DEFENSE BASE CLOSURE AND REALIGNMENT COMMISSSION
2521 CLARK STREET
ARLINGTON, VIRGINIA 22202
(703) 699-2950

MEMORAUNDUM OF MEETING

DATE: June 28, 2005

TIME: 10:15 AM

MEETING WITH: Senator Trent Lott, Mississippi

SUBJECT:

Department of Defense BRAC 2005's Recommendations and their Impact on the State of Mississippi.

PARTICIPANTS:

Commissioner:

Mr. Anthony J. Principi
Chairman

Commission Staff:

Mr. James Hanna
Team Leader
Navy and Marine Corps Team
Office of Review and Analysis

Mr. Brian McDaniel*
Senior Analyst
Navy and Marine Corps Team
Office of Review and Analysis

Ms. Jennifer Meyer
Office of Congressional Affairs

Senator's Staff:

Mr. Mitchell B. Waldman
National Security Advisor

SUMMARY/NOTES:

The Senator expressed his gratitude and appreciation to the Chairman, and praised his dedication and public service record, especially as it has benefited veterans.

The Senator then expressed his long-standing objection to the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) law in general as well as his strong concerns and objections regarding three 2005 BRAC recommendations made by the Secretary of Defense directly affecting the State of Mississippi – Conversion of the USAF Medical Facility at Keesler AFB in Biloxi, MS, the closure of the Naval Station in Pascagoula, MS, and the realignment of the 186th Air Refueling Wing (ARW) from Meridian, MS.

Senator expressed his strongest concerns regarding the DOD recommendation to convert the US Air Forces' largest medical center – located on the Keesler AFB -- and resultant loss of medical specialists for military members, dependents, and retirees. The Senator pointed out the military value analysis ignored key data including the high value of Graduate Medical Education (GME) programs and specialists to military members, their families, and the community and was based on incorrect population data; overstated the medical center's cost while significantly understating the cost of migrating inpatients to community or private hospitals; and that it was inappropriate for the DOD to use the BRAC process as the means to fundamentally alter the manner, priority, cost, and quality of medical services for dependents and military retirees. The Senator also highlighted that the DOD analyses ignored significant cost increases needed for additional medical co-payments that would be required under TRICARE; the fact than many private physicians and hospitals in the Biloxi area do not accept TRICARE patients; and, that even though the other DOD medical facilities slated for conversion had other military, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, or civilian hospitals capable of absorbing the inpatient load, Biloxi and the Gulf Coast Region did not. The Senator clearly stated the significant impact of the Keesler recommendation and strongly urged the Commission to reject this part of the DOD recommendation.

Senator expressed equally strong reservations concerns over loss of well trained and experienced pilots and ground crews and impact on Mississippi Air National Guard readiness due to the recommended realignment of the 186th ARW, questioning the DOD analysis of military value and strategic wisdom of DOD's plan to decrease air tankers assets/capabilities in the Southeast while at the same time increasing the number of fighter jets, DOD estimate of the costs and benefits of the proposed realignment, and potentially significant negative impact on the ANG as well as on the guardsmen and their families.

The Senator then went on to highlight to the Chairman the importance and high military value of the Mississippi Gulf Coast region to the Nation by pointing out the high volume of commercial traffic transiting the region as well as key industrial infrastructure in the region including oil and gas platforms/fields, underwater pipelines, and numerous refineries located in the region.

Senator Lott concluded the discussion by expressing concern about the Navy's recommendation to close NS Pascagoula. He highlighted the negative impacts of consolidating Navy ships in a few "mega bases" on the East and West Coasts and removing all surface combatant assets from the Gulf, which in the Senator's opinion, will create a serious gap in regional homeland defense and security mission capabilities. The Senator went on to point-out to Chairman Principi that the NS in Pascagoula was one of the Navy's newest and least costly installations to operate and that a majority of the economic savings associated with eliminating military billets will likely never materialize. However, the Senator went on to express Mississippian's tenacity to prevail and unique ability to attract new industries to Pascagoula and recoup any job losses if the recommendation were to prevail.

The Chairman assured the Senator the Commission will provide Mississippi full access to all certified DOD information and that, under his direction, carefully and independently analyze each issue and community concern and encouraged the Senator to continue to work with the affected communities so that the Commission and its staff could benefit from the community's analyses, observations, and recommended alternatives.

Meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:15 EDT; June 28, 2005.

* Person responsible for this Memorandum