

Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission

EARLY



BIRD

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Being Suddenly 'Unessential'

New England bears brunt of base-closing job losses

Baltimore Sun

June 12, 2005

KITTERY, Maine - The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard basked this spring in the glow of a Navy Meritorious Unit Commendation that praised workers at the 205-year-old base for their "phenomenal record" repairing nuclear attack submarines.

A day later, the Pentagon ticketed the shipyard for closing as part of a sweeping reorganization of military bases.

"They pulled the rug from under us," Town Manager Jonathan Carter said bitterly. "To say we don't need you anymore is a real blow to the worker, the community and the region."

The Pentagon has proposed shutting 33 large bases and scores of smaller ones across the country to save \$48 billion over 20 years.

The burden would fall heavily on this coastal city on the New Hampshire border and the rest of Navy-dependent New England. Pentagon estimates show the overall region would absorb half the net job losses - about 14,000 - on bases.

Most of the New England jobs would be lost with closing of the Portsmouth shipyard and the submarine base in Groton, Conn.

At Groton, the majority of lost jobs - roughly 7,000 - would result from the transfer of military personnel. In Portsmouth, civilians working on the base would take the hardest hit: about 4,000 would lose their jobs.

"Not only do you lose business, but you lose friends," says Chris Bistany, 35, taking orders for submarines - the edible kind - at Moe's Italian Sandwiches in Portsmouth, N.H.

The Cold War over, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld says that reorganization will help reposition the military for current threats and transform the armed services into a modern fighting force as the nation battles terrorists.

Bases once deemed essential are considered obsolete by the Pentagon. But to affected communities, the bases remain economic engines and historic cornerstones - and losing them could be devastating.

"This has always been a military city. It's who we are," said Evelyn Marconi, a pipefitter's helper at the Portsmouth shipyard during World War II who now runs a tight ship at Geno's Chowder and Sandwich Shop.

Since 1800, the nearly 300-acre shipyard has sat along the New England coastline on an island in

the Piscataqua River that separates the small town of Kittery, Maine, from the tourist enclave of Portsmouth, N.H.

In 1917, it was the site of the first submarine built in a U.S. naval shipyard. During its prime in World War II, the shipyard's work force - mostly civilians - rose to more than 20,000 as subs were built by the dozens.

In the 1970s, the base turned to repairing, refueling and overhauling nuclear-powered attack submarines. The Navy has scaled back that fleet from a Cold War peak of 98 to 54 today.

The Pentagon says it no longer needs four bases where ships are repaired and refueled. It says shutting Portsmouth will save \$21 million initially, then \$129 million annually by shifting work to yards at Norfolk, Va.; Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; and Puget Sound, Wash.

Critics of closing Portsmouth argue that the base fixes submarines faster than the other shipyards, saving the military tens of millions of dollars per ship.

So it was no surprise when four members of the base closing commission, which can change the Pentagon's list of proposed closures before President Bush and Congress finalize them, were greeted by thousands of workers and townspeople last week when they visited the base.

The crowd stood five deep along the road, wearing "Save Our Shipyard" T-shirts, chanting "Take us off the list" and waving signs reading "On time, under budget, quality work."

"We have a community where the people truly embrace this place," said William McDonough, the shipyard's commander in the 1970s, who is leading an effort to spare it.

Congressional delegations from Maine and New Hampshire are also taking high-profile roles, hoping that if the commission doesn't save the base, the president will when the list goes to him this fall.

All four U.S. senators from the two states are Republicans. One - Olympia J. Snowe of Maine - faces re-election next year.

Presidential politics might well intrude. New Hampshire holds the nation's first primary in 2008, and already state officials have prodded potential White House candidates - including Sens. Hillary Rodham Clinton, a New York Democrat, and John McCain, an Arizona Republican - to pledge their support for the shipyard.

The Pentagon says the Portsmouth closure would cost about 9,000 jobs, including thousands at businesses outside the shipyard gates. But Maine and New Hampshire say that estimate omits the impact on New Hampshire. They argue that 17,000 jobs could be lost across both states.

Some people reluctantly talk of future revitalization. They point to the former Pease Air Force Base, a few New Hampshire highway exits to the south. Closed in 1991, the compound is now an office park, complete with a Redhook brewery.

"It's a tremendous success story," said Dick Ingram, head of the Greater Portsmouth Chamber of Commerce.

Still, he says, he'd rather see the base saved.

S.C. bases ranked highly; Reports explain why none were scheduled for closing

The State (Columbia, SC)
 Chuck Crumbo
 June 11, 2005

PENTAGON ANALYSIS

South Carolina's major military installations ranked highly in the analysis that the Defense Department used to decide which bases to close.

The reports, made public after the recent round of base-closing proposals, bode well for the

future of Palmetto State bases. The assessments could mean the bases will attract more missions and jobs, supporters in military communities said.

"We're pleased to see the military value of our bases as strong as it is," said Brig. Gen. George Patrick, coordinator of the state's Military Base Task Force. "We thought it was, but we didn't have the empirical data."

The reports show:

- * The state's two active-duty Air Force installations -- at Charleston and Sumter -- ranked in the top 11 percent of U.S. air bases.

- * McEntire Joint National Guard Base in Lower Richland's Eastover was ranked as the country's No. 1 Air Guard station. It also placed in the upper-third of all air bases.

- * Columbia's Fort Jackson was rated 26th out of 97 Army installations in terms of military value.

- * The Marine Corps considered consolidating all of its basic training for recruits at Beaufort County's Parris Island.

The Midlands was a big winner when the Pentagon released its base-closing recommendations May 13 to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, or BRAC.

The area's three bases -- Fort Jackson, McEntire Joint National Guard Base and Shaw Air Force Base in Sumter -- are slated to gain 1,800 jobs because the Defense Department assigned new missions to each base.

Those gains offset the loss of 1,100 jobs in Charleston. There, the Pentagon wants to close the South Naval Facilities Engineering Command and Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

SHAW, MCENTIRE DEFIED RUMORS

The Defense Department studies support claims that S.C. bases measure up well against other

facilities, base supporters said. The reports also show at least one base in a better light than some observers had believed.

Shaw, home to the 20th Fighter Wing and 9th Air Force, ranked No. 7 among fighter bases, according to an analysis of Air Force statistics by The State.

In addition, Shaw rated high as a possible site for tanker and airlift operations, not now flown from the Sumter base. Overall, the analysis showed Shaw ranked 18th of 154 Air Force bases, just outside of the top 10 percent.

That ranking contradicts a rash of reports and Internet rumors earlier this year stating Shaw was in jeopardy of being closed or was on the Pentagon's hit list.

"I think the numbers bear out that Shaw will be open for a long time," said Tom Olsen, who led Sumter's efforts to keep the base open.

Shaw is the Air Force's largest F-16 base and host to the 9th Air Force, which oversees bases in the eastern United States and air operations in the Middle East.

The presence of the 9th Air Force -- a command, not a flying unit -- at Shaw is responsible for the Pentagon's plan to move to Sumter the 3rd Army's headquarters and more than 800 soldiers, Olsen said. The 3rd Army, now in Atlanta, handles ground operations in the Middle East.

"I know when I was assigned to the 9th Air Force in the late 1970s and later in the 1980s and early 1990s, there always was talk of how to get the two headquarters together," said Olsen, a retired major general and former Shaw commander. "This BRAC gives them that opportunity."

Nearby, McEntire ranked 48th among Air Force bases. It too had to fight off perceptions it was not needed since Shaw is just 20 miles east on U.S. 378.

But McEntire not only survived but was a winner as the Pentagon said it plans to transfer

nine F-16s and 426 airmen to the Lower Richland base.

