "We know that land over here is at a premium and developers want to make money."

At Langley, too, flights are more consistent because it's an operational base. And there are only about 60 F-15s and four F/A-22s, with more on the way.

Oceana has both operational and training roles for its 254 fighters.

"We are going combat training every day," says Tinsley, "so we take off over water into Area 386 (in the Atlantic) and fight out there anywhere from 1,000 feet above the water to 60,000 feet above the water. We go supersonic out there and make all the noise we want 15 miles from the coastline. "When we come back in, we come back in to land and that's it."

Flights are from 6 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. **Oceana's** planes also fight offshore and at a North Carolina range. But more important to critics is aircraft carrier landing practice.

Often called "skip landings," they are conducted well into the night and frequently at **Oceana's** auxiliary airfield at Fentress in Chesapeake. About 140,000 "skip landings" a year are made at Fentress.

When a carrier deployment is approaching, the exercises -- and resultant complaints -- increase. And they are a 24-7 operation. "Pilots train like they fight," says Troy Snead, public affairs officer at **Oceana**.

At Langley, the future is bright, with a new airplane, the Raptor.

"I was asked ... 'Are you worried about noise complaints?'" Tinsley said.

"I said, 'No. I'm worried about people driving up and down Armistead Boulevard running into each other to see what that airplane is doing.' "

Four **BRAC** commissioners are due at **Oceana** on Aug. 1 to look things over with a vote by September that could determine how long the base remains in the Navy inventory.

"The question is, what is perception and what is reality about **Oceana**?" says George Foresman, Gov. Mark Warner's chief adviser on **BRAC**. "To me, the real crux is whether a Navy pilot isn't able to do the maneuvers they need to do to get the job done." *

LANGLEY AIR FORCE BASE

Part of what keeps the airfield on the good side of the area:

- * Fighters: 64 (60 F-15s, four F/A-22s)
- * Takeoffs/landings: About one every 10 minutes
- * Runway: 10,000 feet
- * Takeoff/landing path: East-west (Back River to the east)
- * Hours of operation: 6 a.m.-10:30 p.m.

OCEANA NAVAL AIR STATION

Some reasons the facility has trouble with Virginia Beach:

- * Fighters: 254 (194 F/A-18s, 60 F-14s)
- * Takeoffs/landings: About one every 21/2 minutes
- * Runways: 3 of 8,000 feet, 1 of 12,000 feet
- * Takeoff/landing path: North-south, east-west (houses in each direction)
- * Hours of operation: 24 hours a day

From a whisper to a roar

The Virginia Pilot

Kate Wiltrout

July 24, 2005

In a cavernous Senate committee room on Capitol Hill, Meyera Oberndorf's face went pale. A hundred miles away, in Richmond, shouts alerted Gov. Mark R. Warner to the news.

The federal commission charged with realigning the nation's military bases had just done something many people in Virginia convinced themselves wouldn't, couldn't, shouldn't happen: It had voted - 7 to 1 - to consider closing **Oceana** Naval Air Station in Virginia Beach.

Warner and the state's senior U.S. senator, John Warner - chairman of the armed services committee, former secretary of the Navy - had spoken by phone minutes before the vote Tuesday. Neither expected any surprises.

Then came the shout from William Leighty, the governor's chief of staff. He'd been watching the meeting via webcast in an adjacent office.

"I remember silence in the room for, like, one, two, three, four seconds," Gov. Warner's press secretary Kevin Hall recalled. "I believe I uttered an expletive. And then the governor said, 'Get Senator Warner on the phone and track down Meyera.'"

Within hours, news releases were flying, strategy sessions scheduled, reassurances uttered.

Still, the question loomed: How did this happen? How did **Oceana** escape the Pentagon's gaze in May, when Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld released his base closure recommendations, only to become one of eight last-minute additions to the commission's black list?

The Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission insisted all along it wouldn't rubber-stamp the Pentagon's closure list. Now **Oceana** supporters believe it.

"If nothing else, this is a terrific wake-up call," said Virginia Beach City Councilman Richard Maddox. "Up until now, there has been a sense that it could never happen. There's some threshold decisions we've got to make about what we're willing to do and what we're not willing to do to keep **Oceana** here."

As one senior congressional staffer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, observed: "This whole thing has taken an interesting turn."