CHARLESTON RANKED NO. 1

Charleston, home to 54 C-17 transport planes and the 437th Airlift Wing and 315th Airlift Wing Reserve, ranked No. 1 among the Air Force's airlift bases, according to The State's analysis. Overall, it rated sixth among 154 Air Force bases.

However, Tom Mikolajcik, one of the leaders of the effort to save the Charleston base, cautioned the rankings -- while important -- do not tell the whole story.

"Some communities are trying to use this and say, My base ranked higher and is closed (rather) than one that remains open," said Mikolajcik, a retired Air Force brigadier general and former Charleston base commander.

As an example, he cited Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota. While it ranked 22nd among Air Force bases in The State's analysis, it is on the closing list. Meanwhile, Hickam Air Force Base in Hawaii, which ranked 68th, will remain open.

"The data on Charleston is what we have stated all along from an operational and training perspective," Mikolajcik said. "If you look at past data, Charleston was in Tier 1, the most capable."

FORT JACKSON IN TOP THIRD

Fort Jackson's No. 26 rating for military value among the Army's 97 installations says a lot about its importance to that service, said Donald "Ike" McLeese, president of the Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce.

The high rating means the Columbia fort should hold onto its current missions, including serving as the Army's largest training center, and possibly gain more, McLeese said.

More than 37,000 soldiers a year graduate from basic training at Fort Jackson; an additional 15,000 receive advanced training.

If the Pentagon's recommendations are approved, the Army's three drill sergeant schools will be consolidated at Fort Jackson. The fort also will train all of the military's chaplains. The post will gain about 615 jobs.

WHAT ALMOST HAPPENED

The base-closing studies show Beaufort was in line to be a big winner.

The Marine Corps considered closing its only other recruit training facility -- in San Diego -- and consolidating its two boot camps at Parris Island.

However, the idea was discarded because of the expense. Instead, the Marine Corps recommended keeping its San Diego training center open.

But some military leaders still say the Marines should close San Diego and operate just one boot camp -- like the larger Air Force and Navy.

However, closing San Diego and sending its recruits to Parris Island would put the Beaufort base "at the pinch point" in terms of space, said John Payne, chairman of Beaufort's Military Enhancement Committee.

Consolidating boot camps would nearly double the size of the Parris Island operation.

San Diego trains about 16,000 male recruits a year. Also, it has 1,725 Marines and sailors and 900 civilians on staff.

Parris Island trains about 19,000 recruits a year - - male and female. It also has 2,220 Marines and sailors, and 800 civilians assigned to it.

Still, Parris Island has trained more Marines in the past. During World War II, for instance, it averaged 50,000 recruits a year.

If more recruits are brought to Parris Island, the Marines would have to cut back the length of basic training, now 13 weeks, Payne said.

That could hurt recruits, Payne said. "I think we're turning out a better product now. Training is longer and more thorough."

According to the base-closing reports, Beaufort managed to dodge one bullet as well.

The military considered closing the Marine Corps Air Station at Beaufort and consolidating all Marine air operations on the East Coast at Cherry Point, N.C.

Instead, the Defense Department opted to keep Beaufort open in case it needed another base along the Atlantic seaboard to move some of its planes from the highly populated area near Oceana Air Station, Va.

Payne said Beaufort would be ready for an additional fighter squadron, already having tackled the encroachment issue the military faces at Oceana.

The city and county have worked with the military to ensure development does not encroach upon the air station, hampering its operations, Payne said. "We're the poster child for working with (them)."

NO TIME TO REST

While positive, the reports do not mean South Carolina is home-free in the latest base-closing round.

BRAC is holding hearings around the country and could reverse some of the Pentagon's recommendations before submitting a final closing list to President Bush in September.

The commission plans a June 28 hearing in Charlotte and S.C. officials will attend, Patrick said. Charleston, which stands to lose 1,100 jobs, will make its case to save those jobs.

"We still feel like we're about midway or maybe in the third quarter of the game," Patrick said. "So we're gonna keep pushing the issues."

Local News Articles

Md. Transportation Officials Ponder Metro Link to BWI Plan Would Require Contributions From Nearby Businesses

The Washington Post (Washington DC)

Elizabeth Williamson

June 12, 2005

Girding for the arrival of thousands of new workers along the Baltimore-Washington corridor, Maryland transportation officials are studying ways to build a Metro line between Greenbelt and Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

"It's a concept, not a plan," Maryland Secretary of Transportation Robert L. Flanagan said of the effort, which he called a sign that "Baltimore and Washington are coming together . . . into a single urban area."

At 20 miles, the line would rival the proposed Dulles Airport Metro extension in length and could open, in stages, within two decades, Flanagan said. But much depends on whether the state can persuade businesses along a new route to pony up a large portion of the cost, which could run as high as \$2.6 billion.

Metro extensions typically are paid for with state and federal dollars. That makes local funding even more important to backers of a Baltimore-Washington line because any proposal probably would have to compete for federal money with two other proposed extensions, one to Dulles International Airport and one to Fort Belvoir. The Dulles project alone would cost \$4 billion.

Other factors that probably would weigh on any decision about a line to BWI include a proposed Purple Line across Montgomery and Prince George's counties that has been debated and studied for many years. Also, a proposed \$3 billion intercounty connector highway that

would link Interstates 270 and 95 through those counties would require significant federal funding.

"The goal would be to find a way that landowners who benefit from the [BWI] project make substantial contributions to funding and operating the subway line," Flanagan said.

Work on that portion of the concept "is a very critical point early on in the process. You have to have local support."

Flanagan said the department began studying the potential for a new subway line a year ago for two reasons. First was the state's interest in promoting BWI, which it owns. Second was signs of explosive expansion at Fort George G. Meade in Anne Arundel County.

Three years ago, Fort Meade's commander, Col. John W. Ives, convened a working group to develop a comprehensive plan for the base. The plan, signed this week, will not be released to the public, said Meade public affairs officer Melanie Moore, because sections concern force protection plans. She confirmed, however, that the plan foresees the addition of as many as 20,000 jobs to the base over the next three decades, increasing its size by more than half.

In addition, the Department of Defense Base Realignment and Closure Commission recommended in May that several security and information offices be moved to Fort Meade. If the proposal is approved by Congress and the president this year, it would bring 5,300 more personnel to the base over the next six years.

Flanagan said his office embarked on a feasibility study for the line extension early last year because "basically we knew from our conversations and direction" from Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) "that we expected to be very successful in the BRAC process." The rail proposal was first reported in *The Baltimore Sun*.

The Army's plan calls for extending the Metro line the 10 miles between Greenbelt Station and Fort Meade. Flanagan said the state is

independently considering extending it another 10 miles to BWI.

The feasibility study provided two possible routes, Flanagan said. The first would run along the CSX railroad corridor from Greenbelt Station with stops in Savage and at Arundel Mills shopping mall and BWI. The other would follow the CSX corridor to Savage, Fort Meade and BWI.

MARC trains, which run in the CSX corridor, are running at or over capacity in the area, Flanagan said.

Through a spokeswoman, Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens (D) said she would welcome the extension. "The county executive has anticipated growth in this area," spokeswoman Jody Couser said. "She calls it the county's Gold Coast because it is so heavy with defense and high-tech, high-quality jobs."

So far, however, there has been no discussion of what portion of the project's cost would come from county coffers, Couser said. Owens expects to receive a formal briefing on Fort Meade's master plan within the next few weeks, Couser added.

Bill Badger, president and chief executive of the Anne Arundel Economic Development Corp., said a public-private partnership should be given serious consideration. "This is really the new paradigm with transportation enhancements because the state has so many needs," he said.

But to persuade county businesses to pay part of the bill, the state would have to prove that a Metro extension would save money in the long run, Badger said.

"We lose so much money and productivity by having workers spending a lot of time in traffic," Badger said. "So if it can be sold as enhancing the bottom line in productivity, companies will understand that. Not to say it's going to be an easy sell."

Badger added: "Without a strong federal contribution, it's just not going to happen."

So far, Metro has not been consulted about a Greenbelt-BWI line.

"We've looked at it informally. If we're going to do an official study, the request would have to come from the Maryland secretary of transportation," said Metro spokeswoman Candace Smith. So far, Smith said, Flanagan's office has not made that request. "We're willing to explore it, definitely," she said. "It would be a big thing."

**More Sub Base Data Released
Groton Activists Studying Website**
Hartford Courant (Hartford, CT)
Donna Tommelleo
June 12, 2005

The Pentagon has released more unclassified information about its rationale for closing the U.S. Naval Submarine Base in Groton, apparently including data that sub base supporters have been anticipating.

Identified on the Defense Department website on Saturday as the "data call," the information is intended to explain how the Pentagon calculated the base's military value, said John Markowicz, the head of a regional coalition to save base.

"And now we'll take a look and see what it means," Markowicz said Saturday. "We have to see how they got from here to the military value."

In some of the data classified information is omitted.

The Pentagon has recommended closing the Groton sub base and moving the 16 nuclear submarines there to Kings Bay, Ga. State and local officials have complained in the weeks since the May 13 base closing list was released about the lack of information available as they try to prepare their case to keep the base open.

Pentagon officials have said repeatedly that they were releasing the information as quickly as

possible and had to declassify much of the information so it could be released publicly.

"Four weeks after the [closing] list is released and after significant schedule promises on when it would be released, it appears a significant amount on the military value, if not all, is publicized," Markowicz said.

Markowicz spent hours in front of his computer the last few days watching for the data and intends to spend the rest of the weekend sifting through numerous files on the Groton and Kings Bay bases.

"First we've got to figure out what the questions were and what they mean, and compare them to the scoring," Markowicz said.

Stacie Paxton, a spokeswoman for U.S. Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., said each document released raises more questions.

"The Defense Department is finally beginning to give us a better glimpse into their flawed analysis," Paxton said. "But more needs to be done to make sense of the unwieldy heap of data just released by the Pentagon. We will continue to comb through this information and piece together the flawed analysis recommending closure of America's most important submarine asset."

Officials have objected that much information is classified and cannot be discussed in public or at planned hearings on the proposed base closures.

The independent commission reviewing the base closing list has postponed hearings in Missouri and Utah because of the Pentagon's failure to give the panel information it needs. The New England hearing is scheduled for early July in Boston.

Earlier this week, a U.S. Senate committee that includes Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn., issued subpoenas for more information on the decisions to close the bases.

Gov. M. Jodi Rell has appointed the commissioners of nine state agencies to a "strike

force," each charged with attacking a specific issue involved.

In a related matter, U.S. Rep. Rob Simmons and other members of the House Armed Services Committee will hold a hearing Monday at the submarine base to discuss the future of the Navy's submarine fleet. The hearing had been scheduled before the closing list came out.

Navy Almost Shut Down BNAS

Portland Press Herald (Portland, ME)

Bart Jansen

June 11, 2005

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon considered closing Brunswick Naval Air Station and holding onto the property for strategic reasons, but a provision that Maine's senators inserted into defense legislation last year blocked the idea, documents show. During two meetings in February and March, a Navy panel considered closing the Brunswick base outright to save money, minutes of those meetings show. Initially, officials wanted to "mothball" the property for future use because they were concerned about losing the strategic location.

Panel members eventually discovered the law that prevents the military from deactivating a base without selling or leasing the property for redevelopment. So they opted to move all the planes and most of the military personnel from BNAS, and keep a largely civilian staff to maintain it for future use.

The minutes of the Navy's internal decision-making process regarding the Brunswick base are among hundreds of pages of records that the Defense Department released to justify its recommendations to downsize 29 bases nationwide and close 33 others, including the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery.

Advocates hope to use the documents to bolster their case to reverse Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's recommendations, which are being reviewed by a nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission. Lawmakers are seeking even more detailed documents, which

the Pentagon has so far refused to release, to help them persuade the commission to preserve BNAS as it is.

Maine Republican Sen. Olympia Snowe, who co-sponsored the amendment that prevented the Navy from mothballing the base, said the documents show the Navy had strategic concerns about closing the base outright. "Obviously they were engaged in a significant debate about Brunswick," she said. "It's obvious the Navy saw the value."

The base-closure commission plans a hearing July 6 in Boston about Maine's bases, and will give President Bush a final list of base recommendations by Sept. 8. Bush and Congress can either accept or reject the entire list without changes.

On May 13, Rumsfeld recommended realigning BNAS by shipping its planes to Jacksonville Naval Air Station in Florida. The change could eliminate 2,317 military jobs, 61 civilian jobs and 42 contractors, while preserving about 300 jobs and training for about 1,400 reservists each month.

A summary of the debate leading to that decision is described in minutes of meetings held by the Navy's Infrastructure Analysis Team. That group included admirals, generals and lawyers who studied implications of moving parts of the naval air station to "numerous other receiver sites."

Brunswick's value was described at a Feb. 8 meeting. At that meeting, senior Navy leaders "expressed concern that closure of NAS Brunswick could have strategic implications regarding U.S. Northern Command's homeland defense strategy and would result in the loss of the only naval aviation footprint in New England."

The minutes say the study group was directed to examine options for Brunswick other than full closure. But the meeting minutes also say the study group was developing various scenarios for reducing the staff or deactivating the base,

meaning it would be closed but that the Navy would hold on to the property.

The hitch to deactivating the base was an amendment the Senate approved unanimously last June as part of an annual defense policy bill. Snowe and Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, had joined Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., in proposing the provision to prevent the Pentagon from deactivating, or "mothballing," a military base without selling or leasing the property for redevelopment.

Lott said the Army spent \$600 million in his state on an ammunition center that never produced a shell, then closed it, leaving it idle for 15 years.

"If the military is going to close an installation, it should be turned over to its rightful owners, either the community or the state, and not just maintained or mothballed, except in extraordinary national security circumstances," Lott said.

By March 8, when the base-closure study group met again, they discovered the amendment narrowed their choices for BNAS and prevented them from placing it in an "inactive status," according to the record of the meeting.

Ultimately, Rumsfeld decided to move Brunswick's aircraft to Jacksonville while maintaining a caretaker force at the base. The change is projected to cost the Pentagon \$147 million and save a total of \$238 million over 20 years.

"This recommendation retains an operational airfield in the Northeast that can be used to support the homeland defense mission, as needed, and maintains strategic flexibility," according to Rumsfeld's base-closing report.

The lingering problem, however, is that the reduction in staff at Brunswick seems to Snowe and other local advocates of the base as essentially the same as mothballing. The realignment would still cost 2,420 jobs and prevent redevelopment of the property.

"You couldn't do anything with it," Snowe said of the base. "Really it's tantamount to closure."

She and local advocates for BNAS plan to use the military's own arguments about the base's strategic value in the fight to keep it open.

Rick Tetrev, chairman of the Brunswick task force fighting the Pentagon recommendations, said his group is focused on overturning the decision for now rather than coping with its aftermath.

"Our focus is to work to tear down this realignment decision," Tetrev said. "We don't want to muddy the waters."

Eielson Cutbacks Would Hit Hard In North Pole

Fairbanks Daily News-Miner (Fairbanks, AK)
R.A. Dillon
June 11, 2005

Some North Pole homeowners aren't waiting around to find out what happens to the local economy if Eielson Air Force Base loses the 354th Fighter Wing.

Hank Bartos, owner of Century 21 Goldrush and Coldwell Banker Realtors, has already seen people rush their houses onto the market in the hopes of selling before the reductions cause a possible economic downturn.