The commission had asked specifically about shifting **Oceana's** jets to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia, he noted, with the Pentagon replying that nothing in the inventory met the needs of **Oceana**.

"The commission just doesn't believe them," the staffer said.

On one level, the surprise came at the hands of commission member Samuel Knox Skinner. He had said moments before the vote that **Oceana** was too big a problem for **BRAC** to tackle. But he relented after the commission staff convinced him that they could add something to the debate about the jet base's future if it were placed on the list for possible closure.

Without his vote, the commission wouldn't have reached the seven-out-of-nine majority required to add a base to the list - a threshold that many observers saw as almost impossible to reach.

Skinner changed his mind, it seemed, in the spirit of "Why not? Why not keep talking and analyzing? What is there to lose?"

On another level, however, there had been signs of trouble along the way.

While many people assumed **Oceana** was safe after it stayed off Rumsfeld's list in May, the Defense Department's own report on recommended base closures noted that the Navy had examined the idea of shutting down the base.

According to documents released in May, the Navy's senior leadership even went so far as to ask that the Marine Corps air station in Beaufort, S.C., be kept off the **BRAC** list specifically because they were concerned about **Oceana's** viability as a tactical base and needed an alternative site.

In the months leading up to the May recommendations, documents show, Navy leadership also examined a scenario to close **Oceana** - but without another realistic location for its 244 fighter jets, concluded closure wasn't possible.

True to its word not to simply endorse the Pentagon's wishes, it didn't take long for the appointed commission to broach the topic of **Oceana**.

In its first week of hearings in mid-May, one commissioner - retired Army Gen. James T. Hill - said he was surprised **Oceana** wasn't slated for closure because of the residential and commercial development that's surrounded it, limiting operations and posing noise and safety concerns.

The following week, May 24 and 25, **BRAC** Commission Chairman Anthony Principi and Commissioner Lloyd Newton, a retired Air Force general, visited a number of Hampton Roads bases affected by the proposals. The pair didn't tour **Oceana** - a sign to some that the base wasn't a priority because any facility slated for closure requires a visit from at least two commission members.

But Principi and Newton didn't stay away from the topic of **Oceana** entirely.

According to commission documents, Capt. Tom Keeley, the commander of **Oceana**, met with the pair in Norfolk during their two-day trip. The 21-page brief he presented was titled "Encroachment Issues."

Principi and Newton apparently got the message. At a news conference May 25, Principi commented on "very, very significant encroachment at **Oceana** " but said it was premature to consider the base for closure.

Five weeks later, the commission made its doubts about **Oceana** even clearer.

On July 1, Principi asked in writing why the Pentagon hadn't considered closing **Oceana** and relocating its aircraft to Moody Air Force Base in Valdosta, Ga.

As required by the **BRAC** process, the commission must notify the Pentagon in writing that it's considering adding a base to the list. Gordon England, the acting deputy defense secretary, replied July 14 that a better alternative to moving **Oceana** would be building a new master jet base from the ground up.

The same day that England penned his response, a delegation of local and state officials and two retired admirals went to Washington to make their case for keeping **Oceana** off the list. Bob Matthias, assistant to Virginia Beach City Manager James Spore, said he took about 20 minutes to explain the city's efforts to work with the Navy to control development around the base.

Two **BRAC** staff members - one was Bill Fetzer, the commission's Navy-Marine Corps team

senior analyst - listened, then asked a lot of questions. They were already well-versed in city issues, Matthias said.

Though the group Citizens Concerned About Jet Noise has complained about the decibel levels of jets passing overhead, Matthias said the commission members didn't seem to care.

"Surprisingly, they said repeatedly that in their opinion, noise was not an issue," Matthias said. However, he added, they made it clear they were concerned about development in the potential crash zones around **Oceana**.

They asked about Virginia's strict property laws, particularly a provision called "by right," in which property owners have a right to develop their land without interference as long as it complies with zoning.

The discussion got specific, Matthias said, down to Virginia Beach City Council's decision two years ago to approve a rezoning request allowing condominiums on a site where a motel had been.

Matthias explained that the council saw rezoning the property on Laskin Road as an improvement because fewer people would reside inside the potential accident zone. The Navy thought otherwise and asked that the rezoning be denied.