While the North Pole real estate market has been hot--some would even say overheated--the May 13 announcement that the Pentagon wants to transfer from Eielson more than 2,800 military personnel and their 3,300 dependents--about 7 percent of the borough's population--to bases Outside has many home owners worried about falling property values.

"People are extremely nervous and emotional," Bartos said. "They don't know what to expect."

Residents in the Eielson bedroom community of North Pole fear the economic impact of losing Eielson would be felt through a drop in real

estate prices, declining school enrollment and loss of businesses. It's a combination that could cause a depression for the Richardson Highway town of 1,500.

Eielson contributed \$374 million to the regional economy in 2004, according to statistics released by Eielson.

Bartos has watched three buyers back out of deals and lose earnest money in the past week. All three cited concerns about Eielson.

"People have built up equity in their property and they're scared to lose it," he said.

But others caution that a partial cooling of the real estate market could benefit the area by stabilizing property prices.

North Pole's real estate market has been spurred by a large military presence, low interest rates and affordable property prices compared to neighboring Fairbanks.

Houses in the region have been appraising between \$125-\$160 a square foot with annual appreciation of between 6 percent and 8 percent, said Stacy Risner with the Fairbanks Board of Realtors.

Three hundred and nineteen houses were sold in North Pole last year. Since January, 130 houses have been sold and 82 more are in the closing process. Another 87 are on the market, Risner said.

"If it slows down a little, it won't necessarily be a bad thing," Risner said.

North Pole Mayor Jeff Jacobson said the economy could handle a small dip in property values.

"My concern is how far the cooling down is going to go," Jacobson said.

The Fairbanks North Star Borough was enjoying a blossoming economy before the Defense Department made its May 13 recommendations to close 33 major bases and substantially reduce

29 more. That, coupled with recent setbacks to the proposal to build an all-Alaska gas pipeline, has left many in the region worried about the future.

"We had a beautiful rose bush growing and the BRAC announcement nipped the bud right off the bush," Bartos said. "And then the Semptra announcement came along and whacked off the whole top of the bush."

Despite the recent spate of bad news, Bartos and Jacobson cautioned that it was too early in the process for people to overreact. It's been less than a month since the Pentagon released its list of recommendations and the process won't be finalized until it reaches Congress in September.

In the meantime, panic among home owners would cause unnecessary harm to the economy, they said.

"If a lot of people flood the market with houses, it's going to have a big impact," Bartos said.

Bad for business

Rhonda Boyles took a risk in 1999 when she opened a Wendy's restaurant in North Pole, her third.

While North Pole's population wasn't large enough to support a restaurant on its own, Boyles justified it by including numbers from Eielson, Fort Wainwright and other communities nearby, giving her a total of 14,000 potential customers.

The restaurant has had its ups and downs over the years, but Boyles could always depend on the patronage of military families.

That could change if Eielson's population disappears.

Boyles hopes the additional 1,500 Stryker Brigade troops slated for Fort Wainwright will pick up the slack if the Pentagon's plans for Eielson are approved by Congress. If not, it may mean that her other two Fairbanks stores will have to carry the North Pole store for a while.

"I've decided to watch and see what happens at Fort Wainwright," Boyles said.

Boyles isn't alone in holding out hope that Eielson will be spared. Nearly every business in North Pole and Fairbanks would be affected by the Pentagon's plan, according to state economists. Eielson contractors estimate the base makes up about 20 percent of their annual income.

Realignment would affect the food industry, rental market and the fuel distributors; all of which in turn would impact sales tax revenues in North Pole, Mayor Jacobson said.

But while base realignment would have a substantial impact on the economy--employment on Eielson accounts for nearly 9 percent of all jobs in the borough--it's unlikely to cripple most businesses.

Maria Sabedra, owner of Wallpaper Warehouse, has seen her business rise and fall with the fortunes of the area's military bases. She had hoped Eielson would spur another period of growth, but now she's being more cautious in her predictions.

"Eielson looked like a potential source of profit down the road that I'm not going to get now," she said.

Sabedra's more concerned how the loss of Eielson's \$182 million annual payroll will affect the spending habits of other area residents. Less money going into the community will mean fewer dollars spent by non-military families as well.

"It has a double impact," she said.

Shane Burnett, president of Arctic Fire & Safety Equipment, has also watched his company grow along with the local military bases. Burnett now employs 28 people and said he has a hard time accepting the Pentagon's proposal to move the 354th Fighter Wing.

"I can't fathom it," he said. "It just doesn't seem real."

For the past 13 years, Burnett has done business with Eielson at least four times a week. While his business would survive, Burnett said removing Eielson would be "devastating" to the local economy.

"It would be as much a negative impact on our business as the trans-Alaska pipeline was a positive one," he said.

Sam Brice, owner of Brice Inc., a construction contractor and quarry operator, would likely be forced to reduce the number of seasonal workers he hires in the summer if Eielson realigned. Brice employs about 20 construction workers in the winter and an additional 80 people in the summer.

"That takes a large cut out of our pie," Brice said.

Realignment would have a ripple effect on contractors. Losing Eielson would mean not only a loss of military projects, but would also increase competition for other contracts, effectively shrinking the market.

"You can say the same thing about the car dealers," Brice said, "because there'll be fewer people to sell cars to."

Jay Johnson, general manager of Alaska Petroleum Distributing, said he would also have to lay off staff if fuel deliveries to Eielson dropped off.

Jet and other fuel deliveries to Eielson make up about 20 percent of his company's business. Johnson said he's diversified enough that Eielson's loss would not be catastrophic.

Dick Engebretson, owner of Aurora Construction Supply, makes his living supplying contractors who do business with the Air Force. He contends that cutting forces at the base would be a costly mistake both for the community and the military.

"My gut feeling is that it wouldn't take the government long to figure out they screwed up and bring it back," Engebretson said.

Short-term gains

Mothballing the base would most likely provide Jim Johnson, president of Sunex Inc., with more work in the short term. Johnson's company provides consulting and monitoring of industrial waste cleanup projects.

In the long run, though, the loss of Eielson would have the same negative effect on Sunex as on many other local retailers and service providers.

"We're a small company," Johnson said. "Definitely the best long-term situation for us would be if they just stayed as they are."

Johnson estimates Eielson contracts make up 25 percent of his business.

George Bennett, president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 1836, which represents secretaries to heavy equipment mechanics in the civil service; said 319 civil-service jobs would be cut under the Pentagon's plan. About 200 of them would come back as contractor jobs, but those jobs wouldn't pay as well or have the benefits of the current positions, Bennett said.

National defense

Greg Ashbach, owner of A-1 Sani-Can in North Pole, is more concerned with the country's military readiness than the fate of Eielson. He figures the government must have a good reason for wanting to move Eielson's A-10 and F-16 jet fighters to bases in the Lower 48.

"If it needs to be realigned, it needs to be realigned," he said.

About 20 percent of A-1's business is Eielson-related and any reduction at the base would affect Ashbach and his neighbors equally.

"It will definitely affect the economy, but I think our military is a little more important than just myself," he said. "If the people studying this think it's better to realign Eielson then they must know what they're doing."

The Pentagon says the realignment would save nearly \$230 million annually.

While local officials maintain that the region's economy is diverse enough to handle the loss of Eielson, they're not giving up without a fight. A combined statewide and local task force is preparing to argue on Eielson's behalf at a public hearing with the Base Realignment and Closure Commission on Wednesday in Fairbanks. Historically only 15 percent of bases on the BRAC list have succeeded in getting removed and local officials have already been warned that the effect on the community is not one of the commission's top priorities.

Economic impact ranks sixth on the list of eight criteria the Pentagon is to consider in closing or realigning a base.

Despite the slim odds, business owners are hoping for the best.

"It just can't happen," business owner Burnett said. "It's just too important to the economic health of this region.

"I've got my fingers crossed."

Post-9/11 Mission May Boost Case To Keep Fighter Wing

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (St. Louis, MO)
Harry Levins
June 11, 2005

Moving the unit's planes from Lambert Field would create a hole in the Midwest's air-defense system, opponents of the plan say.

The night after 9/11, the Missouri Air National Guard scrambled a pair of F-15 Eagle fighters from Lambert Field because radar had picked up an unidentified aircraft flying near the Callaway nuclear power plant.

In the end, it was either a false alarm or an errant civilian plane flown by someone unaware of or ignoring the ban on flights.

Either way, the incident showed that the Air Guard in St. Louis was ready to defend the region's airspace, says Col. Mike Brandt, commander of the Air Guard's 131st Fighter Wing at Lambert.

Under a base-closing proposal put out last month, the Air Force would strip the 131st of its fighters, sending some to Nevada and the rest to New Jersey. The state's congressional delegation has charged that taking away the Eagles would open a big hole in the air-defense system of the central United States.

Because the delegation's members are struggling to save Lambert's fighters, the mission on the night after 9/11 could bolster their case.

Brandt said Friday that as soon as the terrorists struck on Sept. 11, 2001, his people had started streaming into Lambert. Although his unit's main mission is air superiority, not air defense, his unit switched on its own that day to air defense, putting fighters on runway alert.

By then, the federal government had barred all civilian flights. "We coordinated with the FAA tower," Brandt said. "They told us, 'Whatever you want to do, just call us. The airport's yours.'"

The next evening, Brandt's people got a call from the Northeast Air Defense Sector headquarters in Rome, N.Y. "They said they were trying to track a light plane flying near Callaway," Brandt said. "They told us to launch and try to find it."

Within minutes, a pair of F-15s took off, their pilots wearing night-vision goggles. But before they could make contact with the radar "bogie," the signal went away.

Brandt said the bogie probably had been a light plane "carrying people trying to get where they wanted to go. It's like those people who still fly over closed areas of Washington, D.C."

If the proposal to strip Lambert of its fighters is upheld in September, the closest warplanes to St. Louis would be Iowa Air National Guard fighters in Des Moines, 275 miles to the north.

The North American Aerospace Defense Command insists that even without Lambert's Eagles, it could protect the airspace around St. Louis. Although NORAD withholds details of where its assets are, the Indiana Air Guard - like the Iowa Air Guard - has fighter planes available.

But the Iowa and Indiana fighters are smaller F-16s, which bothers Sen. Jim Talent, R-Mo., a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He noted last month that Lambert's F-15s carried more powerful radar. Talent called the F-16s "less mission-capable than the F-15s."

On Friday, the 131st's Brandt said that the nighttime mission in September 2001 typified "what the F-15 does - it finds other airplanes in the air. That's its purpose, whether the other airplane is a MiG or a small aircraft somewhere in the Midwest."

Groton wants to sink plan to close submarine base

Ft. Worth Star-Telegram (Ft. Worth, TX)
Dave Montgomery
June 12, 2005

GROTON, Conn. - The Pentagon's plan to close nearly 180 military installations has angered communities across the nation, but passions are especially intense in Groton, where the proposed closure of America's first submarine base threatens to slam the region like a direct hit from a depth charge.

"Taking submarines out of Groton is like taking the cars out of Detroit," said Rep. Robert Simmons, a Republican whose district includes Groton and the New London submarine base. Echoing the outrage of thousands of constituents, Simmons assailed the Pentagon proposal as a "dumb, shortsighted decision."

Tucked along the Thames River in southeastern Connecticut, Groton has been home to the submarine base since 1915. Generations of submariners have gone to sea in diesels and nuclear behemoths, from World War I to post-9-11, often returning to meld back into the community as part of the civilian economy.

Now residents of "the submarine capital of the world" are united in an emotional campaign to save the base. If it fails, Groton, with a population of 40,000, would lose thousands of jobs and the linchpin of its modern heritage.

A delegation from the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission visited Groton recently as part of a four-month-long review of the Pentagon proposals.

"We're not the average military town," said Bud Fay, a businessman who helps spearhead the "Save Our Sub Base" campaign. "We're a town that's blended with the military community. There is no dividing line."

The proposed closure constitutes the biggest single hit in the Pentagon plan, putting Connecticut in line to lose more jobs than any other state. The Pentagon projects a combined loss of 8,586 military and civilian jobs, but the governor's office says the statewide toll could result in 31,500 lost jobs, with an economic impact of \$3.3 billion.

The Pentagon's plan, which was unveiled May 13, would shutter 33 major bases and shrink hundreds of other facilities, hitting the Northeast particularly hard. Also targeted for closure is the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine, which opened in 1800.

Anthony Principi, chairman of the base-closing commission, said in an interview that the panel will closely scrutinize the potential impact on New England as it shapes a final base-closing package to give to President Bush by Sept. 8. The commissioners conducted initial hearings in mid-May and are fanning out to conduct regional hearings and inspect targeted bases.

"Obviously, New England is of concern, given the magnitude" of the proposed closures, said Principi, who visited Groton with three other commissioners. "Military value is the most important criteria -- it has to be given priority -- but we must also be mindful of the economic impact as well."

The Navy says it would save \$1.5 billion over 20 years by transferring New London's subs and personnel.

Collins, Snowe show grit in fighting for Maine's bases

Central Maine Morning Sentinel (Kennebec, ME)

June 12, 2005

Maine's two U.S. senators are not afraid to fight the world's most powerful military.

Republican Sens. Susan M. Collins and Olympia J. Snowe are demanding that the Department of Defense release all documents related to its base-closure-and-realignment recommendations.

The information is essential if Maine has a chance of preventing Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery from closing and Brunswick Naval Air Station from losing half its staff and all of its aircraft.

Collins, the Republican chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, has signed a subpoena to force the Pentagon to release the documents.

In a show of necessary resolve and grit, Collins has given defense officials until noon Monday to turn over the documents.

Snowe says she will ask a federal court to halt the latest round of base closures if the Pentagon refuses to release the documents.

In a letter to Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld and Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon R. England, Snowe wrote that she was making a "final plea" for information before going to court.

Both senators are providing the kind of uncompromising, no-nonsense representation and leadership that Maine must have in its fight to save more than 7,000 jobs, including 4,510 military and civilian positions at Portsmouth, 2,420 at Brunswick and 361 at the Defense Finance and Accounting Service at the site of the former Loring Air Force Base in Limestone.

Collins was joined in signing the subpoena by her committee's top Democrat, Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut. His state stands to lose more defense-related jobs than any other -- more than 8,500. Maine would lose the second most if Rumsfeld's recommendations are approved.

Collins' and Snowe's latest legal moves follow weeks of complaints about the Pentagon's slow release of base-closure data and the lack of supporting material.

"This process is supposed to be a transparent one," Collins said. "It's supposed to be an open process. It's been very frustrating that the department has been so slow in releasing vital information."

All true.

This is clearly a time of crisis for Maine. The state and its congressional delegation need to know more about why Portsmouth, Brunswick and other Maine facilities are being targeted for closure or downsizing.

The need for that information is urgent as the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission, known as BRAC, studies the Pentagon's recommendations and prepares a final list.

The BRAC Commission's recommendations must be presented to President Bush and Congress by Sept. 8. Bush or Congress can accept or reject the entire list, but cannot change it.

Four commission members toured the Portsmouth and Brunswick facilities last week.

Next, a hearing is scheduled for July 6 in Boston at which Mainers will have the opportunity to oppose the recommendations.