"The Navy has its mission, which every one on council wants to support," Matthias said he told the staffers. "And the council has its hands pretty much tied by Virginia law."

Fetzer requested more information about that project, which the city forwarded the next day. On Tuesday, before the vote on **Oceana**, Fetzer used the Laskin Road project as an example of the problems at the base.

He showed the commission a map of Virginia Beach and pinpointed the project's location, then kicked what had been a routine municipal issue to the national stage.

"The commanding officer of NAS **Oceana** opposed that development in writing to the City Council on June the 5th, 2003, stating that residential land use was incompatible ... and should be prohibited," Fetzer told commissioners. "In November 2003, the City Council approved that project over the Navy's objections."

Oceana's supporters interpreted Fetzer's presentation as a sign they need to do a better job convincing the commission and its staff that both the city and the state are committed to protecting the base.

"We need to present this united front that **Oceana** needs to come off this list," Gov. Warner remarked later. "In this case, we have the support of the Navy. We have facts that we think were not fully presented to the commissioners."

Despite the shock of Tuesday's vote, many people think **Oceana** will emerge from this round of **BRAC** intact - if not unscathed.

"Even though they could close **Oceana**, it's clear that they have no intention of doing so," said Christopher Hellman, who tracks base closing issues at the Washington-based Center for Arms Control.

That's because, he said, the **BRAC** Commission also voted Tuesday not to consider major changes at Moody Air Force Base, meaning it wouldn't be designated as an option for **Oceana's** planes.

Hellman said it's clear commissioners feel the Navy needs to close **Oceana**, but they recognize that will be a long and complicated process, and they're just trying to help things along by keeping the talks going.

State Sen. Kenneth Stolle certainly hopes that's the case. He said he was surprised that seven commission members voted to add **Oceana** - but he feels that the group figured vigorous discussion wouldn't hurt.

"Every now and then, you need to get people's attention, and I think that's exactly what this is," he said. "I hope I'm right."

Staff writer Dale Eisman in Washington contributed to this report.

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Coming Monday What goes on at **Oceana** and, most important, what's at stake if it closes. Back in May, when **Oceana** didn't appear on the Pentagon's list of possible base closures, most assumed the base had nothing to worry about.

Now it's July, and with the base on the **BRAC** black list, the disbelief is deafening.

How could this have happened?

Isolating our military. Encroachment and economics aren't the whole **Oceana story**

The Virginia Pilot

David C. Earnest

July 24, 2005

LAST WEEK'S news that the Base Realignment and Closure Commission is once again considering the closure of **Oceana** Naval Air Station has renewed the political fight over the airfield's future.

Elected officials in Hampton Roads fear the loss of jobs, while residents hope for the end of jet noise. Yet both **BRAC** and elected officials seem to miss a more important point.

Oceana and other bases like it around the country represent more than jobs, money and clamorous inconvenience. They increasingly are important yet tenuous bonds between a society and a military that have grown apart during the last four decades.

No one disputes the problems that **Oceana** faces with the encroachment of Virginia Beach's growth along its entire perimeter. Navy pilots flying into and out of **Oceana** skirt beachfront high-rises and residential neighborhoods as they practice their take-offs and landings. Accidents

have occurred periodically, such as in 1986, when an A-6 Intruder which overran the airfield on landing and killed both the pilot and a pregnant woman driving on **Oceana** Boulevard.

And the Navy's own sound contour maps show noise levels greater than 65 decibels from Pungo to Bay Colony, including the entirety of the city's Oceanfront hotels.

Likewise, most local leaders acknowledge **Oceana's** importance to the economy of Virginia Beach and the Hampton Roads area. It is little wonder that Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf said she was "ecstatic" in May on hearing that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the Navy recommended keeping **Oceana** open, and "shocked" at Tuesday's news.

No one is surprised that Virginia's congressional delegation and Gov. Mark Warner have vowed to pressure **BRAC** and the Pentagon to reconsider this latest threat to the base.

Unfortunately, all this discussion about **Oceana** tends to focus only on two aspects of the airfield: its economics and the city's encroachment on its perimeter.

The legislation that empowers **BRAC** to recommend closures requires the commission to consider eight criteria in its decisions: Four focus on the military value of the base, while four focus on the economic dimensions, including savings to the Pentagon from closure or realignment and the economic impact on local communities.