The BRAC Commission postponed similar hearings in St. Louis and Salt Lake City because of a lack of documents.

Collins and Snowe must make sure the same ridiculous -- and avoidable -- obstacle does not prevent the commission from holding its hearing in Boston. That forum could be vital to Maine's effort to save its shipyard and naval air station.

No one knows exactly what the documents might reveal or even what documents exist. There is no public list or index.

That is not how the base-closure-and-realignment process is supposed to work. Federal law says that all data and documents related to the process must be released.

"All means all," Collins said.

And she and Snowe are making sure Pentagon and BRAC officials understand that.

United Way officials say closure would hit volunteer agencies hard

Clovis News Journal (Clovis, NM)
Leslie Radford
June 12, 2005

Joyce Davis' letter underscoring the impact of Cannon Air Force Base in eastern New Mexico is currently on a postal trail to the Pentagon.

In particular, the coordinator for the Curry and Roosevelt County Habitat for Humanity hoped to point out the volunteer efforts of base personnel in the community to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which will decide the fate of the base.

Cannon was one of two Air Force bases recommended for closure by the Pentagon and local and state leaders are trying to get the BRAC Commission to reverse the decision.

About 90 percent of Habitat's volunteers consist of base personnel, according to figures provided by the United Way of Eastern New Mexico, which supports the non-profit universal Christian housing ministry.

"I can't speak for other non-profits, but the volunteers that come out of Cannon have been a tremendous help to Habitat For Humanity," said Davis, who has seen the number of volunteers grow since Habitat started locally in the late 1990s. "We (Habitat for Humanity) would have grabbed them (base personnel) up earlier had we known they would have helped us take off with our projects more efficiently."

She said base volunteers recently played a major role in finishing a house in Portales by sharing their skills and knowledge in areas ranging from carpentry to plumbing. They donated more than 4,000 hours on the last two building projects in Roosevelt County, she said.

"Without volunteers from the base, we couldn't have got a lot of our projects done," said Davis, who added the base's closing would impact contributions to Habitat. The group receives annual funding from a program through the base called Combined Federal Campaign, which are donations made by individuals and organizations on Cannon's campus.

United Way of Eastern New Mexico Executive Director Erinn Burch said the economic impact of terminating the base would cause a chain reaction, beginning with the shortage of manpower caused by the sudden decrease in the number of volunteers — 500 to 600 per year, according to United Way figures. This would likely lead to the limitation of many services and resources to the area.

"I don't think that any other business in our area could afford to send employees to volunteer as much time as Cannon has," Burch said. "That amount of people would be hard to replace."

She said the local chapter is exploring its options and will hold a meeting next month to discuss recruitment of volunteers, new resources, finances and other issues if Cannon is closed.

“Right now we’re just trying to stay positive so that we’re not shocked if the closing does occur,” she said. “Cannon is such an asset to local organizations and losing them would roll back the clock on everything they have made possible.”

Tackett stresses area Guard’s role in U.S. national security

Charleston Gazette (Charleston, WV)

Paul J. Nyden

June 12, 2005

Adjutant General Allen Tackett said Friday that the Charleston Air National Guard Base is “an extremely important asset to national security.

“Our primary responsibility is to the nation’s capital. We can be to D.C. in an hour’s time,” he said.

West Virginia Guard units were on alert during the 2005 presidential inauguration.

On Monday, a team from the Base Realignment and Closure Commission will visit Charleston’s Air National Guard Base with the possibility in mind of moving the Guard’s planes to North Carolina.

Tackett believes the 130th Airlift Wing has more experience and ability than most similar units across the nation. And the cost of maintaining the Air Wing at Yeager Airport is lower than at almost any similar base.

Moving the C-130s out of Yeager, which has had planes stationed there since 1947, would send those planes “to units that have failed operational readiness inspections,” Tackett said.

“We exceed Air Force standards. It also costs us less to maintain our aircraft than anywhere else.”

That is partly because Yeager charges the National Guard just \$1 a year to lease space.

“No matter where they put our planes,” Tackett said, “it will cost more. They would be adding costs to the Department of Defense.”

The 130th Airlift Wing has served 52,000 combat hours since Sept. 11, 2001. It routinely helps clean up after floods and natural disasters.

During the Persian Gulf war in early 1991, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf “chose this unit to be part of Operation Left Hook because of their professionalism. The unit received a presidential citation for valor,” Tackett said.

“Gen. Schwarzkopf did not choose this unit by accident. It is the best in the business.”

Local Guard members have also repeatedly served tours of duty, lasting between 90 days and 120 days, in Panama and other Central and South American nations.

Experienced Guardsmen

Today, the Guard’s maintenance workers in Charleston have served an average of 221/2 years.

“We have one of the highest retention rates in the nation,” Tackett said.

Today, the average aircrew member here has put in more than 3,100 hours of flying and operating planes, one of the highest averages in the nation.

“For every 100,000 hours of flight-time,” Tackett added, “our C-130s have had only one serious accident. Planes flown by active-duty servicemen have 16 major accidents for every 100,000 hours of flight time.

“We take better care of our planes and we have superior crews,” Tackett said. “We keep our airplanes flying and keep pilots in the cockpit cheaper than anywhere in the U.S.”

Today, the West Virginia Air Guard is one of only 12 units in the nation fully trained to handle a wide variety of problems that would result from attacks using chemical, biological,

radioactive, nuclear or high-yield explosive weapons.

“We have the only certified team in all 26 [hypothetical] events. It has taken us two years to train a joint team of the Air National Guard and the Army National Guard,” Tackett said.

“Taking the airplanes out of Charleston will have a major impact on security,” he said.

West Virginia Guard units also work closely with experts at West Virginia University, in projects such as training programs held inside the old Memorial Tunnel along the West Virginia Turnpike near Cabin Creek.

If BRAC’s current recommendations are accepted, Charleston will lose 55 percent of the people who would handle these problems, Tackett predicts.

Future recruiting

The Department of Defense’s report recommending base closures, approved by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, underestimates the ability of Yeager to handle more aircraft.

“They said we could not support more than eight C-130s,” Tackett said. “We can support 12 easily and we could support up to 16.”

During training exercises June 5, 15 C-130s landed and parked at Yeager Airport.

Tackett also believes the presence of C-130s at Yeager is a major attraction for potential recruits.

“Every year, we hold 70 or 80 events for schoolchildren. We have fifth- and sixth-graders up here a lot. It gives them their first inkling of what military service is about.

“Today, West Virginia has the highest enlistment rate [as a percentage of state residents] in active duty in the National Guard.”

Many bases have between 80 percent and 90 percent of their required strength. West Virginia Guard units have a 103.6 percent enlistment rate, Tackett said.

If the behemoth planes are moved out of Charleston, most current Guardsmen — who work as lawyers, bankers, stock brokers, airline pilots, small-business owners and newspaper employees — are unlikely to move with them.

On Monday, Harold W. Gehman Jr., a member of the BRAC Commission, will visit the 130th Airlift Wing for discussions that are planned to last three hours.

Two BRAC data analysts will accompany Gehman, a retired Navy admiral and former NATO supreme commander.

The BRAC Commission is scheduled to file its report to the White House Sept. 8 and the president is scheduled to send his report to Congress Sept. 23.

Congress will then vote to approve or disapprove the entire report. It cannot make changes.

State allocates money to fight military base closures

The Uniontown Herald-Standard (Uniontown, PA)

Alison Hawkes
June 12, 2005

HARRISBURG - The state has allocated nearly three-quarters of its money available to fight military base closures in Pennsylvania.

However, so far, the two areas slated for shutdown, in Allegheny County and at Willow Grove in Montgomery County have received a combined 11 percent.

Much of the state's \$4.5 million pot has gone toward administrative and lobbying costs to support statewide efforts, as well as a slew of studies on Pennsylvania's most vulnerable military facilities, in advance of the U.S.

Department of Defense closure announcement a month ago.

About \$300,000 is slated to Hurt Norton & Associates, a Washington lobbying firm, to update state officials on Pentagon information and provide advice on how to prepare and respond to closures.

According to figures provided by the governor's office, the single largest state spending category is for infrastructure improvements to the federal facilities, at \$1.6 million, although the defense department has accepted none of the state's donations. The point is to "treat the department of defense just like we treat any private employer and try to provide incentives for them to continue to do business in Pennsylvania," said Adrian King Jr., Gov. Ed Rendell's spokesman on the base closures.

The U.S. Army War College in Carlisle is slated to receive \$500,000 for architectural and engineering work on its visitor and education center, while \$230,000 is expected to go toward moving power lines at the Harrisburg International Airport to increase taxi space for the 193rd Special Operations Wing.

Willow Grove Naval Air Center in Montgomery County was to receive \$530,000 for three pieces of snow-removal equipment, replacing equipment the defense department hasn't updated in 30 to 40 years. But because the defense department seems unlikely to accept this donation, considering a planned shutdown, state officials have decided to fold that money back into an unallocated \$1.2 million to be spent as needed this summer on fighting Pennsylvania base closures.

The state funding is being disbursed through the Department of Community and Economic Development, upon approval of the Pennsylvania Base Development Committee. The committee consists of 15 retired and active military officials representing bases across the state, appointed by the governor.

In mid-May, the Pentagon announced the list of 33 major bases closures around the country, and

29 realignments as a way to save \$50 billion over the next two decades. Pennsylvania was largely spared, but still hit hard with the placement of Willow Grove on the closure list, along with the 911th Air Reserve Station at the Pittsburgh International Airport and the Kelly Support Center in Oakdale. A nearby army reserve center in Moon Township would be realigned, under the plan. The combined statewide job loss would be 1,878, still a far cry from the 16,000 jobs lost in the 1995 round of base closures.

In preparation for a fight this year, the state began readying itself in 2003. Communities launched studies on the military value of their facilities and the economic impact of closures, and put together strategic plans. King, also the director of the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency, said such advanced work was crucial in giving military facilities a head start should they be listed.

The time to respond to the announced closures before the federal Base Realignment and Closure Commission is less than two months.

"The studies are used if worse comes to worst and the base comes on the list of closures," King said. "You're looking at this data yourself so if your facility ends up on the list you've got a running start."

King also noted that some of the studies are interrelated. A \$10,000 economic impact study on the Port of Philadelphia could be useful in making the point that supply and repair depots across Pennsylvania are well served by a seamless transportation system, he said. In some cases, too, the studies can later be used to make a pitch for more defense department work, he said.

The community groups responding to closures at Willow Grove and the Allegheny County facilities have received about \$289,000 for studies, as well as \$100,000 per region to use as needed. Not all the money has been spent, and spokesmen from both regions said state officials have promised them more if needed.

Edward Strouse, executive director of the Suburban Horsham Willow Grove Chamber of Commerce, the group leading the fight for Willow Grove, said the money has also been used as a kind of campaign war chest to gather petitions, launch a Web site and print signs.

"That's a huge role to do right now because it's all about politics. We need to let them know we want this base," Strouse said.

An economic impact study showed that 10,000 jobs would be at stake with the closure - including civilians and vendors - instead of the defense department's narrower estimate of 1,200 military jobs, Strouse said.

"We want to make the argument of how important this base is to our area. And going forward, if you're going to try to redevelop it, you want something as meaningful as now," Strouse said.

In Allegheny County, studies have been used to show, among other things, the value of linking a medical air squadron to Pittsburgh's well-developed medical industry. But officials said the main argument there will be that there's room for the 911th Air Reserve Station to expand. The defense department recommended the station's closure because it doesn't have room for a full squadron of C130 planes, though the community group Pit-BRAC says it has letters going back to 1993 proving the airport authority has offered extra land to the military.

Pit-BRAC is spending \$98,000 for office space, full-time secretarial support, copying and other administrative costs, according to group spokesman Keith Dorman.

"The resources have been adequate and we've been told if we need more to ask," he said.

A couple of months ago, lawmakers raised concern about how all the money was being spent. But after receiving an update, Rep. Jerry Stern (R-Blair), who sits on the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, said he is satisfied.

"Thus far, I don't see any discrepancies that I can criticize on the way they spent these funds," he said.

Still, at least one lawmaker is critical. The spokesman for House Majority Leader Sam Smith (R-Jefferson) questioned why Hurt, Norton & Associates was hired to do the lobbying work when it also represents other states on base closures, and why the company was the only one solicited for a contract proposal.

"Are any of the bases they're representing in competition with Pennsylvania?" said Smith's spokesman, Steve Miskin.

David Urban, the governor's lobbyist in Washington who picked out the firm, said the company is considered highly skilled in base closing issues, and a relative bargain at \$15,000 per month - some states are spending as much as \$60,000, he said. Just like law firms and consulting groups, this company knows how to build a firewall between different clients, Urban said.

"The folks at Hurt, Norton, I would put them against anybody in Washington and they would beat them in a knowledge, skills and personality test," he said.

Closures, changes relatively minor for California

State not likely not to be hit as hard as others by Pentagon's base revamps

Sacramento Bee (Sacramento, CA)

David Whitney

June 11, 2005

WASHINGTON - California will lose fewer than 3,000 military personnel and about 5,700 civilian jobs under a base closure plan released Friday by the Defense Department.

But no major California bases are targeted for closure in the fifth round of base closures and realignments that in previous cycles have cost the state nearly 30 major installations, about

93,500 military jobs and nearly \$10 billion in annual revenues.

"Overall, upon first examination and looking back at prior base closure rounds, California did not do badly," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.).

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger echoed that sentiment, while pledging support for communities that didn't fare so well.

"Our initial assessment is that this is good news for California and for our nation," Schwarzenegger said.

Beale Air Force Base near Marysville and Los Angeles Air Force Base were both considered possible targets for closure. But the Los Angeles base, with its heavy concentration on aerospace technology, was not touched. At Beale, minor changes will cement its mission as a spy plane base.

"This is good news," said Tim Johnson, executive director of the Yuba-Sutter Economic Development Corp., which has been leading the battle to save Beale.

The news wasn't so good elsewhere in the country, however. The list submitted to the Base Realignment and Closure Commission by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld would close 33 major bases, with major reorganizations at 29 others.

Among the bases on the secretary's hit list are Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota, Cannon Air Force Base in New Mexico, a naval station in Ingleside, Texas, and Fort McPherson in Georgia. Job losses would be in the thousands at each.

If the recommendations go through as proposed, it could be the biggest round of bases closings since the process started in 1988.

"Our current arrangements, designed for the Cold War, must give way to the new demands of the war against extremism and other evolving 21st century challenges," Rumsfeld said.

But Friday's announcement was only a shadow of what many had been foreseeing as recently as a month ago. The Pentagon had been predicting shuttering as many as a quarter of all the military installations in the country.

Still, Rumsfeld said at a press conference Thursday, the trimming should save as much as \$5.5 billion a year in operational costs, once all the upfront expenses with closing the installations and cleaning up environmental problems are complete. He predicted a 20-year savings of \$48 billion.

Realignment at Beale would cost only eight military jobs and 171 civilian positions, the Pentagon said. Beale is home to the U2 spy plane and a growing fleet of unmanned Global Hawk surveillance drones. The base now employs roughly 4,500 military and 1,500 civilian workers.