Naturally, elected officials are concerned about the jobs and welfare of their constituents and express their opposition to **Oceana's** closure in these terms. But **Oceana** and other facilities slated for closure serve a purpose in American society that is much broader than their economic benefits.

In many parts of the country, they are the only tangible connection most civilians have with the nation's military. In the post-Vietnam era of professional soldiers, the nation's citizenry increasingly has become isolated from the cadre of professionals who constitute our nation's military.

There is considerable evidence, furthermore, that our fighting men and women hold opinions and values that increasingly diverge from American society as a whole. A poll by the Military Times in 2003 showed that two-thirds of the military members they surveyed believe they have higher moral standards than the nation they serve.

The same poll and research done by the Triangle Institute of Security Studies in North Carolina suggest that active-duty servicemen and women, whether officers or enlisted personnel, increasingly feel alienated from the American people; are more conservative; tend to favor more unilateral foreign policies than the American public as a whole; and believe that civilian leaders do not have the military's best interests at heart.

The reverse also seems true: Civilians appear to value military service less than they used to, particularly when electing their representatives.

Social scientists have identified a number of reasons for this growing gap in civil-military relations. The turbulence of the Vietnam era and the all-volunteer force are two important sources. Today's military is attracting a much narrower variety of Americans than did the conscripted forces of World War II, or even of the early 1960s.

The era of the citizen-soldier appears gone, as fewer men and women bridge the divide between the military and civil society. The implications of this problem are clear: The growing lack of understanding between the military and American society ultimately makes both worse off. Our military is less effective, and our society is less secure.

Military bases remain one of the few tangible connections that communities have with the armed forces. Even if they are inconvenient neighbors, they are reminders to civilians not only of the costs that the fighting men and women bear for our safety, but also of our responsibility as citizens and voters to those who don the uniform.

Without military bases in our communities, we risk an even greater chasm in understanding between civilian and soldier, with unforeseeable consequences for the United States.

Oceana and other bases targeted by **BRAC** remind us as citizens of our responsibility to consider wisely the necessity and costs of sending our sons and daughters overseas to fight and die. Will communities without the whine of jet engines understand our soldiers any better than they do today? Will they be more likely to ask for needless sacrifices from the military, or less so?

For now, the answers to these questions are less important than the fact that neither **BRAC** nor our elected officials are asking them.

A crash landing for Oceana hopes

The Virginia-Pilot

July 21, 2005

Seeing it in black and white lends a disturbing reality to what was once just a threat: The nation's military leadership now believes **Oceana** Naval Air Station can't be saved.

To most observers, this has been clear for decades. Its fence line crowded with commercial development, its flight paths interrupted by houses and apartments, **Oceana's** last lifeline was the enormous cost of moving hundreds of fighters.

In the past few days, the Pentagon admitted it can't keep the jets flying at **Oceana**. When the noisy next generation of fighters takes to the skies in 10 years or 15, the Pentagon hopes it won't be over a Virginia Beach that has outgrown the Navy, even as the Navy has outgrown an increasingly crowded Virginia Beach. Call it a case of irreconcilable differences.

On Tuesday, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission added **Oceana** to the list of bases targeted for closure or realignment, the first official notice that separation at least, and perhaps divorce, may be coming. In the end, **Oceana** could be spared in this round of base closures, but it would probably only be a temporary reprieve.

The Pentagon believes **Oceana** should be saved -- for now -- only because it'll take too long and too much money to get a new base up and running, and because the alternatives face similar problems. **BRAC** may decide that's not reason enough. Whatever happens in the next few months, though, the Pentagon has decided it eventually needs an entirely new base, one that can be protected from the encroaching development that doomed **Oceana**:

"Selecting a location and building from the ground up is by far the preferred choice as it gives us the most flexibility to ensure we accommodate future capabilities, while allowing for sufficient 'buffers' to preclude potential encroachment issues," the Pentagon said in a letter to **BRAC** commissioners.

Given the effort and the expense already, not to mention its huge size, an outlying field planned for 30,000 acres in Washington County, N.C., appears among the best candidates for a new base. There are probably others. All of them, it is sure, will be fraught with political and legal challenges, and in the end may be no more attractive than a beleaguered and crowded **Oceana**.