Escaping any personnel or mission changes in Northern California are Travis Air Force Base near Fairfield, a 6,383-acre complex for huge cargo aircraft, and the 37,000-acre Sierra Army Depot in Herlong, about 50 miles north of Reno.

Rep. John Doolittle (R-Roseville, Calif.) had appealed to the Pentagon to leave alone the Sierra depot, where medical supplies and vehicle armoring packages are prepared and shipped.

"I am delighted that the Pentagon recognizes the true military value of the Sierra Army Depot and has decided to retain it with no reductions whatsoever," Doolittle said.

Some California installations gained, including an operation at the Fresno Air Terminal that will pick up 57 military and 254 civilian jobs because of base realignments elsewhere.

The biggest military losses in California will be at the Naval Medical Center in San Diego, which will undergo a realignment costing some 1,596 military jobs.

The state's other major hit is at Naval Base Ventura County, where realignments will cost

about 2,149 civilian and 244 military jobs. The base, with the only deep-water port between San Diego and Seattle that is controlled by the military, monitors a 36,000 square-mile Pacific Ocean test range and employs about 17,000 people.

But at each of the 11 military installations in the state slated for closure, the job losses are generally in the low triple digits, with a naval support center in Corona taking the biggest hit at 886 civilian jobs.

Not only did California avoid, for the most part, closure of facilities it wanted to keep open, but it also won the closure of the one facility the surrounding community didn't want - the Concord Naval Weapons Station about 35 miles northeast of San Francisco.

Concord officials hope to transfer much of the station's 5,000 acres into new housing in the fast-growing area.

"We've had two wins," said Rep. Ellen Tauscher (D-Alamo, Calif.). "We're glad Travis is not on the list and that Concord is."

The Pentagon's list now goes to the nine-member Base Realignment and Closure Commission, which will comb through the list base by base and hold hearings at affected installations.

The commission has the power to change the Pentagon's recommendations, meaning that it's possible California could see further changes in its military structure before a final plan is sent to President Bush by Sept. 8.

The White House will have until Sept. 23 to either approve or disapprove the commission's recommendations. Disapproval sends the list back to the commission for reworking. After the president approves the list, it will automatically take effect unless Congress enacts a joint resolution of disapproval within 45 days.

Opinions/ Editorials

Country owes debt to Grand Forks area

Grand Forks Herald (Grand Forks, ND)
Sukhvarsh Jerath
June 11, 2005

I have lived here for about 20 years. During this time, I have seen tremendous support for Grand Forks Air Force Base among the residents of the area. It contributes substantially to the economy of an area that is very important for our state.

As I understand it, the base originally was located here in part because of the risk involved with such an installation. At the time, not many areas in the United States wanted these facilities in their midst because of the danger of nuclear retaliation from the Soviet Union.

The people in the Grand Forks region showed patriotism and bravery in welcoming the base. Today, it is different; military bases are considered by many areas to provide economic development and opportunity.

I think the nation should stick with those communities that were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice when needed. Who knows when the country may need this again?

I think the present mission of Grand Forks Air Force Base should remain. In addition, a pilot training mission should be added because of huge amount of open air space available above North Dakota.

It is less expensive to have a base here than in a high cost-of-living part of the country. Last, but not the least, the security concerns for a base located in Grand Forks are minimal.

BRAC turns ugly

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich, CT)
June 12, 2005

Drastic circumstances call for drastic measures. For that reason, U.S. Sens. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., and Susan Collins, R-Maine, are to be commended for having subpoenaed all documents that show how the Department of Defense arrived at its base-realignment-and-closure decisions.

Lieberman is the ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security Committee; Collins is the chairwoman. Both insist that the Pentagon has "mishandled" the BRAC process. No, that's too generous and too kind. "Botched" better sums it up.

Lieberman and Collins did not limit the subpoena to official documents, but also demanded e-mails, telephone logs, memos -- and anything else related to the process. As Collins explained, "As far as I'm concerned, they're overdue." Long overdue.

They wanted the information by Monday. On Friday and Saturday the Pentagon released more data, but not all of it. The Pentagon still is holding some of the data that supports its reasons for recommending that the Naval Submarine Base at Groton be closed.

Pentagon doesn't care

Thousands of lives are potentially affected here, but the Pentagon just doesn't care.

The 1995 BRAC included all-but a transcript of how decisions were reached.

The Groton sub base was on that list, but since the criteria were clear, it was simple to point out flawed reasoning. The base was then taken off the list.

This time much, much less has been revealed.

Information on computer disks does not accommodate a search function, so readers must open each file and look for any data that applies to the Naval Submarine Base at Groton. Even an index is lacking.

That's beyond unfair; given the time and effort needed to extract data, it borders on malicious.

A subpoena is an extreme measure, but justified. As of today, the Pentagon has been in violation of federal law fully 30 days. A month.

The Pentagon for more than two years had sifted through reams of information to arrive at its recommendations, recommendations that will have literally life-altering ramifications for military personnel, civilian base workers and the regions where the bases are located.

The base-closure law was passed some three years ago, and that law requires that all information related to base-closure decisions be made public within one week of the release of the list of bases. (All information; not most or selected passages. All. That's pretty specific.)

Stonewall continues

The list was released May 13, yet the Pentagon continues to stonewall, insisting data must be further sifted to ensure that secret information is not inadvertently revealed.

The Pentagon is comprised of human beings and humans make mistakes. But mistakes of this magnitude would get civilians fired -- or worse - - in a hurry.

Lieberman likened the situation to a criminal trial in which the death penalty is sought, and the analogy is appropriate. The prosecution, the Pentagon, won't give up key evidence to the defense -- the communities trying to save bases. Meanwhile, the jury -- the Base Realignment and Closure Commission -- is expected to reach a verdict without evidence to support that verdict.

The entire BRAC process now is open to question, and it's not unfair to say that the Pentagon's credibility is at issue.

Lieberman noted that the Pentagon had asked about unique training capabilities of bases. With the Submarine School, Groton's case is much stronger. But that question was withdrawn.

Cost estimates and potential savings regarding Groton already are highly suspect. "Cooked books" might well apply.

U.S. Sen. Chris Dodd said that the Pentagon should not be allowed to "run out the clock"

stalling to deliver information before the formal BRAC hearings are held. In the case of Groton, that's July 6. Dodd is correct and his analogy is fitting.

Two BRAC hearings -- in Missouri and Utah -- already have been postponed.

It's only right that affected communities wonder, as Lieberman asked of the Pentagon, "What were they doing all this time? What were they thinking about fulfilling their statutory obligation?"

It's less than cynical at this point to believe that the folks at the Pentagon thought nothing of their statutory obligation. They do enjoy, after all, a certain insulation and isolation from the ramifications of their decisions. The words "ivory tower" and "cloistered" come to mind.

And it is no small irony that in the midst of this BRAC, that W. Mark Felt revealed he was "Deep Throat," the Watergate source who helped bring down a corrupt president.

While no one is suggesting that Navy Secretary Gordon England or Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld should be led from their offices in handcuffs, Felt's revelation reminds us of the arrogance of power. That some folks in high places sometimes come to regard privilege as an entitlement.

But privilege is not an entitlement. It is courtesy extended, one that can be revoked if abused.

Pentagon abusive

How else but arrogant do we describe the Pentagon's behavior in this BRAC process? But with time wasting irretrievably, and with the fate of so many hanging in the balance, perhaps arrogant falls short. Abusive better fits the bill.

Lieberman and Collins have done the right thing to stem that abuse. The Pentagon has released more information and has until tomorrow to deliver the rest of it.

The Department of Defense must stop stonewalling, stop breaking the law, and it must reveal the data critical to understanding the military decision to close Groton.

Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, economic adviser to Richard Nixon from 1969 to 1973, knows well how further obstructionism can turn ugly.

Additional Notes