While the Navy considers alternatives to Virginia Beach, Virginia Beach must consider alternatives to the Navy. The impact of an **Oceana** closure would be severe. A study a few years ago said closing the base could slow economic growth across the region, and throw the Beach into the equivalent of a one-year recession. It would cost the region more than 20,000 jobs, about 2 percent of the total employment.

Some businesses would collapse, the real estate market would soften, at least, and the Beach would lose an enormous number of military families that strengthen the backbone of city life.

Still, even the most dire predictions show the Beach and the region rebounding as **Oceana's** replacement -- whatever that is -- begins to take shape.

All this wouldn't happen for years, probably, but the Pentagon thinks it should happen. Given its record over the decades, it's hard to argue that the city government could now find the will to make the politically impossible decisions that could prevent **Oceana's** closure.

And so we find ourselves here. Not the end of the line, exactly, but near enough that we can see it.

Virginia Beach has dithered so long that it now stands to lose its largest employer and a big chunk of its civic identity.

It doesn't have the luxury of procrastination anymore. Regardless of the timing, the Beach has an enormous and painful task ahead of it: deciding what kind of city it wants to be once the Navy flies away.

Virginia's Loss Could Be Texas' Gain

San Antonio Express-News
Sig Christenson

WASHINGTON -- Base closure commissioners voted Tuesday to add a Navy flight training facility in Virginia to a list of installations to be considered for shutdown, a move that could bolster two South Texas installations.

The 2005 Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission voted to put Master Jet Base **Oceana** and seven other facilities on a list of 33 installations pegged for shutdown.

One of those, Ingleside Naval Station, could benefit from the decision, as well as Kingsville Naval Air Station, not on the list.

Commissioner Tom Hill, a Trinity University graduate, said at a hearing on Capitol Hill that **Oceana's** jets could find a home in Kingsville, and that Ingleside's deep-water port could handle an aircraft carrier.

But another commissioner with Texas ties said other bases could absorb **Oceana's** missions and that those on the Gulf Coast shouldn't get their hopes up.

"You really should not jump to any conclusions here," retired Air Force Gen. Lloyd W. "Fig" Newton told reporters after the hearing. "There's a lot of analysis that must be done by the staff and then there have got to be votes by myself and all my fellow commissioners. That could go in any direction."

As the hearing opened, **BRAC** Chairman Anthony J. Principi described it as one of the commission's "more important meetings."

The commission took no action on the Pentagon's proposed closure of Brooks City-Base, Naval Station Ingleside or Red River Army Depot in East Texas. A final vote on those recommendations will come late next month.

It also took no action on a huge shift in Air National Guard assets, one a Houston F-16A wing backers say is needed to protect the industrialized Gulf Coast. Hill called those recommendations "a mess" while the more conciliatory Principi told reporters they require a closer look.

"There are lots of issues, lots of questions," he said.

Bush must accept or reject the commission's findings by Sept. 8. Congress has 45 days to pass judgment on the list.

Installations in Maine, California and North Carolina and three Defense Finance and Accounting Service offices in the Midwest weren't as lucky. The decision to take a fresh look at Defense Department plans to consolidate 26 DFAS offices, one in San Antonio, into three mega centers drew little comment and no debate.

The panel doubts the ability of the mega centers to process checks for workers and businesses. Senior **BRAC** analyst Marilyn Wasleski told the commission the Pentagon didn't study the cost-effectiveness of each DFAS office and also noted that many of them were in towns hit hard in the 1993 closure round.

It isn't clear if the San Antonio office, where 318 people work, could reverse its fortunes as a result of the panel's action. Retired Air Force Brig. Gen. John G. Jernigan, head of a local **BRAC** task force, said the DFAS office could move to City-Base, which has buildings with room for up to 1,000 workers.

But the city faces competition from offices in South Carolina and Rome, N.Y., which are inexpensive and have capacity for growth.

The vote on **Oceana** drew some of the strongest debate of the day. Seven commissioners, including Hill, Newton and retired Air Force Brig. Gen. Sue Ellen Turner, voted in favor of adding **Oceana** to the list.

Neither the Navy nor the closure commission believes **Oceana** can be saved, but a suitable alternative to the base has so far proved elusive. Hill called the matter a "perplexing, complex issue" and said the commission had to study it in order to "avoid a disaster."

Citing Hill's comments, one expert close to the **BRAC** process left the hearing upbeat about Ingleside's chances of receiving a closer look from the commission. Another leader, Ingleside City Manager Mike Rhea, agreed there was hope.

"Hill did the site visit in Ingleside, and I think he came away suitably impressed by the facility and the information he was given," he said. "It's a crapshoot at this point."

Editorial/Opinion Articles

I've voted, without exception, to support Navy's positions

The Virginia Pilot
July 24, 2005

The letters that you published Friday about the current **BRAC** crisis involving Naval Air Station **Oceana**, and some comments Thursday on a local radio talk show, have prompted me to write in an attempt to clear the record.

Charges have been made in the past few days that I am not familiar with the military and that I am "in the pockets of the developers and am backing the demise of **Oceana**."

Nothing could be further from the truth. I grew up in Hampton Roads, close to the military from the beginning of my life. More than 44 years ago, I married a young Coast Guard officer who subsequently spent 32 years in active duty and reserve billets, several of which were joint billets with the Navy.

During my tenure on the Virginia Beach City Council, I have voted, without exception, to support the Navy's positions. Sometimes I have been successful, as in the case of the hotel adjacent to the convention center, which was originally proposed to be more than 30 stories; and many times unsuccessful such as with the recent "Near Post Project," a rezoning project off Laskin Road.

To paraphrase the old slogan of a major area shipyard: I always support our Navy, with a majority of the City Council if I can, on my own if I must, but I always support our Navy.

Unfortunately, I am not always in agreement with the majority on the City Council. Nor do I control my fellow members. I have to insist that I not be painted with a broad brush.

What I can pledge is that I, along with my good friends Sens. John Warner and George Allen, Gov. Mark Warner and Rep. Thelma Drake, will do all that is in our power to retain our master jet base and the wonderful people who work there, both military and civilian.

This is not only for Virginia Beach's sake but for the continued high quality of life that we offer not only for the service members but for their families as well.

Meyera E. Oberndorf
Mayor
City of Virginia Beach

Senator, Let's Launch

Richmond Times Dispatch
July 22, 2005

Naval Air Station **Oceana**, in Virginia Beach, is a key link in America's national security chain. It also is crucial to Virginia.

By a 7-1 vote, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (**BRAC**) has belatedly added **Oceana** to its list of bases to realign or close -- a list first released in May. **Oceana** failed to make the May list evidently because the Pentagon or **BRAC** wants to build a "master" tactical jet aircraft base not subject to future encroachment by civilian development.

Word out of **BRAC** suggests the commission's thinking is this: (1) Begin closing **Oceana** soon; (2) move its Navy Hornets, Super Hornets, and aging Tomcats to Moody Air Force Base near Valdosta, Georgia; and (3) build a master base at some unknown location, perhaps in North Carolina -- and keep the Navy's jets at Moody (which also faces encroachment issues) until the master base's completion.

And do all that because of some noise complaints from those living near **Oceana** in Virginia Beach.

This strikes us as close to lunacy.

Noise is a factor regarding tactical jet operations -- always has been, always will be. That said, it is worth asking how many of the noise complainants moved into their residences without knowledge of **Oceana's** proximity.

If the Pentagon or the **BRAC** commissioners want a master jet base, that's fine. Get on with buying the land and building the base; let everyone know what's going on. Keep tactical air at **Oceana** until then, and allow the Navy and Virginia Beach and everyone with any direct or collateral interest in **Oceana** qua **Oceana** to begin preparing for the phase-out.

But for Heaven's sake, do not move Navy jets from the Navy's principal fleet to an Air Force base in the middle of southern Georgia -- against the day when there may be a master jet base somewhere else.

It makes no sense -- for the nation's security, for the Navy, for Virginia Beach and all of Hampton

Roads.

If an occasion ever called for Virginia's Senator John Warner to take the lead, this is it. He wrote the **BRAC** enabling legislation. He is head of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a former Secretary of the Navy. He is one of the Senate's most distinguished members. If he cannot persuade the Pentagon or **BRAC** to remove **Oceana** from the closure list within the next month, no one can.

Senator, it's time for a BZ (Bravo Zulu -- Navy air lingo for outstanding) performance. Let's launch.